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Leveraging Resources

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In these days of dwindling resources for youth programs, there is no room for duplication of services and effort. All youth agencies must seek additional resources to implement their programs most effectively. These resources can include money, people, partnerships, or equipment. So that maximum use can be made of services that are already available, youth service agencies need to coordinate with other agencies to provide optimum programs.

Since Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth program funding is limited in some areas, it is important for local youth councils to identify the availability of the ten required program elements in local areas through methods such as resource mapping. To fill gaps, the youth council can develop a strategy to address these unmet needs [6].

Assets needed for an organization to accomplish goals and achieve outcomes include [16] :

- Physical resources – Buildings, tools, and materials
- Financial resources – Money and funding streams
- Social resources – Norms, shared understanding, and trust inherent in strong relationships
- Intellectual resources – Skills, knowledge, and competence of stakeholders

Leveraging resources combines existing and new resources to accomplish a goal, promote growth, and make more from what is available [10]. Collaboration can maximize resources, enabling partners to accomplish as a group what they could not accomplish individually.

Integrating Programs

Stakeholders may include any number of people who share a common interest, for example, youth, WIA administrators, service providers, case managers, educators, community members, and business representatives. Through the exchange of ideas, experiences, and expertise, stakeholders can expand their personal knowledge and learning and explore new ways to accomplish the group's goals. Collaboration can result in greater efficiency in operation and use of time and money, improved quality of programs, and elimination of redundancy [10]. A number of guidelines can help in integrating programs and leveraging the resources of each.

To leverage resources

- *Involve stakeholders in a variety of ways.*
- *Involve all relevant stakeholders.*
- *Identify the goals of collaborative efforts.*
- *Develop strong relationships with schools.*
- *Develop a strategic plan.*
- *Promote quality standards.*
- *Leverage physical, financial, social, and intellectual resources.*
- *Consider fundraising and grant writing.*
- *Identify potential funders.*

Involve Stakeholders in a Variety of Ways

Returning to previous partners can be effective in maintaining your programs. Be sure that you [12]:

- Have a variety of ways that people can contribute, such as donating funds, donating services, or volunteering personnel;
- Have various levels of commitment, from those who are willing to serve occasionally to those who are committed to long-term involvement;
- Share all reports with all of your partners.

Although continuing relationships may be the backbone of your partnership activities, it is well to develop new partnerships. Try to think of unlikely partners who may have valuable resources to contribute to your program.

Whether new or continuing partners, project stakeholders should help programs leverage critical resources by matching resources with needs, spreading the wealth, and taking advantage of opportunities [3]. For example:

Project Hope is a collaboration between the Alameda County (CA) workforce development system and the child welfare system. It offers youth employment and educational preparation services in conjunction with those available under WIA. The project assists transitioning and former foster youth between the ages of 16 and 18 in finding jobs, housing, and higher education. It also connects them with the county's One-Stop Center [13].

Idaho's Learn & Earn program is nationally recognized because its employment, credential, skill attainment, and retention rates regularly exceed WIA expectations. It is operated by Magic Valley Youth & Adult Services, Inc., of Twin Falls, Idaho, which is part of the area's One-Stop Consortium. Learn & Earn has partnerships with local schools, vocational rehabilitation programs, the Departments of Health & Welfare and Juvenile Justice, and Job Corps Centers [8].

Involve All Relevant Stakeholders

Programs to promote youth development should include all who are directly involved in the process, including WIA administrators, local workforce investment board (WIB) members, youth council members, case managers, and service providers. Also important are businesses, industry, government, labor, human services agencies, workforce development agencies, and community organizations that can contribute to the identified program outcome.

Equally important, each stakeholder of the collaborative partnership needs to be interested in the outcome of the program, regardless of previous relationships. Stakeholders must be able to see how the program is relevant to other youth or community projects they support. There must be a common thread that brings them together and a shared commitment to meeting the diverse and multiple needs of the target population [11].

For example, efforts to involve the private sector in cooperative and creative approaches to fund community-wide summer jobs programs could be approached in such a systematic way. A private-sector summer jobs campaign could provide considerable leverage for increasing enrollment levels during the summer when enrollment tends to decrease. States and local areas are strongly encouraged to establish partnerships to supplement youth opportunities under WIA funding [7].

Identify the Goals of Collaborative Efforts

For real teamwork to occur, parties must be focused on clearly stated common goals. Not every stakeholder will have the same goals for participating, but overriding goals must be recognized and agreed upon. For example, if the goal for leveraging resources is to save money, the stakeholders must be prepared to focus on this. However, how each stakeholder will work to do this and how much money each will strive to save may vary from collaborator to collaborator [10].

Develop Strong Relationships with Schools

It is important that youth councils forge strong relationships with local schools to best serve youth who are deficient in basic literacy skills. Connecting with local schools will leverage key resources that will assist local areas to improve the skill attainment of participating youth while achieving performance outcomes. The local WIB can coordinate the planning group and provide office space and staff support. Businesses, the employment service, community-based organizations, schools, and local government agencies can also be partners in this effort. Additionally, enlisting the active support of key local elected officials can significantly boost the success of a private sector summer jobs campaign [7].

