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# Friends For Youth Mentoring Institute

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## CONNECTIONS

Winter 2007

### Building Corporate Partnerships

You've put in the time to create a solid infrastructure, you've worked hard to fine-tune your mentee intake process, and you're ready to make the match successful – as soon as those mentors start pouring in the door! Many mentoring and youth-serving organizations have found success in partnering with businesses in their communities to find safe and effective mentors. With the right fit, it becomes a positive arrangement for everyone: businesses want to contribute to the community and build a positive image; programs are looking for volunteers who are stable and can be positive role models. Sounds perfect, right? The first step to take is to build that crucial partnership for a potential big payoff.

*The more cooperation there is among a wide range of community entities, the greater the chance of success in reaching youth and affecting their lives. Governor's Mentoring Partnership Mentoring Toolkit, Guidebook, p. 9*

*In the best collaborations, each partner is able to provide the very thing the other needs, and vice versa, thereby creating the much sought after win/win. Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Art of Effective Business & Non-Profit Partnerships, p. 3*

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The steps to building a partnership with a company follows what you would do with any partner (a volunteer, foundation, or other funding source) and can be thought of as the Three R's: **Research, Relationship, Results.**

#### RESEARCH

Just because there is XYZ Corporation that employs 2,000 workers in town doesn't mean they will jump into an agreement to provide mentors, employee time, and/or financial donations no matter the success of your program. Do your homework! Find out as much as you can about the business: what is their focus? What are their priorities? What are their needs? Whom do they already have as a partner? How do they respond to requests from community programs? Who is the right person to approach with this request? Many business look more favorably upon recommendations from their employees. How many XYZ Corporation workers are already mentors or volunteers or Board Members? If the request is introduced by someone known, will it make a difference?

With any business, their focus is the bottom line: what is in it for them? How will a strategic partnership add value to what they already do? Would they like considerable publicity highlighting their good works? Better, happier, and more productive employees? A stronger connection to their immediate community, even if they are an international company or a satellite office? "The importance of meeting a business need is fundamental for those who work in the corporate sector. Corporate leaders are clear that any effective collaboration must meet a business need

Friends for Youth began our successful partnership with Oracle, the world's largest enterprise software company headquartered in Redwood Shores, CA, over 12 years ago. Oracle originally placed a Volunteer Coordinator for their own company at our local Volunteer Center, where we initially made contact. We had, through a strategic planning process in the late 80's, identified our primary concern: the length of time a youth spent on our waiting list before being matched with a mentor. The Board and staff developed the idea of holding fun and su-

in order to be sustainable, and they are equally clear that business need is defined broadly to include such things as employee recruitment, training and retention, boosting employee morale, placing product, being a good neighbor or member of the community, and being a good corporate and/or global citizen... [One non-profit leader] says, 'In our experience, partnerships really work best when the company is not just "doing good" but instead when the work of the partnership is mission critical for their business. That is when they make time to do the work'" (Corporate Voices for Working Families, *The Art of Effective Business & Non-Profit Partnerships*, p. 9).

**A**s you start to prepare your presentation, make sure your approach reflects a good fit for both of you. Often, non-profits take for granted their communities' understanding of local programs and needs. This is a good time to look into your public relations, as well, to address how you communicate to the public about your program and your needs.

**I**f you've done a good job identifying your own needs through strategic planning processes, you're ready to move forward. "Business people work in an environment in which time and resource commitments relate directly to success and survival and they need to know what is expected of them" (Governor's Mentoring Partnership Mentoring Toolkit, *Guidebook*, p. 4). Make sure you are clear, concise, and brief about your needs; "15 mentors to work for 2 hours a week for the school year with students at an after-school, site based program" is more specific than "volunteers needed to support the youth in the community." Be realistic: if you are expecting the majority of your mentors or volunteers to come from a company you have not previously worked with, how might they feel about meeting your expectations? Be especially conscious of professionalism; corporations won't take the time to nurture your program if you do not present yourself as a competent and effective partner.

