

## *Getting the Right Start-* **Form Strong Relationships**

**T**raining and technical assistance resource centers work with multiple groups by networking, bringing together or representing many voices, and bridging multiple efforts. This requires relationship building—the #1 leadership skill necessary to be successful. It requires personal connections, an individual long term commitment, a desire to be part of something important and to inspire action, joining in a common vision. Without constituent relationships, there is no training and technical assistance resource center.

### **Get out and network**

Centers need a face, a personal image of the leader. Their distance from the daily work of constituents' requires that resource center staff become known for their expertise, support, nurturance, and energy.

By establishing one-on-one connections, the interactions will build ownership, and reinforce and/or realign your vision and mission to best match constituent needs. Start with existing relationships, follow every lead and continually broaden the reach.

### **Involve others**

Genuinely involve constituents by asking for their advice, experiences, expertise, and participation. The strength of the work is really the strength of the collective work—not any individual or single organization.

Be reciprocal; listen and be responsive with the aim to meet your constituents' needs before your own. Ask constituents to provide leadership for the work in authentic ways: as advisory committee member, a workshop presenter, trainer or speaker, standards/guidelines reviewer, or newsletter/website article writer.

*"Building relationships was one of the first things I began to do when I started with my organization because the previous iteration of the agency had taken on a negative reputation. It was hard work but it was what turned things around. And it has become a key way we do business—getting to know folks, building trust; seeking ways to connect that are beneficial to us, to them, and to the youth they serve...I think that is a key piece to our success—folks come to us because they know what we do, how we do it, and believe they can work with us".*

## Communicate constantly

Create an expectation and dependence on valuable information, effective advocacy, and friendly assistance. Communicate regularly, intentionally and with high quality resources. Do not let a week go by without constituents hearing from the training and technical assistance resource center, lest you become “out of sight, out of mind”. A one-page, easily and quickly-read electronic newsletter is an inexpensive and timely way to get information to stakeholders. Be brand consistent but add color, the logo and links.

## Begin with areas of agreement

Listen for areas of agreement among constituent needs and build on those first. Hold off on the harder issues until a strong relationship is established and the training and technical assistance resource center can weather the bumps. It was years before a west coast youth development training and technical assistance resource center had the relationships that allowed them to hold youth development organizations accountable to standards for outcomes and being public in sharing their failures and successes.

*“I seek to balance relationship building, process and outcomes at all times. Awhile ago we got caught in processing too much and forgetting the intended outcome of the collaboration. At other times relationships also distracted from getting something accomplished. But one has also to be careful not to be so concerned with meeting the desired outcome that relationships are stunted or processes short-circuited, weakening support or ownership of the outcome. I try to balance the three—relationship, process and outcome.”*

## CASE STUDY

For the past twelve years, the **Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD)** has served youth workers and youth-serving organizations in the Bay Area as an intermediary organization. Its aim has been to improve the quality of programs for youth by supporting and strengthening the people and agencies who work with them. CNYD is increasing the impact of its work by partnering with other large youth-serving organizations to transfer its youth development capacity-building resources for their use, serving as a youth development catalyst in large youth-serving organizations with their own training capacity and in communities outside the Bay Area. Partnerships have been formed with the YMCA of San Francisco and the San Francisco Boys and Girls Clubs, with intermediary organizations outside the Bay Area, such as the Youth Service Providers Network of Sacramento, and with large, youth-focused initiatives, such as the California After School Partnership. The goal of these partnerships is to integrate the youth development approach into each organization's staff development efforts. Sharing CNYD's know-how in this way ensures that our partner organizations gain youth development resources that are locally rooted and can be adapted to their contexts, and made available on an ongoing basis.