Develop a Strategic Plan

Collaboration can only be effective when stakeholders work together to achieve identified program outcomes, such as increasing public involvement, designing initiatives, strengthening local institutions, and achieving tangible results [3]. Good leadership and a strategic plan are necessary to make things happen [4]:

- Identify the needs that will be satisfied through the youth development effort.
- Identify specific outcomes to be realized through the process.
- List specific activities for stakeholders to pursue.
- Brainstorm solutions to address specific needs.
- Identify community services that can help stakeholders respond to identified needs.
- Summarize actions steps with a timeline and designate responsibility.

Promote Quality Standards

Program quality reflects accountability standards. Measuring that quality requires the use of appropriate data collection methods, effective strategies for evaluating program effectiveness, and clearly identified techniques for analyzing and presenting data [2, 3, 11]. Effective data collection methods include:

- On-site visits
- Telephone and e-mail contacts
- Conferences and workshops
- Information dissemination
- Regular conference calls
- Personalized contact with parents and students

Types of Resources

Strategies for leveraging resources involve the efficient use of physical, financial, social, and intellectual resources. If possible, leverage all types to make your program most effective.

Physical Resources

Community members may be able to offer new or used equipment or opportunities to time-share equipment they house in their buildings. They may be receptive to requests to provide office supplies, food, and other goods and services when needs are made known [12].

Space is another resource to leverage. Public libraries, parks, recreational facilities, school classrooms, and corporate conference rooms can be used for youth development activities and meetings. Sharing community spaces will also demonstrate a more effective use of funding dollars and can encourage more members of the community to become involved [1].

Financial Resources

Joint purchasing is another way to leverage resources. It can lead to greater efficiency in operation and save money for all parties who can now share in the cost of the services [10]. Marketing services are one example [12]:

- Promote products or services of two organizations with one media spot that highlights the programs of both organizations.
- Join with the community library in promoting both the youth program and the library resources that are available to those in the program.
- Contact local newspapers, public TV stations, and public radio stations to publicize the program at the local level.

Social and Intellectual Resources

People, with their knowledge and skills, are always excellent resources for collaboration [10]. Youth council members, WIA program administrators, service providers, and others can all be engaged in ways that encourage and enhance participation [15]:

- Sponsor workshops, conferences, or panel discussions.
- Identify new community members to ensure support for the effort.

Fundraising and Grant Writing

Fundraising includes soliciting donations, creating community-based events that raise money, and writing grants. Donations can be solicited from local businesses for equipment, printing services, meeting space, and supplies. Telethons, walkathons, and other special events can raise additional funds [12].

Successful grant writers have a good understanding of the proposed activities, can translate ideas into a concise, well-written document, can manage the grant if it is funded, and know how to evaluate and describe the effectiveness of grant activities and outcomes [12].

Identifying Potential Funders

There are a many potential funders for local programs [5, 7, 9, 12, 14]. The following list presents just a few examples –

Federal Agencies

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) resources have been made available to some states and local areas for youth wage subsidy programming or support services. WIA program representatives are encouraged to determine whether this option for increasing youth enrollments in their own program might be viable. <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ofa>

Other Youth Funds. Funds such as Youth Opportunity Grants and Youth Offender Grants are potential resources. <http://www.yomovement.org>

U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD administers Community Development Block Grants, YouthBuild Grants, and Enterprise Communities/Empowerment Zones, as well as training funds through the Public Housing Authorities. <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/index.cfm>

The Federal Register. This official publication announces funding availability. http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html

State Agencies

Many state agencies have funding for a variety of youth programs. Check with state departments of social services, education, health, economic development, workforce development, and human services.

Faith-Based Organizations

- Catholic Charities USA. <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>
- Lutheran Services in America. <http://www.lutheranservices.org/>
- The Salvation Army. <http://www.salvationarmyusa.org>

Community-Based Organizations

- United Way of America is a national organization that includes approximately 1,400 community-based partners. <http://nationalunitedway.org>
- The Funding Exchange is a national organization that provides grants for local, national, and international programs. http://www.fex.org/our_vision.shtml
- The Philanthropy Index lists many community-based agencies. http://www.philanthropyindex.org/resources/index_resources_06.asp

Private Foundations

- Ford Foundation. <http://www.fordfound.org>
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. <http://www.mott.org>
- Starbucks Foundation. <http://www.starbucks.com/aboutus/grantinfo.asp>
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation. <http://www.wkcf.org/Programming>

How can you find out about other funders and grants? The Internet and public and university libraries are excellent sources of information; often they will know about local resources that are not listed in national databases. Here are some standard resources for locating funding opportunities:

LearningWork Connection provides links to many sources of funding for youth programs and activities. Also see Announcements and Calendar for specific grants. http://learningworkconnection.org/grants_funding.asp

The Foundation Center lists more than 53,000 agencies, corporations, foundations, direct, and public charities in its database. It includes 1700 links to individual grant maker websites, categorized by type and listed alphabetically. <http://fdncenter.org>

The Educator's Reference Desk provides links to various types of educational programs and resources. <http://www.eduref.org:8765/eduref/questionarchive/query.html>

U. S. Department of Education Discretionary Grant Application Packages posts information about grants that are currently available. <http://www.ed.gov/GrantApps>

The Grants Information Collection at the University of Wisconsin Library provides a wealth of information for grant seekers. <http://grants.library.wisc.edu/>

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