Potential questions you can expect from future corporate partners:

- What are the benefits to my business by partnering with your mentoring program?
  - What are the goals and specific objectives of your mentoring organization, and do they reflect the values and interests of our business?
  - What activities will we be asked to engage in?
  - What is your service record in the community? What are your accomplishments?
  - How strong is your program's leadership?
  - What is your program's fundraising ability?
  - What is your program's long-term vision?
  - How will we create a successful and mutually beneficial relationship?
  - What other organizations are involved in partnerships with your program?
  - What goals and objectives do we, as partners, want to meet at the end of year one, year two, etc.?
- Governor's Mentoring Partnership Mentoring Toolkit, *Guidebook*, p. 5

pervised activities with waiting youth and one-time adult volunteers. Oracle was looking for their employees to participate in the community, specifically in volunteerism. Carole Lam-Chin, Senior Manager, Oracle Global Corporate Citizenship, says, "We seek out genuine intersections between the needs of society and the goals of our company and make investments that benefit both. By collaborating with various community organizations, Oracle is able to use our resources and technology to enrich the life of communities." This was a synergistic fit for both organizations – one-time adult volunteers to participate in fun activities four to eight times a year. These "waitlist activities" continue to this day, proving to be highly successful for both Friends for Youth and Oracle. Carole also adds that Oracle seeks out partnerships with organizations that show they are reputable with the appropriate infrastructure to work with their volunteers, with a history of success in using volunteers, that help to raise awareness of issues and needs of the community represented by employees, and that can support the partnership by nurturing the relationship.

#### *Identifying a Common Problem, Developing Shared Goals and a Common Mission.*

*One non-profit leader who has been leading a five-year, multi-party cross-sector collaboration explained that in building their collaboration, which is focused on increasing the availability of after-school programs to young people in Boston, the parties worked to understand the goals of each of the participants. Through the process, they were able to develop a set of shared goals and a common mission as well as clear expectations regarding the financial commitments for each member of the partnership. Once they reached consensus on these critical issues, the agreement was documented in a detailed memorandum of understanding.* Corporate Voices for Working Families, *The Art of Effective Business & Non-Profit Partnerships*, p. 8

Friends for Youth and Oracle have nurtured the partnership since its beginning with regular contact, flexibility in addressing needs, and mutual respect for each partner's way of serving the community. Luckily, there has been little turnover in key staff members for both organizations, though many direct staff at Friends for Youth have been involved in planning activities over the years. While we initially focused on volunteerism, the relationship has changed over the years to include grants and in-kind donations. Oracle is currently a Major Donor to our program, donates their Conference Center for our annual Mentoring Conference, provides expertise with PR efforts, and has connected us with other community organizations. Oracle has also been a major supporter of our latest publication, *SAFE (Screening Applicants for Effectiveness): Guidelines to Prevent Child Molestation in Mentoring and Youth-Serving Organizations*.

After the initial approach, follow through, like you would for any other part of your program. If the company is interested, identify a key staff member to nurture the Relationship, "R" Number Two.

### **RELATIONSHIP**

**M**entoring is all about the relationship, and creating business partnerships is no different. Be as organized about this process as you would any other part of your program. Think about how you train your mentors to build the relationship and build trust: consistency, positive interactions, and good communication. Work with your corporate partner to develop a clear understanding of roles and expectations, especially about both parties' desired outcomes and timelines. Identify times for regular check-in meetings, from once a week during active recruitment times to once a quarter once you have secured your mentors and want to provide them with Results, "R" Number Three. Vary your contacts so that you can meet in person on occasion, have conference calls when you know your contact at the company is busy, and always respond promptly to emails. Also, when either organization has staff turnover, it is recommended to initiate meetings to introduce the new employees.

**R**eview your goals with each other on a regular basis, too. Once your initial need is met, how else could XYZ Corporation assist your program? Some development experts recommend asking immediately for at least three ways a company can help you, usually volunteers, financial donations, or in-kind donations. This way, they have a "menu" of items to choose from, showing that you have done your homework and will be a responsive partner. However, be open to other ideas from your business partner. Perhaps they have meeting space or extra equipment you could use or technical assistance in an area you are lacking. Be certain you are comfortable with what your partner organization is requesting to provide. Is it a good fit for your program to accept 12 used computer systems from a company interested in providing high-tech opportunities for youth if you are a community-based 1:1 mentoring program? Maybe if you can distribute the computers to the mentees – but maybe not if the company would like their name on a computer lab for your program.

