

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
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3 pm EST

Operator: We are about to begin. Thank you for standing by and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks conference call. Today's conference call is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thanks. Happy 2009 everyone and welcome to the January Neighborhood Networks Conference Call, which is entitled: "Consortia: Proving That There is Strength in Numbers."

I'm Michele Higgs, as you have heard, and I'm joined by Charima Young, Neighborhood Networks partnership and consortium development manager. We have Charima to thank for the speakers we have with us today, LaKeisha Jackson and Joseph Mayerhoff.

With Charima, our speakers represent a powerhouse of development, maintenance and growth of consortia experience within the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Ms. Jackson is executive director of Pathway to the Future Learning Center, Inc. in Indianapolis, Indiana and president of the Indiana Neighborhood Networks Consortium.

Mr. Mayerhoff is assistant vice president of the Kraus Organization in New York, and a member of the board of directors and chair of the partnership development committee of the

Neighborhood Networks New York Consortium, which serves New York City and its metropolitan area.

They will tell you a little more about themselves in just a moment. Before we continue with our call, let me welcome our newest centers to the neighborhood with a reminder of the resources they receive as Neighborhood Networks centers.

There are four new centers to start us off in 2009. There is Moncrief Village Neighborhood Networks Center in Florida, Crossroads Community Workforce Learning Center in Connecticut, Hollywood West Neighborhood Networks Center in California, and Terraces Neighborhood Network Center in Ohio.

Let me tell you about the resources available through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative to help you guide your centers to success. First, let's talk about the toll-free information line. That number is 888-312-2743, where you can call in and learn all about resident surveys, success stories, special event ideas, or general questions about the Neighborhood Networks Initiative.

Then there is the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool known as the START business plan. START is an online resource that helps you to recognize the needs of your residents, determine the resources in your community that can address those needs, and keep track of the partnerships that can attend to them.

When data is compiled in START, it becomes a tool that positions a center as a business and makes it more attractive to potential partners as well as donors. START also creates the foundation upon which you can organize your activities and it provides institutional memory for your organization.

You can get access to the START business plan by visiting the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. Also on the Web site, you will find out what's current, learn about funding opportunities, learn about special events, and connect with your peers.

Let me remind you that a transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks. Look for it in the conference call archives at the bottom of the home page.

Remember, if you have questions about the START business plan or other Neighborhood Networks topics you can call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743.

Also try online networking through the Neighborhood Networks online message board.

You can share information with other centers or ask questions. Be aware that this is not a real time resource, but when you post your information you can revisit the board in a day or so to see what kinds of responses you have received.

Just go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and click on the Neighborhood Networks online networking link to the right under the green banner labeled "helpful tools."

Today's call will familiarize you with the development, maintenance, and growth of consortia for your Neighborhood Networks centers. A consortium is a group of Neighborhood Networks centers within a geographical area that collectively address issues that threaten their sustainability. For example, we often hear that funding, building partnerships, or resident participation are challenges that Neighborhood Networks centers face.

They're all issues that impact their sustainability. A consortium enables Neighborhood Networks centers to form an organization that can drive a wedge into these challenges. E Pluribus Unum: out of many, one.

There are multiple benefits that Neighborhood Networks centers obtain in forming or becoming part of a consortium. Here's a report from the interim president of the Midwest Neighborhood Networks Consortium, Sharon West, and I quote, "We have not had any meetings since August, but we have been working with groups to get them set up with Neighborhood Networks computer labs."

"One such site needed computers for a multifamily housing center in Davenport, Iowa. By working with Pam Dodge at the Des Moines HUD Office, we were able to secure three used computers for them to get their lab started."

One of the benefits of consortia is that they encourage the sharing of resources and connections with external stakeholders such as funders or larger non-profits in ways that can support the consortium's efforts, as well as individual Neighborhood Networks center efforts.

As noted by Sharon West, a rich resource is your HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator. It's good to know him or her. Also in consortia, Neighborhood Networks centers get to meet and network to share ideas and best practices on activities such as programming, staffing, or funding.

Now, before I get carried away showing off how much I know about consortia, I would like to have our speakers tell you a little about themselves. Charima, who has been instrumental in working with our consortia, will follow with an overview of today's topic.

I think we should start with ladies first. LaKeisha, will you tell us a little about yourself?

LaKeisha Jackson: Yes. My name is LaKeisha Jackson. Hello everyone. I am the executive director of Pathway to the Future Learning Center. The property where my center is located is on the far eastern side of Indianapolis.

