



MENTORING FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Education ■ Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Mentoring Resource Center

#5, August 2005

Getting Started With Program Sustainability

Sustaining a youth mentoring program takes hard work and planning. In today's competitive education, nonprofit, and youth service funding environments, mentoring programs need to be diligent in seeking funding and other support that can keep their critical services thriving. Effective sustainability planning and resource development allow your program to achieve its goals and fulfill its mission.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) Mentoring Program grants are three years in duration. Therefore, there is an expectation that grantees will fully develop services *and* start planning for their future beyond the grant during these three years. Unfortunately, the influx of major grant dollars, combined with the rush to hire staff and get the program off the ground, often leads to a delay in sustainability planning. It can be difficult to plan for tomorrow when so much is happening in the "here and now."

However, a grantee who doesn't plan for the sustainable future from the beginning risks program closure. Building solid community relations and diverse financial support for your program takes time and effort. A grantee who waits until the last year of grant funding to begin sustainability efforts may have trouble finding sufficient funds to keep going. Program closure means that many mentoring matches may end abruptly or prematurely, something that has proven to be harmful to the youth participating in mentoring programs (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Program failure can also erode the community and school district support for youth mentoring. Thus, you have a responsibility to use the three years of your grant to lay the groundwork for program sustainability so you can make the transition from OSDFS funding and keep those mentoring relationships going.

Planning Is the Key

Effective resource development does not happen by itself. It is the end result of coordinated action and teamwork. The most important thing to remember about sustainability is that *being organized is critical*. The following process can help you organize your program and effectively plan for its sustainable future:

1. **Form a Resource Development Team.** This team should be composed of the mentoring program coordinator, other appropriate program staff, members of your agency board (or advisory counsel), your school liaison, representatives from partner organizations, and perhaps even parents, youth, or mentors. For OSDFS mentoring programs, especially ones that are heavily school based, it will be useful to have a school district grant writer or fund development specialist on your team. They can ensure that your fund-raising efforts are in line with district policy and the other fund-raising activities that the school or district is undertaking. For example, some foundations only fund a particular entity once in a given year. If your district representative is already pursuing funds from such a source, this district person can help make sure your efforts are coordinated with theirs.

Similarly, if your program is part of a larger youth-serving organization, having a funding specialist from the parent agency on your team can help coordinate resource-development activities. Involving this person will also make it easier for you to demonstrate how your mentoring program fits into the larger mission of the agency.

Regardless of its exact makeup, your team should involve *all* of the stakeholders that have a

vested interest in your program lasting beyond its grant cycle. You will need everyone's buy-in no matter what funding approaches you choose. It's also critical that your team provides the skills (grant writing, budgeting, presentation skills, etc.) and community/business connections the program will need to pursue new funding over time.

2. **Review Your Resources and Environment.**

Your team should begin its sustainability efforts by taking stock of the **internal resources** your entire program (not just your team) has at its disposal. Internal resources that influence resource development include:

- Your program's mission and goals (everything you do should be tied into your mission);
- Staff time and skills;
- Tools, such as databases, donor tracking software, boilerplate text, and templates that can help with grant proposal development;
- Established relationships with community, education, religious, and business leaders;
- District policies and guidelines that influence fund development;
- Volunteers who can help with sustainability tasks; and
- Marketing materials and public relations plans.

You will also want to review your **external environment**, which includes:

- The level of support, financial and otherwise, for mentoring in your community;
- Other agencies that you may be competing with for funding;
- The fiscal health of the school and district;
- Trends in the mentoring or volunteer fields that could have an impact on your program's future;

- Shifts in school or district priorities that might affect the program; and
- State and local funding streams and broad funding priorities.

These internal and external assessments will provide your team with direction and clarity about the types of funding to pursue and the potential resources to leverage when turning your plans into action.

3. **Create a Formal Resource Development**

Plan. This plan will organize your sustainability efforts during each year of your grant. It should map out which team members are responsible for certain tasks, the budget you have for sustainability activities, and how progress toward goals will be tracked over time. The plan should also include monthly or quarterly meeting times when the team can get together and discuss how your strategies are working.

- ### 4. **Update the Plan as Needed.**
- Chances are you will need to revise your plan as you determine the effectiveness of certain approaches and as new, specific funding opportunities arise. Be sure to build in time every quarter to review and update your plan. A good plan has some flexibility. But be wary of "mission drift." Your program was designed to offer one specific brand of mentoring that fits the needs of the youth you serve and the values of your community. Mentoring programs find trouble when they "chase" funding, hastily reinventing themselves in pursuit of funding that is not a good match. Only pursue funding which allows your program to achieve its stated mission.

The Common Funding Streams

There is no magic formula for how much funding a mentoring program should receive from a particular source. Your specific mix of funding sources will be influenced by your program focus, your external environment, and the resources at your disposal.

