

## Building Sustainability into Your Program

By Susan Hailman, Project Director, Campaign Consultation

The term “sustainability” is tossed around a lot among nonprofit organizations, foundations, and government funders. Most folks would probably agree that it refers to a program or project’s staying power—its ability to last beyond its first implementation. What might not be so readily agreed upon is what it takes to make an initiative sustainable. The first thing that often leaps to mind is the necessary financial resources. But if your idea of sustaining your program stops at grant writing, you’re missing some vital ingredients that might entirely change the way your program can grow and become embedded in your community.

Community programs that last never exist in a vacuum. Who knows about them, who supports them, and who feels they have vital roles in shaping these programs to match community needs all affect how long the program will last. If you recognize this, you will pay attention to marketing, volunteer development, and working collaboratively as well as diversifying your funding base to ensure your initiative’s future. Each of these activities creates a piece of the support needed for sustainable projects. More important, when combined, they create a synergy that exceeds the value of any of the individual pieces.

It takes a team to be successful at sustainability. It requires varied skills, contacts, and perspectives, which is why identifying, cultivating, and asking your stakeholders for their help is the most important first step you can take.

### Identifying and Recruiting Stakeholders and Program Champions

The first step in creating a local network of support is to identify current and potential stakeholders. The list always starts with the “usual suspects” who would routinely be identified as holding a common vision of your project. These are volunteers, staff, and board members.

Include those who have something to gain or lose, depending on whether your project is effective or not:

- beneficiaries/service recipients
- their families
- other agencies that have goals in common with your program.

Don’t stop there. Sit down with your current stakeholders and ask who else has a stake or interest in

*See Building Sustainability, page 14*

### Theme: Sustainability—Editor’s Box

This issue of *The Resource Connection* explores several aspects of sustainability with the hope of broadening national service programs’ understanding of this important issue. Building sustainability into your program includes gaining the support of stakeholders, using effective marketing techniques, collaborating with other organizations, developing volunteers, and diversifying funding.

Developing resource-rich partnerships is a vital strategy for sustaining your program, and included are suggestions of where to look for such partners. Making the community aware of who you are and what you do is another strategy that helps ensure

your program’s ability to sustain, expand, and flourish.

Several T/TA providers share the benefit of their experience regarding the essential clients needed to sustain national service programs. There are testimonies from the field from programs who have managed to sustain themselves and thrive.

Also included are tips for state commissions to consider in determining if they should become private or nonprofit for fundraising purposes. The newsletter also lists some publications available through the NSRC lending library on sustainability that you may find valuable. ■

*The quarterly  
newsletter of the  
National Service  
Resource Center*



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# Sustainability: A Way of Being

By Jackie Jordan-Davis, Regional Director, United Way of America—Atlantic Cluster, and Brenda Parker, Coordinator, AmeriCorps Network Northwest, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

## Media Ideas: Examples from the Field

*From the Northwest  
Regional  
Educational  
Laboratory*

### Idaho Trio Program

Publishes a report card that shows their activities, partners, clients, and personnel. Lists program objectives, accomplishments at each site, and plans for both community service and internal program improvement.

### Montana Conservation Corps

Assigns a member on each team to be the “publicity specialist.” The role is to establish media contacts, develop press releases, and perform other activities to inform the community about team projects.

**Sus • tain** (sə-stān') *v.* 1. To keep in existence; maintain; prolong. 2. To supply with necessities; provide for. 3. To support from below. 4. To support the spirits, vitality or resolution; to encourage, inspire.

*The American Heritage Dictionary*

**S**ustainability is a term every national service program must reckon with. The ability to sustain a program—to continue its existence, supply the necessities for its maintenance, and support it from the ground up—is fundamental to good program management. Until your program has been so successful in meeting its mission that your services are no longer needed, consider your work in sustainability as simply a way of being.

To be an effective manager, staffer, member, or volunteer, you have to be a systems thinker and operator. You have to keep the big picture of sustainability (and your personal role in it) uppermost in your mind when you decide on the individual tasks to do during the day.

...effective marketing contributes to program sustainability, because it allows you to show your passion for your work and your mission.

Sustainability represents a system of operation and a way of being because it is about:

- A solid mission and delivery of excellent services
- Recruiting, staffing, and managing both paid and non-paid personnel
- Training and professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers
- Managing, and leveraging resources
- Finding ways to increase your resources as needed
- Developing systems and the infrastructure that help people perform their jobs
- Evaluating and continuously improving your performance
- Community outreach, community building, and developing supportive partnerships

- Image and reputation among both current and potential stakeholders—

Who knows about you?

What do they know about you?

Who needs to know about you?

What do you want stakeholders to know about you?

How will you tell them—what tools and strategies will you use?

These activities to sustain your programs require effective, and sometimes highly strategic communication. Therefore, if you're serious about sustaining your program, you must also be serious about marketing your program.

To be strategic means you will need a plan of action. First and foremost, your marketing plan has to be *do-able* (which means short and simple). It has to fit into your daily activities and show up in your planner or it won't get your attention, and won't get done. Plus, any marketing activity

you perform should cover multiple elements of sustainability if it is truly worth your time and attention. If you approach marketing as an isolated task or just for a specific event, you're not maximizing your time, which is already likely to be in short supply. Make the most of your time by setting reasonable marketing goals to help sustain your program. For example, combine your marketing goals with your volunteer recruitment goals or the recruitment of new community partners; connect these goals with big events, such as Make a Difference Day or end-of-service activities.

Remember that one definition of sustain is to support the spirits; to encourage and inspire. That is precisely what effective marketing contributes to program sustainability, because it allows you to show your passion for your work and your mission. Marketing provides the means to attract people and resources to your project in exchange for the opportunity to serve, and/or to be served. You owe it to yourself, your colleagues, and your stakeholders to use marketing as a tool to encourage and inspire you in reaching your goals. Consider the ideas in the box on the next page to use in your program.

