



Funding Tip: Building and Establishing Community Partnerships to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation

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This funding tip is part one of a three-part series of resources developed by The Finance Project to help LifeSkills Training (LST) grantees build capacity and sustain LST program implementation at their sites. Most LST programs are implemented in schools; however, the series presents strategies to help a variety of LST grantees, including program leaders, site coordinators, teachers and school administrators, obtain additional funding through foundation, corporation and government grants, and by building and establishing community partnerships. This funding tip presents strategies on how to build and establish community partnerships to enhance and sustain LST programming.

Why Establish and Build Community Partnerships?

Building community partnerships with local non-profits (501(c)3), community-based organizations (CBO), small businesses and local clubs can allow LST grantees to build their program capacity and expand their sustainability strategy. The establishment of strategic partnerships can result in access to volunteers and in-kind resources, increase eligibility for funding and promote more coordinated services for youth. As most LST grantees are affiliated with the local school, a strong relationship between the LST site coordinator and school/school district personnel can help distinguish who will reach out to those partners and coordinate the work related to those partnerships. For example, the LST site coordinator may work with a non-profit director to write a joint-grant while the school district provides a formal letter of support to solidify the partnership.

Strategies for Establishing and Building Community Partnerships

Developing new partnerships can be time consuming and require detailed management. Even so, LST grantees should take the necessary steps to reach out to those in the community to advance their LST programs. In fact, careful coordination can be beneficial to both students and the community as a whole. This funding tip offers suggestions to establish and build community partnerships.

- **Identify other community groups with a similar mission or invested interest in helping the local youth population**
 - *Schools* - Most frequently, the LST program is run by the school/school district in which the grant is received. If an LST site coordinator has not already done so, a first step in establishing and building community partnerships starts by maximizing the relationship with the school principal and/or school district staff. To strengthen that relationship, the LST site coordinator could attend all-staff meetings, request regular one-on-one meetings with the principal and ask to feature the students' progress in the LST program in relevant communications such as the school newsletter. Buy-in from the school principal and/or school district staff will make attempts to form community partnerships an easier process. It also allows for more

opportunities to integrate the LST curriculum with the school's goals and utilize the facilities, supplies, and technical assistance needed to successfully run the LST program.

- *Local Businesses* – Partnering with local businesses can be mutually beneficial. Local businesses may provide small cash donations with few or no reporting requirements to LST grantees. At the same time, these donations may boost the company's good will, which can create a sense of community involvement and raise the company's visibility. A local business may not be able to provide a cash donation, but they may be able to donate a good or service that supports the LST program.
- *Non-profits and Community Based Organizations (CBOs)* - By working with non-profits and CBOs, an LST program may receive funding that the school/school district is ineligible to apply directly on its own. A non-profit can serve as the fiscal sponsor for various grant opportunities and potentially provide fundraising assistance such as grant writing. A fiscal sponsor is an organization that is eligible for funding and usually works directly with the funder. The fiscal sponsor may require or ask to write and submit the grant in which both parties receive funding. It is important to manage the terms and conditions jointly with the chosen fiscal sponsor. Additionally, by building partnerships with multiple CBOs, a grant proposal may be more competitive for federal funding.
- *Clubs and Parent Groups* – Local clubs or parent groups can support the LST program in marginal ways that make a big difference. Both groups may include the LST program in their community fundraising initiatives or provide trained volunteers to help with training and program implementation. They may also give presentations in their area of expertise that relate to the development of positive life skills and maximize their ability to provide in-kind goods such as space, materials, equipment or supplies. Parents and parent groups can also serve as advocates for the program, reminding the school that the LST program is critical to the middle school students.
- **Meet with community leaders to discuss goals**
 - *Introduce the LST program to the appropriate community leader* – Many community members may not be familiar with the LST program available to middle school students; however, most community members are probably grateful that the program exists. Call or email the correct community leader (e.g. CEO, Development person, or Manager) to teach them more about the school-based program and its goals. Find out if there are opportunities to partner and have an idea in mind on how to maximize the partnership.
 - *Agree on certain goals and outcomes* – Once you develop a relationship with the right organizational contact, see where your work best aligns. Is it writing a proposal together? Is it by obtaining donated goods and services? Agree on the goals of the partnership and make sure the outcomes for the partnership are determined.
- **Establish a Formal Partnership**

- *Collaborate with community leaders*– Working as a team can help both programs capture funding or maximize the use of in-kind resources that support joint services. In a formal partnership, there can be lots of room for collaboration on proposals and memos of understanding or letters of support. Also, the community leader may just want to be more involved in community activities and ensure that local youth have opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives.
- *Communicate regularly* – Open communication is key to the success of any partnership. It is important to regularly discuss the proposal work plan and budget expectations. In addition, it is very important to thank the partner for their support.