It's 350 apartment units; the entire property is Section 8 or has a Section 8 base to it. We serve more than 1,200 adults and more than 400 school-age children. I have an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan and I am also the president of the Indiana Neighborhood Networks Consortium; our Web site is innneighborhoods.com.

Michele Higgs: Okay . . . thank you so much, LaKeisha. Joseph, would you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Sure. Good afternoon everyone. I am Joseph Mayerhoff and I am assistant vice president of the Kraus Organization in New York. We have two Neighborhood Networks centers, one is the Kraus Computer Learning Center, which is located in Brooklyn, New York, and has Certified Center Classification.

The other one has Designated Center Classification because we have only been in business about a year. It's the McCombs Village Neighborhood Networks center, which is located in the Morris Park section of the Bronx. Our consortium, the Neighborhood Networks National Consortium, has about 33 members.

We have been very active throughout New York and the surrounding areas. I'll get more into that a little bit later.

Michele Higgs: All right. Thank you, both. Charima, won't you tell us about the call?

Charima Young: Well, thank you for the introduction, Michele, and thank you LaKeisha and Joseph for joining us. Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us.

Now that Michele has given you a working definition of a consortium and its role in Neighborhood Networks, let's begin the call by discussing additional benefits of a consortium and how to obtain and maintain participation from Neighborhood Networks center staff.

There are four points I would like to cover that will keep your consortium members actively involved as well as strategies for recruiting new members. Making sure that your consortium has a clear vision and plan should be your first step.

Without a clear vision and a detailed plan for implementing that vision, members and potential members will get easily distracted and fall astray. Each consortium should have a thorough strategic plan that outlines the organization's mission, goals, and responsible leadership.

Using this strategic plan consistently as the driving force for meetings and activities will ensure and encourage members that they are on the right track. Accomplishing goals within your strategic plan will also re-emphasize the benefits of being part of a consortium.

Benefits include access to 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, professional expertise and assistance from other consortium members, name recognition within your community, and much more. Since everyone in the consortium would like to take advantage of these benefits, step number two is to have clear roles and delineate reasonable responsibilities to each member.

Members must know that they have ownership in the consortium. Sub-committees are often created to provide each member with a leadership role; to encourage individual talent, interest, and expertise; and to divide the responsibilities to ensure a balance within the group.

It is important that tasks are distributed so that members will not feel burned out, abused or taken advantage of. To ensure equitable distribution of tasks, consortium members should have consistent meetings and activities and should create an environment of accountability and rules for participation, which are often found in your by-laws.

For instance, some members like knowing that meetings and activities will be held every second Monday of the month, a consistent date that they can put into their calendars. This provides members and potential members with a sense of structure and confidence in knowing that their volunteer efforts will produce something and have a great impact.

Step number three is to have fun and make sure members are benefiting professionally and personally. This is probably one of the most important aspects in attracting and retaining members. It is always an extra benefit when consortium members can add to their personal and professional development through activities hosted or sponsored by the consortium.

Consortium leadership may want to consider hosting a training or having a knowledge-based session where members can rotate conducting presentations on their areas of expertise or talent. This will also help to build trust in one another's core competencies.

Making sure that your members have the opportunity to share ideas and creativity will foster a more cohesive group. Team building is an important aspect of retaining your members. People tend to work better with those they trust, like and/or respect, and that they feel share the same values.

That's why it is important to get to know your fellow consortium members beyond what they do at their centers. You may want to have a bonding activity each quarter such as going bowling, going to an exhibit, or hosting a joint event at a Neighborhood Networks center.

Consortium members should consider working together to host an event at each other's properties where they can share the resources and the responsibilities. Just create some form of activity where individuals can get to know one another on a more personal level.

Team building leads us to the final step, which is communication. As I mentioned earlier, having consistent meetings not only helps to maintain your membership but it also helps to keep accurate data on members and prospective members.

Keeping accurate data will help you to disseminate information about fundraising events, grant opportunities, and requests for success stories for marketing material. In addition to your in-person meetings, you can also use technology to stay in touch more frequently.

With e-mail, blogs and Yahoo Groups, many consortium members have been able to stay active and aware of consortium activities. Using this technology also helps to bridge the gap between consortium members who may be a great distance from one another or may have a scheduling conflict.

Creating lines of communication between consortium members is essential, but it is also important to communicate with your HUD Coordinator, property owners and managers, staff and local community members. All of these entities can serve as a great support for consortium activities and encourage more participation and growth.

