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Dear Project Director:

We are delighted to be able to make this fact sheet available to you to help you make your mentoring program a success. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools under contract with EMT Associates, Inc. Although this publication has not yet been officially released by the U.S. Department of Education, we have been authorized to make it available on the Web at this time to solicit your feedback.

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Sincerely,

Judy Strother Taylor  
Project Director



# MENTORING FACT SHEET

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

Mentoring Resource Center

#9, June 2006

## Sustainability on the Fly

The typical weekly to-do list for a mentoring program coordinator is always packed with critical tasks: recruitment presentations, volunteer interviews, networking opportunities, participant training, data collection, and reporting. These activities have a high priority because they allow the program to effectively deliver its mentoring services in the here and now.

But what about planning for the future? Coordinators and other mentoring program staff often lack the time to think about, let alone implement, plans for securing ongoing funding for their Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) Mentoring Program. Simply getting a program through its day-to-day operations can be challenging enough. But unless staff members can find creative ways to spend time on resource development and sustainability tasks, their programs run the risk of closing once their three-year OSDFS grant expires. No matter how busy everyone may be running the program, sustainability planning is something that cannot be avoided if programs are to have long-term impact.

In addition to time constraints, mentoring programs' sustainability efforts may also be hampered by:

- A lack of staff skills
- A uninterested board or advisory council
- Neglected partnerships
- An inability to demonstrate the impact of the program

Faced with these challenges, it is no wonder that many programs avoid meeting their sustainability challenges head on. This reluctance impacts many nonprofit and youth-serving agencies, and not just at the program staff level: A 2006 survey of nonprofit

*executives* around the United States found that finance and fund raising are among the least favorite aspects of their jobs and are areas in which they most need to build skills (Bell, J. Moyers, R., and Wolford, T., 2006).

So what's an overburdened program coordinator to do?

This fact sheet offers quick and (sometimes) easy tasks that programs can undertake to get started on securing their future. These tasks, by themselves, are just a starting point for your sustainability work; they are not a comprehensive approach to growing a youth serving agency for the long haul. But they are simple, high-impact activities you and your staff can use when time is limited and resources are scarce.

### Definition:

Sustainability in the context of the non-profit refers to the overall stability of the organization: its ability to weather temporary challenges, provide quality services in the present, and maintain a solid foundation for its future.

### Getting Help Is the Key

When it comes to sustainability tasks, effective delegation is an important skill to cultivate. Involving others eases the time crunch, provides needed skills and resources, and creates consensus on how to best keep the program going. Simple strategies for getting much-needed help over time include:

- **Make a list of people and skills that can impact sustainability efforts.** Be as comprehensive as you can with this list. It can include volunteers, staff members, business partners,

community connections, even youth participants and their parents. They may not all help with the application for that new large state grant, but they should all be able to help in subtle ways, such as with individual giving campaigns or with generating community awareness. Taking just a few minutes a day to chart people's skills and availability will help you be more strategic when asking for help down the road.

While every program's list will be different, there are a few individuals who are critical to any program's efforts: a board member (ideally *all* board members), a staff person who can handle some of the organizational and detail work, and the person in your agency who is in charge of finances. Key skills to look for include grant writing, event planning, and public relations. Many programs like to identify "community champions"—individuals who can promote the program locally and take some of the tasks associated with sustainability off of the plates of staff members.

- **Put resource development on the agenda of every staff, board, or advisory meeting.** This sounds simple, but sustainability will always take a back seat if no one is discussing it. Use designated meeting times to keep everyone up-to-date on progress toward sustainability goals, ask for new ideas, and get commitments to carry out fundraising activities. You don't have to solve your sustainability problems every meeting, but setting aside time to address the issue keeps people engaged.

This activity is especially helpful for programs having a difficult time getting their board or advisory committee to pay attention to program sustainability. Board members are uniquely qualified to help with sustainability tasks (it is a primary responsibility of most nonprofit boards). Getting this topic on the agenda at *all* meetings amounts to "internal advocacy," which can be just as critical as the advocacy you do in the community. So take time to ask for the assistance, governance, and stewardship you need from your board.

- **Be open to new partnerships and develop those you already have.** A strong partnership can lead to new funding and innovative collaborations that save money while serving clients better. Spend some time each week calling program partners to discuss how the current partnership is going and to explore new ways of collaborating. Investigate other youth-serving agencies in your community and think about strategic ways you can leverage their resources. All OSDFS mentoring programs will need to find creative ways of continuing (or even expanding) services when their grant expires, and setting aside time to personally communicate with both current and potential partners lays the groundwork for that future.
- **Make your program known in the community.** Part of creating strategic partnerships is creating community awareness. People cannot offer support if they do not know about the wonderful work you are doing. Create materials about your program that look professional and are easy to read. Make presentations at community events. Keep school district board members, principals, and other educators informed about the program. Make at least one new outside connection each week.

### Simple Sustainability Activities

While the tips mentioned above are great for laying the foundation for your sustainability, there comes a time when you (and your helpers) will need to actually buckle down and do some meaningful sustainability work. Simple things you can do on the fly include:

- **Schedule at least one hour a week for dedicated sustainability work.** If you actually put it on your schedule and stick to it, you *will* move forward. What can you accomplish in an hour? Examples include: researching online for grants, writing a letter of request to a foundation, contacting current or prospective donors, investigating fundraising software, or taking a short online course in grant writing. As you learn of new strategies and opportunities, share them with your board members and other stakeholders.