- **Find ways to showcase and inform stakeholders about your mission**

Use report cards, book markers, speakers bureaus—whatever tool reaches the people who need to know about your services.

- **Position your agency to be an attractive partner for a community sponsor or ally, then trade resources**

For example, in exchange for placing a member or volunteer at a site, ask for hours of service from their media specialist or fundraiser. Or provide a service specifically designed for a corporate sponsor in exchange for “seats” in their professional development training classes for members of your staff.

- **Collaborate in your marketing efforts**

Form publicity committees or participate in media campaigns with other agencies.

- **Evaluate everything as a tool for continuous improvement**

Make adjustments to systems and service delivery before your funders ask you to do them.

## Media Ideas

*continued*

### Northwest Service Academy

Sponsors are required to provide at least two media opportunities for AmeriCorps members placed at the agency or school. These can include press releases, articles in the agency’s newsletter, or presentations to key community leaders.

### Washington State

Program directors and commissioners from all streams of service collaborate in designing a media campaign, in conjunction with the 1999 Northwest National Service Symposium. The symposium awards prizes for the submission of winning papers about national service projects. ■

For training and technical assistance on sustainability issues, contact Jackie Jordan-Davis at 877-959-1967, e-mail: [jduwta@aol.com](mailto:jduwta@aol.com), or Brenda Parker at 800-547-6339, e-mail: [parkerb@nwrel.org](mailto:parkerb@nwrel.org) ■

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## State Commissions and Private Sector Options—501(c)3

*By Frank Slobig, Aguirre International/Project TASC*

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Since 1991, a number of state commissions have wanted to enhance their fundraising capability in the face of an increasing matching requirement, or have desired to operate with a greater degree of flexibility. States have used different methods to achieve these goals. They include privatizing the commission itself (Rhode Island, Oklahoma, and Nevada), aligning the commission with an existing state-wide nonprofit (Massachusetts), or creating a companion nonprofit entity for fundraising purposes (Kansas, Nebraska, Texas, Florida, and Georgia). Their experiences provide some useful lessons for commissions exploring one or another of these options.



### Key Considerations



- Make sure you have the support of the governor.
- Consider any comparative advantages for creating a companion nonprofit versus becoming a nonprofit.
- Get legal support from the attorney general or pro bono assistance from someone familiar with the laws of the state.
- Ask for peer assistance from other states for model by-laws, board structures, and cooperative agreements.
- If a companion entity is created, make sure the relationship between the nonprofit and the commission is formal and contractual.
- Recruit a board that understands your strategy, supports the big picture, and is committed to “giving, getting, or getting off.”
- Make sure the board members understand they will have more responsibility than if they were inside of state government.
- Try to have the best of both worlds by maintaining a close relationship with state government.
- Get technical assistance and training early in board development and fundraising strategies.
- Clearly understand that in the short run the burdens may be greater than the benefits.
- Hire highly qualified staff who understand the nonprofit world.
- Seek support from multiple public, corporate, and foundation sources.
- Use ventures as fundraising catalysts, such as achieving the goals of America’s Promise.
- Obtain outside professional accounting support.

For further information in deciding about the benefits from or going ahead to pursue nonprofit options, contact Project TASC at 888-333-8272, or call any of the state commissions referenced above. ■

# RSVP: Sustaining, Expanding, and Flourishing

By Janice Ingling, RSVP Director, North Central RSVP serving Itasca and Koochiching Counties in Minnesota

When I became the RSVP director in 1981, the program was not very involved with intergenerational activities in our communities, and there was little name recognition for RSVP in our two-county area. We had three or four RSVP volunteers working in one school for the Rocking Chair Reader project. It was a starting point—the challenge was to get the word out and to further expand the use of our services.

## Media Exposure is Key

It made sense to capitalize on the appeal of seniors working with children, so we made sure that the Rocking Chair Reader project was in the news with an aggressive publicity campaign, by producing a video with children and their senior friends, and by generally “talking it up” wherever and whenever an opportunity presented itself. Nurturing this school partnership, small though it was, became the key factor to our expansion into other schools and districts. We were asked to help establish a similar reading project in another school, and we also helped set up Special Reading Friends, modeled after Rocking Chair Reader, in two other schools.

As Rocking Chair Reader and Special Reading Friends became known in the community, other schools began asking us to partner with them. We received a grant for Read With Me, a reading project with Head Start. Volunteers were placed in ten classrooms to read to children. To encourage more reading at home by parents, we held a contest and awarded a gift book to each child whose parent read a book to them every day in the month of April. This exposed RSVP to Head Start sites in rural communities in our two-county service area, and again we promoted the project vigorously and worked closely with Head Start staff and our volunteers.

One of the long-range plans for intergenerational programming was to establish RSVP as a willing partner and indispensable community resource. We focused our energy not only on sustaining but

also expanding the program through a planning process that included RSVP staff, advisory council members, school administrators, teachers, and volunteers. We attended every meeting we could that had anything at all to do with children and youth, including meetings on school grant planning, Safe and Drug Free Schools, asset development, and the Children First program.

We served on committees, planning groups, and boards.

Part of our strategy was to let everyone know exactly what we were doing, through every possible media outlet. We planned special art projects that created high visibility for RSVP, and while we didn't have a budget to fund them, we didn't let a lack of money stop us. Our partners included the school where the project took place, who wrote a small grant for supplies, and a local art gallery, which provided gallery space, copying, refreshments, and supplies. We also received money from the United Way for other expenses. The projects, which last for six weeks, always end with a celebration and showing at the art gallery, complete with a photo session, and the finale is being part of the art gallery's formal opening for the month. These become publicity gold mines!