Well, enough from me. Let's hear more from our experts Joseph and LaKeisha.

Michele Higgs: With that in mind and bouncing right off of the last point you made, Charima, I'd like to throw a question out there for both of you. How do you bond or connect with your consortium members? I'm putting that out there and you can take that in any order you wish.

LaKeisha Jackson: I'll go ahead and jump in. What our consortium does is that we honor everyone's birthday for that month. For example, in January any member, executive or sub-committee, will be invited in and we have a cake and get them a card.

We usually put a fund together at the beginning of the year for these types of things; we donate \$5 or \$10 or whatever everybody does. Or one particular organization donates \$150 for the entire year for this type of bonding activity and we just celebrate.

We also take about 15 minutes at the beginning of each meeting to get updated on how each person is doing, their family, that type of thing. Then we might ask how the job is going just to let them know we're concerned beyond just participating in the group.

Once a year, we go out as a group, either mid-stream or at the end of the year as a holiday celebration, to either lunch or dinner.

Michele Higgs: Joseph, you want to tackle that one as well?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Sure. First of all we have set up our consortium into several committees. We have a partnership development committee, resource development committee, a curriculum and training development committee, and a membership development committee.

The committees meet individually and have individual conference calls in addition to regular consortia meetings. So the additional meetings and the time that's spent in the smaller group creates a situation that is conducive to bonding among the committee members. Then they come as a unit to the larger group.

We set up a program where we conduct regional meetings. Instead of having all of our meetings for the entire consortium, we go to various areas where there is more of a concentration of

Neighborhood Networks centers. We try to do it during lunchtime and we try to give everyone at least a month's notice.

We have a local meeting so that the demands of transportation and taking people away from their regular jobs and their centers are minimized. In that way, we get people to come to meetings and we talk to them in smaller groups and, get to know personal and individual needs.

One of the best things that we did was to set up a group on Yahoo. If you go to Yahoo and click on "groups" you will see that there are all sorts of groups that you can be set up. Our group is called the Neighborhoodnetworksnewyorkconsortium@yahogroups.com

Everyone who is a member of that group can post anything on a bulletin board at any point in time. When they do, every member of the group gets an e-mail. Then we can have a discussion online without really disrupting too much of anyone's work day because they don't have to go back to stay on that site. It keeps coming back to their e-mail and they can chime in at any point with their comments.

Just a quick story about how well that works. Last year, my company upgraded all the monitors to flat panel monitors in our office. We had 25 extra monitors that we were going to throw out.

And I said "Wait, don't throw them out yet." I posted a little notice on the Yahoo Web site. Sure enough, one center that was starting a workforce development center separate from its regular neighborhood center got in touch with me and said they could use those monitors.

They came and got all these monitors just because we were able to communicate on a moment's notice to the entire group.

Michele Higgs: Well, you just took us to another question, which is how important is communication? Let me also just mention the other point I was going to make. You mentioned that for an event, a meeting, you were alerting people one month out.

That's clearly taking note of members' time constraints and their needs. How important is communication? How important is timely communication? I know that you're using all of the technology that is available to us. How important is that? Let me ask both of you that question.

Joseph Mayerhoff: I guess it's my turn to go first.

Michele Higgs: Okay.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Without communication you have nothing. You have no consortium because after all what is consortium? It's a group of people that are working together.

You can't run your consortium from meeting to meeting with nothing in between. It doesn't work. You don't get anything accomplished. You can meet for two or three years and still be at square one unless you have meetings with content in them.

That's helpful but it doesn't really get you to where you want to go. You need to be in constant contact, regular contact. And as you mentioned in the beginning, Michele, one of the strongest resources that we have for regular communication is our HUD Coordinator.

Our consortium started with an exceptionally proactive HUD Coordinator. Without him, I don't know what would have happened. He is the one who really pushed and prodded and got everyone to come to the first meeting. We had 25 out of the 33 member centers at this meeting because he called every one of them and told them to come to the meeting. When your HUD Coordinator calls and says come to a meeting you come. When somebody from another

Neighborhood Networks center calls and says come to a meeting, you say, you've got better things to do.

So the HUD Coordinator and communication and telling people what is going on is key, because obviously not every consortium member is as active as the others. You have to keep communicating with centers to come to the consortium meeting and let them know the benefits.