- **Conduct a “SWOT analysis” for each major source of funding.** A simple assessment of your sustainability landscape can provide valuable clues to the best funding sources to pursue. The most common resources are government grants (federal/state/local), foundations, corporations and businesses, individual donors, fund-raising events, and in-kind contributions of time, goods, and services. For each category, chart the internal “Strengths and Weaknesses” your program has in pursuing these sources and the external “Opportunities and Threats” that might affect your success. For example, program staff may have excellent skills in writing foundation grants (a *strength*), but a *weak* understanding of local foundations and insufficient information to determine which ones to approach. Applying for an AmeriCorps member may present an *opportunity* to research those local foundations, but you’ve also learned several youth-serving agencies have formed a new coalition that *threatens* your access to those local dollars. You may find it useful to chart your SWOT results as shown at the top of the next column.
- **Make a timeline, plan scenarios.** Take some time to quickly chart where you are and where you would like to be in the future. Your timeline should show how much funding you have, when it ends, and how much you need to raise by a certain date to keep services going. Plan different scenarios to see how each impacts services and staffing. For example, what would your program look like if you only replaced 65 percent of your grant funds? How would staffing be affected if you created a partnership with another agency? When should you launch an individual giving campaign in order to raise sufficient funds by the end of the grant? These timelines and scenarios help you set fund-raising benchmarks and identify critical time periods when you may need intensive help from others for sustainability tasks.
- **Write “boilerplate.”** Save time and energy when pursuing new funds by developing boilerplate language about your program in advance.

**SWOT Analysis:  
Obtaining Private Foundation Funding**

	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>INTERNAL</b>	<p>Staff skills in grant writing are excellent</p> <p>Program has clear outcomes to support foundation funding</p>	<p>Lack knowledge of local and regional foundation funding priorities</p> <p>Lack staff time to research these</p>
	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<p>Potential AmeriCorps member position approved for agency; can spend 1/4 of his/her time on foundation research</p>	<p>New coalition of high-risk youth provider is seeking significant local foundation support; this may hurt our access to foundation funding</p>

In no more than two pages, describe the need for your program; who it serves; its goals, objectives, and successes; and why it is worthy of being funded. Develop boilerplate on your partnerships and the level of funding needed to keep (or expand) program services. The point is to have the information needed to make your case ready to go *before* funding opportunities arise. This is an excellent use of that one hour a week you’re devoting to sustainability.

- **Develop short marketing “packages.”** Tailor the boilerplate to different audiences. How would you sell your program to a foundation primarily interested in academic achievement? To a donor who wants to help kids in poverty? Don’t change your mission, but find language that speaks to each audience. Exploring different groups’ motivations can also assist with volunteer recruitment and community outreach.

Program sustainability is all about hard work and effort. There are no shortcuts to building a sustainable mentoring program. But doing the simple activities in this fact sheet can help you and your staff overcome the anxiety, complexity, and lack of time that keeps far too many programs from planning for the day when your OSDFS grant ends.

### References

Bell, J. Moyers, R., and Wolford, T. (2006). *Daring to lead 2006: A national study of nonprofit executive leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Compass Point and Washington, DC: The Meyer Foundation. Retrieved 6/14/06 from: <http://www.compasspoint.org/daringtolead2006>.

### Additional Reading and Resources

**America's Promise** offers templates and sample documents to assist you with every phase of your corporate engagement efforts. They're designed to be downloaded and customized with your specific information. <http://www.americaspromise.org/community/corptoolkit/tools.cfm>

The **American Association of Fundraising Counsel** promotes and supports ethics, excellence, and leadership in advancing philanthropy. It also has a private foundation that publishes an annual report called *Giving USA* and keeps track of philanthropic news and trends. <http://www.aafc.org>

The **Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP)** promotes best practices in of philanthropy. Its Web site has useful information on all kinds of resource development strategies. <http://www.afpnet.org/index.cfm>

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 **Coalition for Community Schools** advocates for community schools as the vehicle for strengthening schools, families, and communities. Web site includes a great page on funding collaborative school-community programs, with links to additional online resources. <http://www.communityschools.org/funding.html>

The **Council on Foundations' Community Foundation Finder** is a useful online tool for locating community foundations in all 50 states. <http://www.cof.org/locator/>

The **Finance Project** is a nonprofit research, consulting, technical assistance, and training firm. Their Information Resource Center has useful resources on sustainability planning, including a five-module workbook and an indepth training institute. <http://www.financeproject.org/irc/sustainability.asp>

The **Foundation Center** has fundraising information and links to the sites of hundreds of grant makers. The site has a searchable online database (fee required for use) and offers workshops in grant writing and other services. <http://www.fdcncenter.org>

**Fund for Public Schools Toolkit** provides a step-by-step process for doing grassroots fundraising, as well as specific strategies for business partnerships, in-kind donations, and fundraising events. <http://www.nycenet.edu/FundForPublicSchools/ToolsforSchools/Introduction.htm>

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

**Grants.gov** allows organizations to electronically find and apply for current competitive grant opportunities from all federal grant-making agencies. <http://www.grants.gov>

The **Grantsmanship Center** offers workshops in grantsmanship, fundraising 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://www.tgci.com>

**Philanthropy News Network Online** is a daily online news service that reports on nonprofit agencies and philanthropy. <http://www.pnnonline.org>

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