## Finding the Need, Filling the Niche

Last year we received an America Reads grant, which greatly increased our capacity to provide reading tutors for children. Before applying for the grant, we did our homework and knew what the schools wanted and needed. We met with potential volunteers, school administrators, and teachers from the target schools, and members of the advisory council. The teachers gave us input on training and helped us further define the tutors' roles. We recruited, trained, and placed tutors in second grades in three elementary schools in our two-county service area.



Teaming up for an art project at Murphy Elementary School



Head Start  
Read with Me  
Project/KOOTASCA  
Community Action

Our consistent efforts in intergenerational programming paid off when in March 1999 we received an AmeriCorps VISTA member for our program. Her task is to expand into all six school districts and their 18 elementary schools with America Reads\*America Counts. We have prepared the way by visiting with all of the principals and superintendents, and have received their enthusiastic support. They assured us that they really need our volunteers and welcome them with open arms.

Here are some lessons we have learned in sustaining our RSVP program:

- Build on and strengthen what you already have.
- Start something new and different.
- Develop relationships with potential funders and community leaders, and form partnerships wherever possible.

- Research community needs you are addressing—do your homework.
- Promote your program in every possible way as often as you can, and take lots of photos.
- Offer your help, stay flexible, keep your sense of humor, and, most important of all:

Publicly promote and recognize the value of your volunteers; and

Take good care of your stations; promote and recognize each one.

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For more information and ideas about RSVP programs and sustainability, contact Janice Ingling at 218-326-3175, e-mail: [jmirsvp@uslink.net](mailto:jmirsvp@uslink.net) ■

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## Going Beyond Your Match

*By Liz Upchurch, Community Action Corps AmeriCorps, Knoxville, Tenn.*

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**S**ustainability is a timely topic of interest to both new and veteran national service programs. One of the main sustainability issues is how to carry on much needed service when federal funding is no longer there. Whether or not this actually happens, your best line of defense is having strong partnerships that have been developed and nurtured over time. While specific techniques may not work for all programs, I would like to share what has been effective for Community Action Corps (CAC) AmeriCorps, and also provide some tips on how to build and strengthen the partnerships supporting your program.

We are an environmental corps based out of the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, a comprehensive social service agency that has served this community for almost 35 years. We began our AmeriCorps program by partnering with other groups within the same parent agency, and each year we evaluated our program and built on our strengths. Currently in our fifth year of service, we still have partners within our parent agency, and have also diversified to include partners from local government, consortiums, and other local nonprofits. Each of our partners provides significant cash and in-kind matches, covers site supervision, conducts site interviews and training, and assists in the writing of objectives.

While it seems like building financial stability of your program is one of the largest challenges when striving toward program sustainability, it is

possible not only to meet your match consistently, but to exceed it. At CAC AmeriCorps, 67 percent of our operating costs come from the organizations and individuals who value the service we provide. Our cash match and in-kind contributions from partnering agencies almost equals the amount of our federal grant. Our tremendous local level of support did not happen overnight and there are several factors that contributed to its success. One is that the previous program director took it as a serious part of her job to prepare our program for the day that there would be no federal funding. True sustainability means increasing local support each year. Basically, our partners have been brought along and educated over time to realize this as well. They understand the importance of following through with their commitment and documenting their in-kind contributions. We call it “holding their feet to the fire.” While this sounds extreme, we all know that financial stability is absolutely essential in making our programs work for the long term. Indeed, one of the main factors in deciding whether to continue a partnership is whether that partner comes through with the amount of match promised and in an appropriate time frame with which to use it.

The process of evaluating existing partners and meeting with potential partners needs to be started well before you are writing the proposal for next year’s program. It works well to start this process

*See Match, page 6*

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## Match

*(continued from page 5)*

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for the next year immediately after you have started up your members for the current year. While it is always a challenge to find the time to plan, the annual proposal/continuation process gives you a window of opportunity to make programmatic/partner adjustments to maximize the service your corps provides to the community. Here are some tips for building strong partnerships:

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- ✓ Clearly define expectations up front. Be open and frank about respective roles and responsibilities. This allows you to hold partners accountable to come through with what is promised.
  - ✓ Build the case for the value your members bring to their organization. Show what a “good deal” they are getting with enthusiastic members advancing a common goal.
  - ✓ Encourage partner buy-in—allow them a hand in writing objectives and outcomes, recruiting and interviewing members, and strategic planning. Treat partners as part of the management team on big issues.
  - ✓ Be responsive to community and partner needs, and be innovative in your approach to service.
  - ✓ Warm up partners yearly to expect an increase in the cash/in-kind contributions needed.
  - ✓ When bringing a new partner on board, give them a trial year. Allow them to contribute a reduced investment (cash and in kind) while you check each other out for a year. If it is a good fit, you can increase their contribution in the next year.
  - ✓ Educate partners on a continual basis. Sometimes you need to reiterate points several times.
  - ✓ Treat your partners well: keep them informed, facilitate communication between them, and give them appropriate recognition.
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Building strong partnerships and long-term sustainability will take time, but it is possible. Make efforts to build in this area each year and resist the temptation to rest on your laurels when your program is at a good place. Believe that each year it is part of your job to increase local support of your

program in an effort to move completely away from federal funding.

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For more information on building sustainability and partnerships in AmeriCorps program, contact Liz Upchurch at 423-546-3500, e-mail: [cacamcrs@esper.com](mailto:cacamcrs@esper.com) ■

### Fundraising Policies for the Corporation for National Service Programs

For policies specific to your stream of national service, check with the provisions established for your program or with your program officer.