The HUD Coordinator is such a good point of contact. He is like the hub in the middle of the wheel that keeps communication with all the member centers alive. He's an invaluable resource. Although the HUD Coordinator that I'm talking about has moved on to bigger things, we are fortunate to have a new HUD Coordinator who is doing a very good job filling a very big pair of shoes.

Michele Higgs: Terrific. Thank you much. LaKeisha, do you want to attack that one too?

LaKeisha Jackson: Sure. As Joseph said, communication is the key and it's one of the most important activities for a consortium. One thing that is really vital is reminders.

Another is giving everyone a task and then following up in between the meetings. As Joseph said, if you just come to meetings, even a couple of hours once a month is not enough to get everything done that you need to.

One of the things that has worked effectively for the Indiana Neighborhood Networks Consortium group is that our president, which is me, if I have a member that's not there I'll call them and ask them why they weren't there. But before I even do that I send out a meeting notice reminder at least two or three weeks in advance and I ask everybody to respond whether or not they plan to attend. That way I'll know who plans to attend and who doesn't plan to attend. Then I follow up with them after the meeting and make sure they've received all of the minutes. Our secretary is

actually good at getting the minutes out and getting what we call "hot topics." What we do is right after the meeting she goes back and sends out hot topics or hot agenda items. These are the top three or five critical things that we need to do that particular week or before the next meeting.

Then she'll follow up within a week or so with the minutes, which keeps everybody in alignment with their roles. It keeps us on the mark for our vision and our goals. .

We also have sub-committees. We currently have only two but they are the major ones; the finance and fundraising committee and the public relations and marketing committee. We have an executive committee board member that sits on each of these subcommittees and helps them out. For instance, if they get off track on something that the executive committee has put into the action plans for 2009 or our strategic plan or at a certain benchmark, then they get immediate responses from the executive board right then instead of waiting for a meeting or receiving an e-mail response.

We inundate our consortia members with our contact information and tell them to call us if they have questions. Then we just follow up. I follow up at the beginning of each week.

So something I'm going to take away is what Joseph said about Yahoo Groups. I really like that. We e-mail a lot. I have an e-mail list serv but I haven't actually used a service where the e-mail goes to everyone and they can reply in real time right online.

So that's an excellent tool as well. But communication overall is very effective because if you don't communicate, your left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Do you really want to attain goals? You're setting goals and objectives. Do you really want to meet those goals? If you do, there are only three goals a year: communicate, follow through, and consistency as to how you want to meet those goals.

Michele Higgs: That's good. Thank you very much. Now one question that I know everybody wants an answer to is how have you grown or maintained your membership in your respective consortium?

LaKeisha Jackson: Joseph, do you want to go ahead?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Okay. Well, we've done a couple of things. First of all, again, our HUD Coordinator has been invaluable in helping to maintain and grow our membership.

I know that HUD Coordinators try to get new centers onboard every quarter of the year. As they sign up new centers, they get them involved in the consortium at the same time. New centers are the best things to help you grow your membership.

When we started out, 25 out of 33 of the centers in New York and surrounding area attended our first meeting. By the second meeting that number was diminished by 50 percent. By the third meeting, we had our core group that became the basis for our executive committee and all the committees that we subsequently established.

We needed some way to pull these people back into the consortium. One thing that we did was rely on a couple of partnerships to create meetings that contained content. We had presentations by the National Networks of Libraries of Medicine and by Grant Station. These meetings attracted our centers because people had something to learn and to gain by coming to the meeting. Once they came for the presentation, they were already there for the meeting portion and we got them to become more involved in the consortium.

We push very hard for people to serve on committees because that's the easiest way for us to keep them involved. The concept of a consortium is, "do a little, get a lot. Do your share and see what comes back to you."

We tell them that, "What you're doing isn't necessarily for you per se. But, because you're doing what you can do and somebody else is doing what they can do, you gain back from the whole group while you are doing something that might not necessarily benefit you directly. But, on the whole it benefits you in a big way."

After we tried the meetings with the content we also went to the regional meetings to try and get more people involved.

Now we're trying something new. In March we're planning a meeting not really for the center staff or for the center directors but rather for the management companies and some property owners. We're calling them all, with the help of our HUD Coordinator again, into a meeting that will probably be held at the New York HUD office.

We are going to make a presentation there, show them what we've accomplished, and what we're aiming to accomplish and where we're headed. We hope that we have some involuntary bonding; that these people will be so impressed with what we're doing and how we're doing it that they will tell the people who work for them, who run the centers, and who work at the centers that they should be involved with this consortium, that they should be doing more, and they should be playing a more active role.