Searching for Best Bet Funding Sources

When searching for new funding sources, it is important that program leaders determine whether a specific funding source and in-kind services are worth pursuing. The requirements for specific funding sources will help you determine if you have the right partnerships in place or need to establish a partnership with a community-based organization before applying. There are three major groups of funding that can support the LST program, which are listed below. In addition, having the right partnerships in place provides access to a broader-range of opportunities.

- **Finding the right funding source for your partnership**
 - *Community-based organizations and businesses* - Community service organizations, such as Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, and Junior League, or college fraternities and sororities, may donate funds and goods to support the LST program. Also, partnership opportunities may be available through groups such as the United Way, 4-H Clubs, Boys and Girls Clubs or YMCA. If the school serves families from a core group of employers in your community you may consider asking these companies, and any professional organizations associated with them, for assistance. The local yellow pages, internet, or word-of-mouth may also help you locate these groups in your area.
 - *Foundations and Corporate Giving Programs* – Many foundations and corporate giving programs only support 501(c) 3 tax-exempt organizations. Once the proper non-profit relationship is established, there are a number of grant opportunities available through this avenue. However, many local corporations such as Wal-Mart stores, Dollar General stores and others make small donations to local programs and educational initiatives including schools. This might be an easy ask for LST programs that are just looking for small donations for curriculum materials and supplies.
 - *Government Grants* – Community-based partnerships can expand the number and types of government grants that they are eligible to apply to. Government grants provide financial assistance to recipients to carry out a public purpose of support of stimulation authorized by the United States government. More than 1,000 grant programs are offered through the 26 federal agencies. Federal grants may not be used to acquire property,

services for the federal government's direct benefit or for personal financial assistance.

- **Using partnerships to access funds**

- *Eligibility* - Entities that are eligible to apply for funding sources are usually specified in the grant announcement. In some cases, the grant will open to any public or private organization. In other cases, eligibility may be limited to state and local government entities, local education agencies, tribal governments, institutions of higher education, or tax-exempt 501 (c) 3s. If you are not among the entities eligible to receive funding, consider what partnership opportunities exist with an organization that is eligible to apply for funding.
- *Access* - In some cases, tax-exempt status is a big barrier for LST grantees. If your LST program does not have 501(c) 3 status, you need to apply jointly with a non-profit program or find a fiscal sponsor to help you apply for certain grants in order to meet eligibility requirements. Calling a local group or networking with local community leaders can help you determine if you should make a request for donated goods and services. Many local community organizations will volunteer their time or donate goods to worthy causes regardless of 501(c) 3 status. Very few government grants are awarded to individuals. In many cases, the school district in which the LST program is housed should be able to access government funds.

Looking Forward

Building community partnerships leverages an LST grantees' ability to build their program capacity and expand their sustainability strategy. Once the proper partnerships are established and a funding source is identified then the following set of questions can help determine if the funding opportunity is a "best bet."

Funding Considerations

When searching for new funding sources, it is important that program leaders determine whether a specific funding source is worth pursuing. Consider the following questions to assess if a specific funding source meets the program's goals and resource needs.

1. **Does this funding source support the goals and priorities of the organization?** What types of investments can the funding source support? Does it align with your organization's priorities and needs?
2. **How can these funds be accessed?** What types of programs or organizations can apply for funds? Can youth programs apply directly for the funds or do funds flow through the State or Local government?
3. **Should I apply?** How many grants are given out each year? What is the average grant size? What are the reporting requirements? Is it worth the time and effort to apply?

These set of questions will be used to inform the subsequent funding tips in this series of resources. See these forthcoming resources, *Obtaining Foundation and Corporate Funding* and *Obtaining Government Funding*.

Other Resources

The Finance Project has an extensive body of information and resources to help leaders finance and sustain effective *programs* that support the positive development of youth,

and develop *systems* that provide an infrastructure to help coordinate and guide investments in youth. Visit The Finance Project's [Youth Programs Resource Center](#) for tools and resources on financing and sustaining youth programs, and the [Find Federal Funding](#) database, an online catalogue of more than 400 federal programs.

Suggested publications produced by The Finance Project:

- ▶ [Building Capacity for Better Results: Strategies for Financing and Sustaining the Organizational Capacity of Youth-Serving Programs \(September 2010\)](#)
- ▶ [Cutting Costs, Keeping Quality: Financing Strategies for Youth-Serving Organizations in a Difficult Economy \(March 2010\)](#)

This funding tip is part of a three-part series of resources developed by The Finance Project to help LifeSkills Training (LST) grantees build capacity and sustain LST program implementation at their sites. The resources in this series include:

- ▶ Building and Establishing Community Partnerships to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation
- ▶ Obtaining Foundation and Corporate Funding to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation
- ▶ Obtaining Government Funding to Support LifeSkills Training Program Implementation

The [Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance](#) (CFDA) provides a full listing of all Federal programs available to a host of eligible agencies. There are a number of places to look for foundation and corporate foundation grants including the [Botvin LifeSkills Training](#) website. The majority of government grants can be found and applied for at www.grants.gov.

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