# Library Spotlight: Aspects of Sustainability

## Collaboration and Community Partnerships

### **Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets**

Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight  
ACTA Publications, Chicago, 1993  
M0026, 376 pages

Focuses on locating the assets, skills, and capabilities of residents, citizen associations, and local institutions in communities. Includes encouraging individual capacities, releasing the power of local associations and organizations, capturing local institutions for community building, and providing support for asset-based development with polices and guidelines.

### **Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey**

Winer, Michael and Karen Ray  
Amherst H. Wilder Found., St. Paul, MN. 1994  
W0012, 178 pages

Provides an understanding of the process of collaboration. Defines collaboration by detailing its four stages along with each respective challenge. Concludes with appendices of resources, documentation forms, and worksheets.

### **National Service Resource Guide: Strategies for Building a Diversified Funding Base**

Corporation for National Service in partnership with Mellon Bank, 1994  
R0005, 27 pages

Developed by the Corporation for National Service to assist service organizations think about forming innovative partnerships in their communities as well as soliciting community resources.

## Intergenerational

### **Young and Old Serving Together: Meeting Community Needs through Intergenerational Partnerships**

Scannell, Tess and Angela Roberts  
Generations United, Washington, DC, 1994  
R0056, 110 pages

Presents aspects of developing, implementing, and sustaining an intergenerational community service program. Gives guiding principles, along with specific examples of highly successful programs and advice from experts in the field.

## Marketing and Media

### **Guide to Working with the Media**

Corp. for National Service, Washington, DC, 1997  
R0015, 26 pages

Provides assistance for working with the media to promote a national service program. Includes a description of types of media and the appropriateness for using each one. Helps with developing a media plan and talking with reporters.

### **Media Relations**

The Volunteerism Project, Hercules, CA, 1997  
C0153

Training module covering how to develop a strategic communications plan, how to craft the message to effectively tell the AmeriCorps story, and how to maintain control of an interview with the press. Five lessons contain information for AmeriCorps and other national service programs to gain visibility.

### **Media Training Materials for AmeriCorps Programs**

United Way Training and Technical Assistance Project. 1997  
R0501, 74 pages

Provides material for AmeriCorps programs to use media outreach effectively. Includes getting a message to the community, communicating in a crisis, and promoting a special event.

### **Using the Internet & Media Awareness: AmeriCorps Training Workshop**

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995  
V0020

Two topics include a brief introduction to the Internet and its potential value to projects, and information on conducting a public relations campaign. Explains the differences between advertising and marketing concepts in developing an organizational key message. Details working with the media, accessing experts, evaluating PR campaigns, and maintaining crisis control.

## Service-Learning

### **Building Support for Service Learning**

Addison-Jacobson, Jill and Don Hill  
Service Learning 2000 Center, 1996  
R0498, 30 pages

Provides a collection of ideas to help teachers build and sustain effective service-learning programs. Includes areas of challenges reported by teachers: teacher support, community connections, reform links, student support, and financial support. ■

**C**orporation for National Service programs may check out these and other items from our Library Catalog by contacting Amanda Fargo:

**Phone:**  
800-860-2684, ext 260

**TDD:**  
831-461-0205

**Fax:**  
831-430-9471

**Address:**  
NSRC/ETR Associates  
P.O. Box 1830  
Santa Cruz, CA  
95061-1830

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# Sustainability Means More Than Money!

*By Michael Duplechain, Coordinator of T/TA, National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC)*

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The AmeriCorps match requirement could rise. The allowable cost per member is falling. You are trying to squeeze more and more out of each dollar. What can you do when there is nowhere else to cut?

The above was one of the questions pondered during the Programmatic Sustainability Symposium the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) convened, in partnership with the New York State Corps Collaboration and the Massachusetts Service Alliance, on behalf of an AmeriCorps grantee. The purpose of the sym-

posium was to have program directors think about and discuss the challenges their programs face. The discussions did not revolve around fundraising as the key to sustainability, but rather focused on ways to continuously improve the program so that its quality helps ensure sustainability. Sure, everyone would be better off with an extra million dollars or two, but there is more to ensuring the sustainable operation of a quality program than money.

The symposium participants identified several programmatic sustainability strategies during the symposium. Some of the key strategies include:



## Get Things Done Well

Set clear expectations for members, staff, and partners. Ensure that there are clear lines of communication and defined roles for all involved. Spell these roles and expectations out in handbooks (staff handbooks, member handbooks, partner handbooks). Emphasize the importance of training front line staff, including site supervisors. Encourage member involvement in the inner functioning of the program. Solicit and use their input when making changes to the program. Change the dynamic of the relationship with site partners to one of true partnership. Ask partners to prepare a proposal to host members. Use this proposal to clarify not only the objectives to be met at the site, but also the role the partner will play and resources the partner brings to the relationship.



## Develop and Support Strong Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are the key to programmatic sustainability. Partners can help programs identify unmet community needs and strategies for addressing those needs. Partners can also provide services to program staff and members. Many successful programs ask their partners and host sites to contribute all or part of the match requirements.



## Re-Examine Program Design

Regularly seek feedback regarding the design and continuous improvement of the program. Seek feedback from partners, members, staff, and community representatives. Ask for feedback regarding the structure of the program, the program's objectives, methods of meeting these objectives, and emerging community needs. Collect this information using a combination of surveys, focus groups, informal conversations, etc. Use grant renewal time to initiate this conversation.



## Empower Communities

Give communities a real stake in the program. Establish an advisory board and task it with meaningful work. Have the advisory board identify unmet community needs, identify potential partners, and advocate for the program.



## Share Program Impacts with Government Offices and Funders

Seek out champions for your program. Let other organizations know about your program's accomplishments. Target organizations that benefit directly and indirectly from your program's activities. Show them how your program's mission is assisting their organization with its mission. Seek to build a relationship with these organizations to gain supporters and advocates.