Michele Higgs: Sounds great. It's a good opportunity for you to toot your horn and have them toot your horn.

LaKeisha Jackson: They want their centers to succeed. They want their communities and neighborhoods to succeed. They're just in it to see the legacy go on and see Neighborhood Networks get its just due in helping the residents as well. So that's how our primary board and our executive board maintain are maintained. To gain new members as well as continue towards name branding and visibility, we attend community events. We market at both community and business round tables.

For example, if our trustee's office is putting a community round table together about resources, we attend and get on the agenda. We get the opportunity to tell them about the Indiana Neighborhood Networks Consortium, what we're doing and how it benefits the residents, the community, and the constituents.

We make a large impact with our annual membership meetings. We go all out. We have this nice presentation. We send formal invitations that are specific for a management company, an individual, a business, or a member center. Next, we follow up with an executive member calling them to let them know how important they are to us.

This year, during our annual membership meeting, we showed the video, "212 Degrees." If you haven't seen it, go online and Google "2-1- Degrees video" and it will pop up and tell you how to purchase it. You may be able to watch it on YouTube. It's so empowering. It tells you the difference that one degree can make with anything. For instance, if you boil water at 210 degrees, it's still not safe to drink water unless it hits 211 degrees.

Another example is the difference in award money for race car drivers coming in first place versus second place is over \$1 million. So whether they receive a million plus or half a million is a difference of seconds, two or three seconds. This is what this video is all about.

At the end we put a piece together and we told them that they are our one degree. We showed them how they make a difference with our consortium, with our community, with our residents, and we tied it back to them.

So I totally agree that having some type of specific meeting for your business, your potential management companies, or your potential centers will have an awesome impact. That's something that you can do. Get out into communities, go to community fairs, or community events such as a Parent-Teacher Organization meeting; use those types of activities for

recruitment. Make sure that your board not only attends but plays a role that holds a passion for them.

Don't have them do what they always do. What do they like to do? What's a passion of theirs? Have them volunteer to play that role within your committee.

Michele Higgs: You all have given us a great deal of information. Now I'd like to see if there is anyone out there who has a question. Do we have anyone on the lines?

Operator: Thank you, Ms. Higgs. If you would like to ask a question at this time, please press star 1 on your telephone keypad. If you are using a speakerphone, please make certain your mute function is disengaged to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, it is star 1 to ask a question.

We go first to Marsha Hamaker with The Ampy Community Center/Kingsway Apartments

Marsha Hamaker: Hi. How are you all today?

Michele Higgs: Good.

Marsha Hamaker: My question is: I've got my program pretty much up and going. What I'm finding though, is a lack of participation from my local community and residents in the apartment complex where we're located.

How do I empower them to self-motivate and be more active in the programs available to them?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Are you talking about in terms of your center or your consortium?

Marsha Hamaker: My center.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Well, there are a lot of things that you could do. One common answer that has come up is to host some sort of social event to get them to come out. And to get them to feel like the center is not only a place where they can get on a computer but also a place where they can express themselves socially, congregate with friends, a place to hang out, and a place to hang out in a positive sense.

Michele Higgs: That's really key. I'm going to throw a comment in there. Make certain that there are activities going on and there is something to do when people get there. Perhaps training or some sort of activity in which residents can participate. Everybody likes a hot dog every once in a while. You could host an event that gets people in the door to see what's going on there. That might help. Anything else from either of you?

LaKeisha Jackson: Yes. I have something. I heard a couple of different things if I'm correct. I heard you ask about getting your residents involved as well as the community. Is that what you stated?

Marsha Hamaker: Yes.

LaKeisha Jackson: Okay. On the resident end a couple more different suggestions. Have you done a resident survey yet?

Marsha Hamaker: Yes. I've held potlucks. We've had a couple of events including "build yourself up day" where we provide haircuts, by getting local barbers to volunteer time, come in and cut the children's hair or the single mother or just people that can't afford it. We host birthday parties for the month. We have Bible studies. There is always some type of program or some organization coming in from outside, including our partners. At first the residents were really excited, but now it's just like it's sort of at a standstill.

LaKeisha Jackson: Okay. Some things change and we have to find out what that change is. One of my recommendations would be to put together an advisory committee. That could be three or five residents.

Also, offer some kind of benefit; create a six-month mark and a 12-month mark for your advisory committee. Ours is titled PAC, which stands for Pathway Advisory Committee. Basically, let them do the leg work. They are your eyes and ears.