However, there are some common sources that mentoring program grantees turn to when conducting resource development. No matter which of these you pursue, your program should strive for a diverse funding base. Many experts recommend having not more than 20–30 percent of a program's budget coming from one source. This will allow you to offset the impact of losing a large amount of funding (such as your OSDFS grant). A diverse funding base also allows you to “stay the course” rather than chase dollars that will dilute the services you provide and draw you away from your program's core mission. Most mentoring programs choose some mix of:

- **Corporate and Local Business Support.** Business support can come in the form of volunteers, in-kind donations of space, equipment, and supplies, or sponsorship of program activities. If your program is heavily school based, make sure that the pursuit of corporate or business dollars is in line with any district or school policies that govern business sponsorship or partnerships. Some corporations also conduct their philanthropic efforts through separate foundations.
- **Foundations.** Whether corporate or private, foundations usually provide grants and other funding in specific geographic areas and for special areas of programming. Many will not fund direct school services, but they may provide funding to your community-based partners. While this money can be difficult to secure, it represents one of the best sources of the large-scale funding that can replace the sizable amount of money your ED grant provides.
- **Individual Giving.** At the other end of the “giving spectrum” are individual donations. This source of income is often overlooked, but it actually represents more than 75 percent of all charitable giving in the United States (Giving USA Foundation, 2005). Board members, volunteers, staff members, and other stakeholders can all play a role in building a network of individual donors who believe in the work your program does.
- **Local Opportunities.** In addition to individuals, there are several community-level resource development approaches worth considering:
 - **United Way Funding.** This network of non-profit organizations provides funding and leverages resources for community and youth-serving efforts. Their local grants may not be as large as some foundations' but they can be a valuable source of income and can help connect your efforts to new community partners.
 - **Civic Groups and Churches.** Fraternal organizations, such as Rotary or Kiwanis, often provide resources to youth-serving organizations. Local churches sometimes provide money or resources as part of their philanthropic mission.
 - **Fund-raising Events.** Local fund-raising events can be a great way of generating community interest and goodwill, in addition to bringing in funds. These can also tie in nicely with corporate or business sponsorship opportunities and help develop an individual donor base.
- **Other Government Funding.** Because your program has received one large federal grant, you are in an excellent position to go after additional government funding at the federal, state, county, and municipal levels. You can use language and budget templates from your OSDFD grant to simplify the process of pursuing other government grants. As with all forms of funding, make sure the government money for which you are applying fits your program's mission.

Sustainability Tips

Keep in mind that you do not need to find replacement dollars for your grant immediately after receiving the award, but you do need to start organizing and planning right away if you are to make a successful transition to a long-term future. In general, remember these sustainability tips:

1. **Be prepared.** You should have boilerplate language for proposals, evaluation results to share, and compelling stories of success that tell of the good work your program does. Being able to “tell your story” is critical to getting future funds. Sustainability efforts should also be adequately staffed and tracked. Most of the real work of sustainability happens before a specific opportunity arises.
2. **Be creative.** There is no one path to fundraising success. You will need to adapt your efforts to your specific community and needs. For example, don't do a “bowl-a-thon” simply because you've heard it worked for another program. Brainstorm unique and fun ideas that will bring energy and community building, as well as dollars.
3. **Be persistent.** Don't be discouraged if your plan produces few results early on. Just remember to modify your plan as needed, keep positive, and remember who all of your effort is for: the youth you serve.

References

Giving USA Foundation. (2005). *Giving USA 2005*. Glenview, IL: Author.

Grossman, J.B., and Rhodes, J.E. (2002). Test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2), 199–219.

Additional Reading and Resources

Print

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. (2005). *How to build a successful mentoring program*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

National Mentoring Center. (2005). *Sustainability planning and resource development for youth mentoring programs*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Webster, B. (1999). *Sustaining program viability: Fund-development principles to assure your mentoring program's future*. Folsom, CA: EMT Group.

Webster, B. (2001). *Show us the money! Fundraising fundamentals for mentoring programs*. Folsom, CA: EMT Group.

Web

The Chronicle of Philanthropy's guide to grants, including an electronic database (fee required for use) of corporate and foundation grants. <http://philanthropy.com>.

The Foundation Center has fund-raising information and links to the sites of hundreds of grantmakers. They also have a searchable online database (fee required for use), and they offer workshops in grant writing and other services. <http://www.fdncenter.org>.

Fundsnet Online Services has access to hundreds of resources, including links to grantmakers and a useful tool to find foundations by state. <http://www.fundsnet.com>.

Grants.gov enables organizations to electronically find and apply for competitive grant opportunities from all federal grant-making agencies. Grants.gov is the single access point for over 900 grant programs offered by the 26 federal grant-making agencies. <http://www.grants.gov>.

The catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance is a searchable database that lists all current federal funding opportunities and some that are anticipated to be funded. <http://www.cfda.gov>.

The Grantsmanship Center offers workshops in grantsmanship, fund-raising publications, a free newsletter, a link to the daily digest of grant opportunities from the *Federal Register*, and state-by-state information on public and private funding sources. <http://tgci.com>.

The Mentoring Fact Sheet is published by:

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This publication was funded by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED04CO091/0001 with EMT Associates, Inc. The contracting officer's representative was Bryan Williams. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government. This publication also contains hyperlinks and URLs for information created and maintained by private organizations. This information is provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for controlling or guaranteeing the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information or a hyperlink or URL does not reflect the importance of the organization, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered.