## Increase Awareness of the Program in the Community

Continually work at building awareness of the program in the community. Seek opportunities to inform the public about your program. Write articles for the newsletters of organizations whose missions complement your program's mission. Speak at meetings when you can. Recruit members of other organizations to serve on your program's board or on an advisory board. Be as creative as possible to find opportunities to educate the public about your program, its mission, and its accomplishments.

In essence, the key findings were not new concepts for many program directors. However, many of the participants used the findings as an opportunity to revisit some of the fundamentals of operating a community-based service program. Also, as fundamental as these key strategies may seem, many program directors discussed how difficult it is to execute the fundamentals well. Monetary resources help with short-term sustainability, but programs must ensure long-term sustainability by running strong programs, developing committed

partnerships, and becoming integral parts of the fabric of their communities.

NASCC is available for training and technical assistance in program sustainability as well as other program needs. Contact Michael Duplechain, email: [mduplechain@nascc.org](mailto:mduplechain@nascc.org), or Harry Bruell, email: [hbruell@nascc.org](mailto:hbruell@nascc.org), phone: 800-666-2722, or visit their website at [www.nascc.org](http://www.nascc.org) ■

## Take Along Your Camera!

When your program is out getting things done, snap some photos of the members, especially wearing their service shirts, in action. Pictures are always good to have on hand: for newspaper articles, newsletters, and for showing the community and potential partners the work you're doing.



### Santa Cruz Service Corps

*Working on a river cleanup project within the community. The corps also teaches sustainable agriculture to students in school, and builds community by staging events and helping partner organizations.*

# Public/Private Partnerships

*By Melinda Hudson, Director of Public Liaison, Corporation for National Service*

It's spring, you're looking toward next year's programming, and it's clear you need additional resources. A nice juicy grant from a foundation or product donation from a company or some advertising that would build name recognition—all of these can help extend your reach and effectiveness. But you are no fundraiser. You don't know the bank president. And you've got your hands full running that program.

It all begins with a shift in perspective. You may be traumatized by the idea of going out and raising money, and that's not surprising. Fundraising is a specialty with a whole industry devoted to it. Why should you be expected to be great at running a national service program, and also have the same skills as someone who is terrific at shaking down donors?

The good news is that you have the skills to do something even better than fundraising, and that is building resource-rich partnerships. Rather than a one-shot deal for which you raise funds, this approach seeks to develop a partnership that extends into areas in which you might not have originally envisioned. Real hard cash is certainly attractive, but in addition to being the most difficult resource to procure, it is not always the most valuable to your program's long-term sustainability. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have advocates for your program all over town rather than a one-time donor to list in your annual report? Isn't it helpful to have others tell your story or seek assistance for you than just you yourself?

Start by thinking of your bottom line in a new way. There are many expenses you can defray by in-kind product donations—everything from office equipment to advertising to training and technical assistance. Each one of these is an introduction to a partnership. What may start as a simple invitation to join you in a day of service, with time and attention can develop into a relationship that brings you allies, resources, collaborators, fans, recruits, and maybe even cash.

This is happening all over the national service landscape and is creeping into the nonprofit world as a whole. The following is some collected wisdom about forming successful partnerships.

## Shift from a Sales to a Marketing Perspective

Sales is a one-way transaction: "I have the product and I'm going to do all in my power to get you to buy it." Marketing is a two-way transaction: "I have something that you will find valuable and you have something that can make our work better." See the difference? Marketing assumes that everybody wins. And that makes a relationship possible. Start with the attitude that you are going to create a win-win partnership in which both parties have something to give and something to gain.

## Know Your Product

National service has some of the best assets any marketer could imagine:

- We address real needs. What we do matters.
- We get things done. For instance, national tests tell us that 40 percent of third-graders are not proficient readers. Our tutoring programs deliver measurable results such as improving reading scores by two grade levels.
- It is low risk. National service programs are rigorously reviewed to ensure quality. And their investment is matched by a secure stream of funds from the federal government.
- National service is inclusive. It is built on partnerships, so that your program and funders with ongoing relationships can work together on a common goal. Join resources with theirs—AmeriCorps members serving through Boys and Girls Clubs, Foster Grandparents joining literacy programs or offering coordinate service-learning projects after school.
- National service in your community is a part of something bigger. It's big, it's strengthening communities, developing participants, and getting things done, and it's happening right there in your home town!

## Know Your Targets

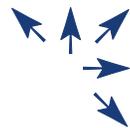
If you've identified the largest employer in town as your target for building a strategic alliance, you've got to know what matters to this enterprise. How do they make their money? Who are their customers? Where do they invest if they have a philanthropic arm? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Who are their top executives and what are their issues? It's a simple research project, but

one that needs to be done well. First, get their annual report and read it from cover to cover for themes, growth areas, points of pride. Check their website. If you are interested in a marketing relationship, who are their customers? They'll want to see if affiliating with you will be attractive to their target market. Pick up some of their lingo so you can speak the same language.



### Make It a Team Effort

Your best weapon is a strong community advisory board that can help you make the contacts you need to develop these partnerships. There is an old maxim about the three G's in community organizations about their boards: members have to Give, Get, or Get off! Build that board, starting at whatever level you've got. In other words, if you don't know the bank president, do you know the vice president? Or the community relations officer? Or the teller? You'll eventually build up to more senior folks if you start with folks who are passionate about your mission. Think also about the kinds of professionals you need. Always have a lawyer, a media, public relations, or marketing person, a numbers guru from a local accounting firm or bank, and a fundraiser. The National Society of Fund Raising Executives can introduce you to fundraising, and perhaps point out local go-getters.