They're probably in the community more than you are and probably have a handle on what is working and what's not and why the residents are not participating.

I don't know if you could offer anything off the rent for those that serve on that committee. But come up with an incentive. Just put together a brief sketch of your goals for them and then have some people develop that committee.

As far as the community, you could put together action plans, or what I like to call a networking plan, for your local area businesses, other agencies, and the Community Development Corporation. Define your action plan of what you're hoping to get back from the community.

Once you have it in writing, you can tackle one item at a time. For example, if you want them to conduct a health fair or an employment fair; or if you want them to donate a certain amount per year; or if you want to participate in one of their events, you can include it in your action plan.

Whatever it is put some kind of action plan together. You can call me and I'll help you with that.

Marsha Hamaker: Thank you very much.

Charima Young: Marsha, I just want to reiterate. I don't know where you're from but these are some of the benefits of being part of a consortium. To mirror some of the information that you received from Joseph and LaKeisha, you'll meet other people who can give you some insight and with whom you can share ideas. That's one of the purposes of consortia.

Michele Higgs: Thank you much. Have we any other questions on the line?

Operator: I have a question from Valente Gumms with Louisiana Neighborhood Networks Consortium (LANNC).

Michele Higgs: Hello.

Charima Young: Hi.

Valente Gumms: Yes. How do I get money for my consortium, for the whole consortium, because each Neighborhood Networks center is different? I'm trying to figure out how do I get money for the consortium as a whole?

LaKeisha Jackson: That's what we're working on right now. Do you have your 501(c)(3) yet?

Valente Gumms: Yes.

LaKeisha Jackson: Okay. Identify major corporations in your neighborhood where your Neighborhood Networks centers are located. Next, put together a fundraising plan and sponsorship plan and decide who you're going to contact and for what reason. What we do is put together centers together that are alike.

So for example, if I want dollars for our Neighborhood Networks center's afterschool programs, instead of saying, "We service Amber Woods Cooperative where there's more than 400 school-

age children,” through our consortium, we’ll add two or three other centers together. Now we have more than 1,300 school-age children. Then I’ll say, “These are our needs and this is how your funding or your assistance would support our youth residents in these areas” and the benefits to the youth, the community at large, and to that sponsor or that funder.

Charima Young: I agree with LaKeisha because companies like to know that they’re making a large impact. They like to see when nonprofits or different entities partner with one another.

It lets them know that you have greater strength. So, just like LaKeisha said, that’s your marketing tool. Sometimes you may want to start with a partnership, whether you want to ask your local grocery store chain for goods and services or for discounts for residents.

By building that partnership, maybe the following year they will trust you enough or want to give you funding for some of those residents that are utilizing their services and products.

Joseph Mayerhoff: A couple of suggestions. First of all, what Charima is saying is very important. As you apply for funding from people consider that a lot of people don’t like to be the first. People like to know that you’re for real. So if you can show that you either have partners or small grants from other places, whether they’re local vendors or small businesses, you can say that you’re already being funded. It will impress people; the fact that you’re part of a large group is also very impressive.

Two things that we’ve done in New York to brand ourselves is to come up with a logo and a slogan. That way, hopefully, our name or our image sticks in people’s heads after they see us once. They’ll say,” Neighborhood Networks, we’ve heard of you. We know what you are.”

Michele Higgs: I hope that everyone is catching these points because they are really golden. What I'd like to do is ask both of you another question. I personally hear your commitment in what you're saying. But what I'd like to know is what keeps you actively involved in the consortium?

Joseph Mayerhoff: LaKeisha, you want to start?

LaKeisha Jackson: For me it actually happens to be my passion. I believe in Neighborhood Networks and its mission, my love of people and enrichment and self-efficiency for them.

So for me that's what it is. I thought about how I could be more effective with my Neighborhood Networks center. That was one of the first things that got me involved. So I took that passion to the consortium and gave it my all because if it succeeds then the likelihood of my individual centers self-sustainability will be greater. There is the saying that there is strength in numbers. It's very true.

Joseph Mayerhoff: I think that everybody who is involved in the nonprofit world has a drive in them to make a difference and make the world a better place. For me, Neighborhood Networks really has been able to satisfy that need in terms of my centers and of the consortium as well.

We started our first center about five and a half years ago and about three and a half years ago I went to the Neighborhood Networks National Conference in Orlando. I thought my center was great. I thought everything was going good.

