

Neighborhood Networks Quarterly Consortia Conference Call Basics in Partnership Development

On September 16, 2008, Neighborhood Networks held its fourth Quarterly Consortia Conference Call, entitled “Basics in Partnership Development.” The call focused on best practices for Neighborhood Networks consortia to leverage and develop long-term partnerships. Guest speakers Mandy Meloy and Terri Ottosen, from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine; Deborah Backus, Executive Director at Castle Square Technology Center in Boston; and Charima Young, Neighborhood Networks Project Coordinator; were featured on the call.

Highlights from the Call

- Young discussed the importance of solidifying and retaining local and national partners. She discussed the following successful strategies:
 - **STEP 1** – Identify your consortium’s needs because it helps to guide research of potential partners. Research the specific needs of your center, consortium, and/or the community and determine if these needs match the philanthropic goals of particular organizations and corporations.
 - **STEP 2** – Research organizations that can assist in resolving challenges the consortium may face. Utilize the needs as a guide and research companies with search engines such as Google and online business magazines such as *Business Week*. These sources will inform the consortium of the company’s giving focus, the amount they give each year, and if their giving has increased or decreased.
 - **STEP 3** – Send Neighborhood Networks marketing materials and make introductory phone calls to potential partners. It is very important for potential partners to know the organization, the mission, and the consortium’s requests from the partner. Marketing materials, such as brochures, postcards, or flyers, can convey all of those points. Always keep in mind that the initial outreach goal is to establish an in-person meeting or a teleconference. Conveying in-person messages is more powerful.
 - **STEP 4** – Meet with the potential partners. This is a critical step, where you convey a clear and accurate description of the consortium’s community, the needs, and how the partner can benefit the organization. It is important to stress the win-win benefits of the partnership.
 - **STEP 5** – Identify partnership resources that may mutually benefit the relationship.
 - **STEP 6** – Continue to build relationships through follow-up meetings and phone calls to potential partners. Maintaining these relationships with

potential partners will help to build the consortium's reputation among similar organizations. It also increases the consortium's chances for receiving additional services and products during the follow-up years.

- **STEP 7** – Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a Letter of Agreement (LOA). Developing a MOU or LOA solidifies the partnership with the consortium, as it provides a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each party, which can assist with accountability.
- **STEP 8** – Partnership implementation. This is the final step in the process, as it wraps up all of the ideas discussed between the involved parties. Successful implementation is based on consistent communication with the partner, adherence to deadlines, and effectively managing all participating parties.
- Ottosen and Meloy focused on creating a win-win situation for the partner, and establishing a good return on investment (ROI) for the partner. For example, a potential partner may want more exposure for their products and services in the community, they may want to fulfill the requirements of a grant with a specific population served, or they may want to apply for funding that requires them to provide specific services. It should be the consortium's goal to help achieve a positive ROI; the partner is investing in the consortium, the community, and the residents.
- Public libraries are integral parts of the community, as they help access services and resources, enhance sharing and collaboration, and provide empowering information, such as health, job, and education information, to enhance people's lives. Ottosen and Meloy provided an example of a local public library in North Carolina that partnered with community centers. The partnership was aimed at improving access to health information for high-risk and significantly underserved populations. The partnership offered basic computer skills courses and held courses on locating reliable health information.
- Backus has done exceptionally well in partnering with local organizations and leveraging these relationships to increase access to additional resources. She established a partnership with the Ben Franklin Institute of Technology, which provides work-study students for the Neighborhood Networks center's afterschool program and technology center courses. The partnership also provides career development services and workforce-related presentations for the residents.
- Backus discussed additional partnerships that have enhanced Castle Square Neighborhood Networks center and offered added opportunities for the residents. They have partnered with the Josiah Quinsy Elementary School since many children of the residents attend this school. This partnership gives the center's staff access to the students' teachers. Castle Square has also collaborated with the Appalachian

Mountain Club for the past two years. This partnership allows the center to take the youth residents on camping trips during the summer, and in 2008, the residents participated in three camping trips, in New Hampshire, Nantucket, and Cape Cod. The camping trips are called Youth Leadership Training, as Backus instills appropriate leadership qualities in the residents.

The guest speakers encouraged the participants to continue to solidify local and national partners and attempt to leverage these relationships to increase access to other resources. To receive information about the Neighborhood Networks national partners, the participants were encouraged to view the Web site, as it will soon highlight the 2008 partners.