### Align Your Missions

Determine what do you have in common with your partner—why they would find value in a relationship with you. There are a lot of angles. In a tight labor market, companies need to hold on to their employees and to incubate employees of the future. Programs that address concerns of current employees—environmental projects, literacy programs for kids, public safety initiatives around schools, eldercare, decent housing—are important human resource tools for a company as well as present a good corporation image. Affiliation with good causes increases sales—78 percent of consumers will switch brands for a cause or organization they admire. Companies are increasingly aligning their community investments with their business objectives. Why not do that by supporting something that helps meet a real need in that particular community?



### Leave the Paper Behind and Listen

Ask to meet with a potential partner because you've seen what they've been doing or have heard that they care about certain issues. You're not selling, you're meeting another fellow traveler in this campaign to get things done. Leave the paper behind—

you're not making a proposal, you're finding common ground, aligning your missions, seeking mutually beneficial activities, and building strategic alliances. Listen. Don't talk. The potential partner will tell you precisely what they value, what they need, and what concerns they might have about you. Resist the temptation to explain or "power point" at your first meeting. You have just a few basic points: there is a serious problem, both groups care about it, explore how to help solve it together. If at all possible, offer them the opportunity to see your team at work. That is how they begin to be reassured that you are a good investment of energy, time, and money. Follow up with paper outlining some of the approaches you've identified together.



### Take Your Time

These things take time. Even if lightning strikes at the first meeting, it is a long road from seeing common ground to rolling out the partnership. One savvy director said that he can consider only one partnership a year. After it's launched and before he goes after another one, he makes sure that someone considers that partnership their responsibility on an ongoing basis. Think about starting small, allowing it to take time, and growing in ways you don't expect.



### Thank You, Thank You, Thank You

Never stop thanking your partners. They may have taken risks to support you either inside their own organizations or in the community. Write a note, include them in your newsletter, keep them updated regularly, give them an award, keep offering more opportunities to work together, invite them to join your board, send your volunteers by their office with a token of appreciation on National Youth Service Day or National Volunteer Week, and share their support with the media. Thank them any way you can, and ask your board members, volunteers, other partners to do the same. Build that web of gratitude and it will, in turn, build a web of support. ■

# Where to Look for Partners

By Melinda Hudson, Director of Public Liaison, Corporation for National Service



## Banks

Through the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), banks are encouraged to invest resources in local communities in which they conduct business to address local needs. Banks must demonstrate their commitment before they are allowed to expand, merge, open new ATMs, etc. Bank support for AmeriCorps programs is an approved community investment under CRA. While it is not guaranteed that a bank will choose you for their CRA investment, it is a great opportunity.



## Commitment Makers to the Presidents' Summit

Many are natural collaborators with your projects and may also need help in implementing their commitments. There are over a dozen commitments for America Reads specifically and many, many more that address literacy. Visit [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org) for a list of commitment makers. Later this spring, the second annual report from America's Promise will be published and available on their website, which will have an update on commitments and contacts. Offer your help because your missions may already be aligned.

## Words of Caution



### Pick Your Partners Carefully

The Corporation for National Service has made a conscious decision to not seek relationships with the manufacturers of alcohol, tobacco, or firearms. However, it is recognized that many of these companies do support fine programming, such as the anti-teenage drinking campaigns of the beer industry, and many are strong local partners. Many others are conglomerates, and while you might not want to do business with one company, there may be another under their umbrella which you find appropriate. Use your own best judgment, but do consider the impact of a partnership that may be controversial.

### Do Not Enter into Exclusive Relationships or Endorsements

When you seek a corporate partner that is, in turn, seeking market share by affiliating with your "product," take care to avoid the implication that you are endorsing their product. Let them endorse you—they get a business benefit by being associated with you. And, in turn, thank them. Acknowledge what they have done for you and your community. Highlight them in your publications, on your materials, on your T-shirts if they are team sponsors, but maintain your independence and flexibility. You'll be respected for it and it won't cost you a single partnership.

### Don't Undervalue your Worth

There are few programs or "products" that do so much for so many people. Think of your program, volunteers, or members as your "brand," and manage it accordingly. Don't let it be used for purposes that undermine your mission or your reputation. Do insist that it be acknowledged and given its due.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact the Corporation. We can put you in touch with those who have successfully negotiated these waters.



## Foundations

There are all kinds of foundations and each behaves a little differently. Increasingly, foundations want to be more than funders—they want to be partners, helping to design or strengthen programs that get things done. Corporate foundations may work closely with the company's marketing folks, so pay close attention to what is called "strategic philanthropy." Community foundations are booming and have a real dedicated interest in issues at the local level. Foundations also meet regularly at

Regional Associations of Grantmakers (RAGS). They often pool resources to address common regional needs. There are also very strong family foundations all across the country. Your local library has guides to foundations by issue and geographic areas. Pay close attention to their grant guidelines and highlight for them how your missions are aligned. One of the most common reasons folks don't get funded is that they ignore some key part of those guidelines.



## Colleges and Universities

Think people power, not money. First, consider tapping into that rich vein of talent on campus through the work-study program. Through America Reads, students may serve in their communities as well as on campus. Offer to help the college or university by serving as a community-service site, guaranteeing a quality experience and reducing their administrative hassles around sending people off campus. Second, get some free thinking by offering your program as a project for the marketing or business department. Remember that Federal Express was conceived by then MBA student Frederick Smith as his senior thesis. You'll get some terrific ideas, fresh perspective, and some advocates outside your normal reach.



## Media

Media professionals need you almost as much as you need them. Their business is to get the word

out and they, like banks, have a requirement to publicize community activities through public service announcements (PSAs). But rather than just send them the latest PSA, go seek their partnership. Increasingly, television stations want a year-round campaign through which they can promote their good corporate citizenship, highlight their on-air talent, and, of course, attract viewers. You can help them develop that campaign. Anytime they need a story of seniors, on young people, or on, say, the environment, they should know that you are a key resource for good stories and salient facts.