We had good attendance. People were coming in. People were learning. And then I got to the National Conference and I saw what other places were doing and just how big Neighborhood Networks really is and the magnificent things that are going on. It was a real eye-opening experience for me and I learned how much more I could do. From there, I got more involved and

then we became more involved in this consortium. I'm very fortunate that my company is very supportive of my efforts in this regard.

They feel that it's a good will gesture to our residents and to the community. And because this is a program that HUD is very much in favor of, by being actively involved and taking a leadership role we are doing something that HUD wants us to do. Our management company is in favor of that.

Michele Higgs: Okay. May I ask one other question? A lot of times when you have volunteers or folks who are working in nonprofit organizations it enriches them personally as well. Can either of you tell me how you have gained personally from your participation in the consortium?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Well, I personally have gained quite a bit. Here I am speaking on a national conference call. I'm a little bit egotistical and this really satisfies me.

Also, when we have an RTAW or a National Conference, I have been asked to serve as a panel speaker and it massages my ego in a really big way. If there are people out there who have not been to a National Conference or to an RTAW, I really urge you to go because it recharges your batteries. You're with hundreds of people who are doing the same thing that you're doing.

Seeing what they're doing, comparing experiences, seeing just how far this can go is really inspiring. So if you haven't been there yet, go, and if you have gone, go again, because like I said, it really does recharge your batteries.

The executive board of our consortium has three members. Of the three, I am the only one that is still involved directly with Neighborhood Networks centers. The other two started out with Neighborhood Networks centers but have changed jobs. Although they are no longer directly involved, they have decided to remain on the board and continue this work because they have

such a strong feeling for its value. So aside from commending them it gives you an idea of just how rewarding it is and how fulfilling it is to be involved with a program like this.

Michele Higgs: That sounds like you've gotten a lot out of it.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Oh yes.

Michele Higgs: Good. LaKeisha, how about you?

LaKeisha Jackson: I have also. I have been to several RTAWs as a speaker. I've been to Nashville and San Francisco. Also, because of my involvement with both the consortium and Neighborhood Networks centers beyond my normal duties, when I go above and beyond, I don't clock the hours. That I just do because of that passion and drive; I am a 2008 Mayor's Award Community Award recipient for community service for 2008.

I even have a brick on the north side of the canal with my name on it. So that's a legacy. There aren't many people that can say they have a brick in their city for being the mayor's top pick for community involvement and service. So that's a way I can toot my horn as well.

Just to piggy back off of Joseph again, when you attend these conferences, it gets rid of the stagnation. You rejuvenate. You get so much more information. Sometimes you need to hear things more than once or twice.

When you go to these conferences, you hear other people speaking or you get to sit in and observe, and you obtain resources. You get Web sites, people you can call or e-mail when you think you're going down a wrong path or when you need ideas about programming, funding, sustainability, capacity building, and getting your Neighborhood Networks centers involved in a

consortium and residents in your centers. You get a lot of these ideas from your peers and from people at the conferences.

Michele Higgs: Well, you all have gotten me all enthusiastic. Thanks for the commercial for the RTAWs by the way. I am going to stop us now and see if there are any calls on the line. Do we have anyone on the lines?

Operator: Thank you, Ms. Higgs. Once again, ladies and gentlemen, it is star 1 if you would like to ask a question at this time. That's star 1 on your telephone keypad. Once again, it is star 1 if you would like to ask a question. Ms. Higgs, there are no questions at the moment.

Michele Higgs: Okay. In that case, I would just like to find out about your involvement with the consortium.

Operator: Ms. Higgs, if I may interrupt you we do have a couple of questions.

Michele Higgs: You do? Great; go ahead.

Operator: We'll go first to Joyce Mortimer with DB Consulting Group.

Michele Higgs: Hi Joyce.

Joyce Mortimer: Hi. I have a question for Mr. Mayerhoff and Ms. Jackson. What do you do to try to attract center managers from one-person centers, people who are wearing multiple hats?

Plus, Mr. Mayerhoff, in the outreach program that you plan for March, what might you say to property owners and managers to get them to allow these people to participate in these

worthwhile meetings? Would you ask them to think about having a contingency fund so that they can, in fact, attend the RTAWs?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Well, the idea is to tell them we started this consortium a few years ago. Over that time, we have established partnerships with several organizations that provide direct benefits to the member centers.

For instance, in New York we've set up a partnership with Work Force One. Work Force One is very similar to the Department of Labor's One Stop, which has been discontinued. But it's a New York City program.

