

Getting the Right Start- Create Meaningful Partnerships and Collaborations

To establish a training and technical assistance resource center necessitates building ownership by including a number of different players, blending collective know-how, perspective, and resources and creating a richer and greater whole. “Through their convening function, intermediaries are ‘setting the table’ around which the different stakeholders meet to plan and strategize new initiatives. As neutral arbiters, intermediaries are able to position themselves to build strong, meaningful relationships across organizations that deliver services. Across the nation, intermediaries are pulling together like-minded groups and helping them see the benefits of greater collaboration and coordination of efforts...”¹

Befriend and gather the right people

Building a field of practice, like building a house, requires a myriad of professional experts (architect, plumber, framer, and well digger). Each brings skills, tools, methods, and years of trial and error to create the final product. In youth development field building, stakeholders are practitioners, policy makers, academics, researchers, advocates, trainers, recipients of services, and local community builders. Know who must be at the table and be intentional about expanding the invitation list. Find the youth development champions, such as the local workforce, school district, city council, community-based organizations, or state government. Meet with those who are well connected and discover your common goals and interests. Get young people actively involved to influence peers and policy makers alike, and to build your expertise in youth development practices.

“We have formed a complex collaboration of seven independent agencies, comprised of multi-disciplinary members including community-based services, child welfare and mental health. We have implemented this collaboration by designing an approach that respects the autonomy of each participating entity while ensuring that each participant is operating out of maximum benefit to the team.”

¹ Local Intermediary Organizations: Connecting the Dots for Children, Youth, and Families; New Ways to Work with Jobs for the Future, the American Youth Policy Forum, the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, the Coalition for Community Schools and the Finance Project, 2002 Found at: <http://www.intermediarynetwork.org/connectdots.html>.

Do not reinvent the wheel

The purpose of partnerships is to blend expertise and create more than any single entity could do alone. Avoid building expertise in areas where it already exists—establish good will through involvement of existing expertise and connections. A powerful alliance was developed within a New England intermediary, a well established local university, and a software company. Alone, these entities did not have the expertise to create a software product to create youth development outcomes and manage the resulting data. Some of the most powerful improvements in the field come from partnerships among unlikely constituents.

“It takes special skill as an intermediary to be able to sit back, listen and be attentive and tuned in to the various dynamics and agendas that people bring to the table. As one who is generally in a position to see the big picture, it is important not to cause resistance by controlling the facilitative process, but to empower others to come to their own conclusions by asking the right questions and directing conversations in the way you want them to go. The art of consensus building is critical to ensure that others will own the process and decisions, and that everyone’s needs will be met.”

CASE STUDY

The Center for Youth Development (CYD), an initiative of United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania (UWSEPA), serves as a regional center for training, technical assistance and resources to help public and private providers of non-school hour programs assess and improve the quality of their programs. CYD works with approximately 285 programs serving over 51,000 youth and provides training, customized technical assistance and support through seven networks: Mayor's Children's Investment Strategy, Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative, First Doors To The Future (FDF) Initiative, UWSEPA Member Agencies, Bridesburg, Port Richmond, Frankford Projects, Youth Opportunities Initiative, and Peacemakers. <http://www.uwp.org/pauw.asp>