## State and Local Governments

State commissions and state offices offer dozens of examples of how they've invested through partnerships at the local level from matches for the President's Student Service Scholarships, to administrative funds, to matching the AmeriCorps education award for use in state colleges. ■

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# Building Sustainable Partnerships to Promote Disability Inclusion

*By Kevin Elliott, Senior Staff Trainer, Access AmeriCorps*

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**I**nclusion of persons with disabilities is a vital component to building a sustainable program that is diverse and well represented. We are all committed to building diversity and complying with the ADA, but may need some support in doing so. Below are some key areas to address while building equal opportunities for people with disabilities in national service, and some organiza-

tions your agency can partner with to support these activities. To further support collaboration, and therefore strengthen and sustain your program, offer to work with these agencies when performing service projects. You may find a new community-based agency that can become a partner in many endeavors. Remember, collaboration is a two-way street.

### Recruitment:

- Access AmeriCorps
- Centers for Independent Living
- United Cerebral Palsy affiliates
- Disability service providers
- Vocational rehabilitation offices
- University offices for students with disabilities
- Special Education and vocational counselors in high schools

### ADA Compliance:

- Access AmeriCorps
- Centers for Independent Living
- Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTAC)

### Benefits (entitlements) Counseling:

- Access AmeriCorps
- Centers for Independent Living
- United Cerebral Palsy affiliates (most, not all)
- Other disability service providers

### Accommodations:

- Access AmeriCorps
- Centers for Independent Living
- United Cerebral Palsy Affiliates (most, not all)
- State Vocational Rehabilitation offices
- Adaptive Technology labs
- Disability service organizations
- High School Special Education departments
- State Commissions on Volunteerism (for qualified AmeriCorps programs)
- Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTAC)
- State Assistance Technology programs

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For information and referral for these and other related topics, contact Access AmeriCorps at 202-776-0406, or e-mail: [accessamericorps@ucpa.org](mailto:accessamericorps@ucpa.org) ■

# Building Sustainability

(continued from page 1)

your program's success. The following examples are given to start your creative juices flowing. As you consider who might be added to your list of potential supporters or partners, also use your group to identify your strongest argument for their involvement. Identify who might be in the best position to approach each person—it shouldn't always be the executive director. Remember, the objective is to build a web of local and regional support rather than looking to large national corporations and foundations.

Program/Project	Potential Stakeholder	Common Interest	Best Argument for Involvement	Involve-ment	Who Should Approach Stakeholder
Middle School Literacy	John Smith, Store Manager	Son benefited from this program	Young people who can read are future customers	Invite to goal-setting session next month	Tutor who worked with son last semester
RSVP Program	June Simms, Pres. U-Trust Bank	Continued vitality and contribution of seniors to community	Program has access to 200 seniors who would frequent businesses partnered in planning for future senior programs	Participate in strategic planning for next quarter	RSVP member who is a retired banker
Learn & Serve Environmental Program for 10th Graders	Jack Finch, local nursery owner	Residents develop appreciation for beautifying yards & public land	Program teaches youngsters & their families about plants, creates an interest in gardening & will frequent nursery	Review plan for the semester & suggest ways to improve it	A student's mom, owner of 3 rental properties that were landscaped using Jack's nursery
VISTA Child Immunization Project	Jackie Woo, Regional Dir. Squibb Pharmaceuticals	Health of children	Assistance could attract more patients & create publicity for firm	Help with marketing campaign	Retired doctor who volunteers part time for the program

## Cultivating Champions for Your Cause

The process of moving a potential stakeholder to an involved one who is a champion for your project or program is a process of cultivation. It involves convincing the individual of the benefit they will derive, personally or organizationally, from becoming involved in your initiative, and then giving them a meaningful way to contribute. Champions must actually add their stamp to the project; through their participation, they “buy in.” Each time they contribute, they should be recognized for their contribution and any results that come from that contribution should be shared with them enthusiastically.

What are the characteristics of champions? They:

- Look for opportunities to talk about or demonstrate the effectiveness of your program to others.
- Tell you about opportunities to collaborate with other groups.
- Identify funding opportunities.
- See opportunities to publicize what you do.

Through your careful cultivation, you can develop a team concerned about the project's longevity and

growth, who can tackle diversifying the funding base, marketing the program, developing volunteer leadership, and collaborating.

## Contributions to SustainAbility

### Marketing and Media Relations

If no one knows about the good work you do, you won't have “customers” or supporters, volunteers or partners who want to join you. People want to join successful initiatives. They want to be part of something they've heard of before. Generate opportunities for the print or electronic media to spread the word about you, focusing the marketing pieces you create about your project. Identify public forums that allow your project to tell its story well. Create a public image and reputation that attracts supporters, customers, and partners who feel like old friends because they know about you.

### Collaboration

In order to create effective multidisciplinary solutions to community problems, it is often necessary to work across organizational boundaries. Attracting and keeping the partners you need to solve problems requires attention to group process, clear agreements, and mutual benefits to each

collaborating organization. Groups that excel in building collaborative relationships frequently comment that mastering collaboration has opened doors to new projects, new funding, new clients, and volunteers.

## Volunteer Development

Your volunteers play one role in your project today, but seeing the roles they could play tomorrow is key to sustaining your project. Identifying volunteers' skills and aspirations as well as making their vision part of the project's vision can create opportunities for your program to remain in the community for many years to come. The community development adage, "people support what they help to create," can be the foundation of a sustainable project. Giving volunteers opportunities to learn new skills and test them out in new situations while you can support and coach them, can encourage their leadership to grow.