In New York City, it's a part of the Department of Small Business Services. Work Force One gives people training in certain skills. Plus they give incentives to employers to list jobs with them, which gives them a bank of jobs that is exclusively theirs.

So the people who apply through them have almost an exclusive track into these jobs. What we worked out with them was that we would conduct the training and we would take in people, not necessarily center members but people from the surrounding communities, who wanted to come to us for training because it was more convenient than going to Work Force One for the training.

As a result, when they finished the training, they're fast tracked into the job stream that is created in Work Force One. That's a very, very tangible benefit. Obviously, in subsidized housing everybody wants their residents to be working.

They want them not only to be working but to be working at the best job they can obtain. So it's not only getting people into the work force but it's getting better jobs for people that are already working. Obtaining the jobs through partnerships is just one example.

But through partnerships we can provide a very tangible benefit to the consortium members because it makes the centers better. If they've already invested in the center, obviously they want to make it a good and successful one.

So we provide resources to help their centers be better. But the cost of doing that is having some level of participation in the consortium itself. As I said before, the relationship with the consortium is very interesting. What you do for the consortium doesn't necessarily benefit your center directly. But it might benefit a center that's 10 miles away from you. What they're doing might not benefit them but they're benefiting you. Or what three other centers are doing might benefit you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you so much Joseph.

LaKeisha Jackson: I'd like to make a real quick comment. There should be monies in reserve for the Neighborhood Networks centers, either through the management or the center staff, depending on the service coordinator.

The property itself should have some way to provide money for training. The number of trainings you can afford is dependent on the center's reserves. Also, to get management buy in, I would come up with a letter or a benefit proposal to the management company to ensure that the management company and the center service coordinators are on the same page.

If you have to twist the arm of the management company, I would have lunch or something with the management company's controlling officer and let them know the benefits. And come up with a schedule of community events.

Ask them to what things they can commit. Once you have that commitment, follow up with an advance reminder that you look forward to seeing them at the event. You can then give the management company recognition in your newsletter.

Give them some feedback and praise for some of the things they are doing and just get them involved and keep asking for their help.

Send them the same invitations you send to your outside community. When you do, they will become more and more involved. But start with a checklist of resources you need and how you want them to be involved with your team.

Michele Higgs: Okay. Thank you so much LaKeisha. Since we're running close to the end of our allotted time, it looks like we just have a few minutes left. Charima would like to speak with you about forming a consortium in your area.

Charima Young: Well, for a list of consortia you can go to our Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. We currently have 18 active consortia across the country.

We are beginning the process of selecting consortia that will receive onsite technical assistance this year and we are always accepting new members. Some of the workshops that we'll be offering this year include organizational development, action planning, outreach and marketing, and much more.

We welcome you to make inquiries and sign up to participate in the consortium in your area. If you would like to join a consortium in your area, please call 888-312-2743. If you don't have a consortium in your area, please call our toll-free line to learn more about our nomination process for consortia.

Through this process you can nominate a Neighborhood Networks center in your area for onsite technical assistance for consortia development. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you this year.

Michele Higgs: Thanks Charima, all that information was important. I'm going to repeat that number again and that's 888-312-2743. If you're interested in joining a consortium, you can find more information about that process by dialing the toll-free line.

Now I'm going to remind you about the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. If you still have a question after the call, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and post it on the Neighborhood Networks online message board.

Our staff or your peers will see that your question gets attention. You can always call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line with questions at 888-312-2743. You'll find useful resources and current information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Let me remind you the RTAWs will be coming before too long. Look for your "save the date card" and check the Neighborhood Networks Web site for new information. Keep saving your quarters so you can attend.

As you have heard from our speakers, attending the RTAWs is a very renewing experience and it gives you a chance to learn what other centers are doing. On February 10, we will tackle the topic "Resident Participation. If You Involve Them, They Will Come."

Often that's a tough nut to crack, getting residents to take advantage of the resources at your center. This call will help you learn how other centers have handled the issue and how you might approach it, too. Thanks to all of you for joining us today.

Thank you again to Charima Young, LaKeisha Jackson and Joseph Mayerhoff for sharing your wisdom on creating and nurturing the development of Neighborhood Networks consortia. Thanks again to all of our callers. Take good care everyone. Talk to you next time.

Charima Young: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen that concludes today's conference. Once again we thank you for your participation. We wish you a very pleasant day and you may now disconnect.

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