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### **RESULTS**

**N**ow that the partnership is established, you and your corporate partner want to identify the results. How can you best report these results in a way to strengthen your connection? Share your evaluation results and program goals with each other. In what way did XYZ Corporation support these efforts? In what way were their efforts a major contribution to making your program successful? Go beyond numbers; first-hand stories from employees' experiences as mentors express the success in a more personal and enriching way. Ask the corporation how they have been impacted by the results. Also, how can your partner continue to support your program? Is it time to ask for a grant application in addition to recruiting volunteers or some other additional means of support? If you are proving yourself as a competent and worthwhile partner organization, the corporation might be interested in brainstorming other ways to work together.

In addition to seeing youth and staff at quarterly "waitlist activities," Oracle gets regular updates on the success of our program's matches and their employee volunteers. Their stories are occasionally reported on Oracle's internal web site for employees only, which brings more interest from other employees. Rob, a employee of Oracle, was first matched as a Friends for Youth mentor with Jose over 15 years ago. They had not been in touch for a few years but Rob continued to be in touch with the program. He attended a San Francisco Giants game with Friends for Youth during June of 2004, a

When you report your success to your corporate partner, find out how they can use that information to draw in more volunteers. Some ideas include adding stories about your program or feature employee volunteerism in a company newsletter or intranet, pitching a local paper or other media about their employees' efforts at giving back to the community, and tying their partnership with you into something else they do.

And, as you report on your success to others, be sure to include information about your corporate partners. If one of your mentors or mentees will be featured in a story, is there a way to include your partnership? Corporations are interested in positive publicity. How can you help them achieve that goal?

How else can you benefit from a corporate partnership? How about "increased resources, credibility and capacity for non-profits as well as professional development opportunities for employees as they volunteer time working with non-profits" (Corporate Voices for Working Families, *The Art of Effective Business & Non-Profit Partnerships*, p. 7). Once you have one successful partnership, other companies will feel more confident about becoming involved with your program and, perhaps, even more motivated to be involved with their community.

## RESOURCES

California Governor's Mentoring Partnership <<http://www.mentoring.ca.gov/>> has published a Mentoring Toolkit. It includes a video to use for corporate, community, and educational presentations to recruit mentors, a CD-ROM, and a *Guidebook: Techniques and Approaches for Building Partners in Your Community and Strengthening Your Program*.

Corporate Voices for Working Families <[www.cvworkingfamilies.org](http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org)> has published *The Art of Effective Business & Non-Profit Partnerships: Finding the Intersection of Business Need and Social Good*, a resource on how to effectively approach a business partnership. This is available as a downloadable document online.

Corporation for National & Community Service <[www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)> has everything from research on volunteering in America to a media relations guide and a Resource Center.

Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network <[www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)> has an online library of resources at <[www.VolunteerResource.org](http://www.VolunteerResource.org)>, information about the National Council on Workplace Volunteerism that works on the development and growth of employee volunteer programs and Corporate Volunteer Councils, and a quarterly magazine called *Volunteer Leadership* <[www.volunteerleadership.org](http://www.volunteerleadership.org)>.

waitlist activity sponsored by Oracle. Once there, he sat next to RJ, a young man waiting to be matched. Here's the rest of their story and an excerpt from what was recently featured on their internal web site:

"I forget whether the Giants won or lost, but during the course of the game, one of the waitlist kids, RJ, came over and sat next to me. We had a really nice conversation and got along so well one of the program staff followed up with a phone call... Six months later, I became a Senior Friend to RJ. During the course of our friendship, we have gone to the driving range, the Exploratorium and most recently visited the California Academy of Sciences. We also had the opportunity to go on an official tour of the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, as RJ has expressed interest in becoming a graphic artist and working on video games. We are also in the process of trying all the pizzas offered at California Pizza Kitchen. The thing I will remember the most was when RJ asked if I would come to his Back to School Nigh last September. Agreeing to participate was something I won't soon forget. I am not a parent yet, but feel like one to the extent that RJ has let me in to his personal and academic life. I got so much more than I thought was possible."



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