## Diversified Funding

Your involvement with local stakeholders can often lead to the discovery of local funding opportunities. While you may not have the Ford Foundation in your backyard, the development of in-

kind resources donated by a local partner may be the beginning of a relationship that can have many different benefits to both partners over time. These donations can take many forms: free marketing assistance from a local business, donation of space for a meeting, or food for a special event, will not only defray line items in your budget, but also could be the beginning of "buy-in" by your business partner.

Have a realistic plan to solicit contributions of cash or in-kind donations from local organizations, and develop a long-term plan for soliciting select individuals in your region. This strategy can provide the freedom to grow, and also to deal with unexpected short-falls without terror. Keep in mind that "diversity" applies not only to the sources themselves, but also to the formality and rigorousness of the process of applying for the resources. And in all cases, the success of your "ask" will be determined by the relationship you have with your stakeholders, prospects, and champions.

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For training and technical assistance on program sustainability, contact Susan Hailman at Campaign Consultation, 410-243-7979, e-mail: [sustainability@campaignconsultation.com](mailto:sustainability@campaignconsultation.com) ■

## A Case Study on Sustainability

**D**oreen was assigned to a community service organization that helped political refugees from Vietnam with job placement. The biggest challenge for the refugees wasn't securing jobs, but finding transportation to and from work. The local bus system barely covered half of the valley and was poorly interconnected with other routes, increasing the waiting period at bus stops for up to two hours each way. Doreen was given a caseload of refugees and charged with creating and sustaining transportation options for 30 of her clients. Her first strategy was to meet with elders from various political factions of the local Vietnamese community to determine how the problem could best be solved. These volunteers, many of whom were former high-ranking military officials and professionals, suggested that funding be secured for drivers' training classes, so that workers could car-pool or buy low-cost vehicles. She secured an agreement from the elders to speak on behalf of the refugees if help was going to be needed to secure resources.

Doreen's second strategy was to identify and secure funds to underwrite drivers' training costs for one year. The United Way in her area referred her to the community services department of the county. Doreen was told to submit a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) proposal on behalf of the Vietnamese community during the next funding cycle, which was two months away.

Her third strategy was to get her boss to agree that their agency would serve as the applicant for the project funds. This prompted her boss to designate the agency's grant writer

to draft the proposal for the project. Doreen convened the elders group one more time to pinpoint specific individuals eligible for the training, and to have them draft support letters for the grant. In addition, she found a company willing to discount the training by 40 percent.

Two months after submitting the proposal, Doreen was asked to appear with representatives from the Vietnamese community to "pitch" the program in front of a review group. She prepared the elders by setting up role-plays to increase their confidence during the review. The subsequent review session went well. The reviewers suggested that all trainees pay a portion of the cost so that more individuals would be trained. This doubled the anticipated number of people trained to 60.

One month after the review, the project was funded for \$6,000. After project start-up, the first set of five graduates was featured in the local paper and on the news. Each graduate had paid 50 percent of the training cost, and news was spreading among community members that the driver's education teacher was patient and easy to learn from. This prompted more community members to apply for the training, some being willing to pay up to 75 percent of the fee. Since the program was such a success because it met a community need, Doreen's agency not only earmarked funds from the general agency budget to continue the project the following year, but also committed to reapply for further CDBG funding for future years.

*See Sustainability Principles, page 16*



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# University-Assisted Community Schools: Integrating K-H Service-Learning for the Long Term

By Joann Weeks, Director, WEPIC Replication Project, University of Pennsylvania

The University of Pennsylvania's Center for Community Partnerships has been reaching out to its community of West Philadelphia for over a decade, exploring how it can bring the resources of faculty and students to bear in mutually beneficial partnerships with local public schools and community members.

The Center has helped to create university-assisted community schools that function as centers of education, services, engagement, and activity for the public school students, their families, and community members. The mediating structure for on-site delivery of academic resources is the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), which was founded in 1985. WEPIC is coordinated by a nonprofit, community-based organization, the West Philadelphia Partnership, in conjunction with the School District of Philadelphia. With all of these partnerships vital to the survival of the program, the following are a few key points that have helped us with sustainability:

- Build sustainability into the routine work of each partner.

For Penn and the public schools, it is linked to the curriculum. Academic courses bring faculty and students to work in WEPIC's school-day and after-school programs. The

public schools incorporate a community-focused, project-based approach to learning that the Penn students have developed and implemented.

- Coordinate closely between partners.  
For our program to support the number of volunteers coming into the schools, graduate and undergraduate students often serve as coordinators.
- Fundraise jointly with partners.
- Reach agreement with all partners that a long-term commitment can bring about measurable positive change over time.

The university-assisted community school model is being replicated nationally at nine universities and colleges through support from the Corporation for National Service and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Their work, as that of the ever-increasing number of university-school partnerships, is showing the way toward effective K-H collaboration.

For more information concerning the university-assisted community school model, contact Joann Weeks at 215-898-0240, or email: weeks@pobox.upenn.edu ■

## Sustainability Principles Based on the Case Study

1. Resource development: Doreen enlisted her agency, Vietnamese elders, and a driver's training company to initiate the project. She contacted the United Way for funds and was referred to the county community services department.
2. Marketing and promotion: The project was featured in the media after it generated its first result. Word-of-mouth generated a lot of enthusiasm in the Vietnamese community. The participants were sharing in the costs, and Doreen's agency was able to take credit for a worthwhile community project.
3. Collaboration: The elders were vital in this collaboration, since they served as gate-keepers of a factionalized community. Doreen's agency was also important for lending its name to a grant application and preparing the document. The driver's school owner volunteered to discount his fee as his contribution to the community.
4. Volunteers: Doreen first enlisted the elders, and secured their agreement to help with funding attempts and recruitment of participants. The most critical activity of the elders was presenting the need to the grant review group. Their willingness as representatives of the community lent credibility to their request. ■