



Resources for Youth Programming and Policy

DESCRIPTION

- Youth center offering a safe educational and recreational environment for teens
- Engagement and leadership development for out-of-school youth, ages 13-19, in planning and execution of center's activities
- Garnered considerable community and local government support and experienced growth in popularity since its inception
- Strategic in measuring success through surveys of participants and their families
- Plans for the future include doubling the facility space to allow for additional programming options

THE GARAGE

Active Youth Engagement

Overview

THE GARAGE is a youth center located in Burnsville, Minnesota that offers a number of recreational events and programs for youth in a supervised drug-free setting. Approximately 600 youth participate in the center's afterschool and weekend activities each week, with most participants aged 13-19. Teens are the major creative force behind the diverse programming offered, comprised of speakers, classes, music concerts, and parties administered with the help of adult staff. Their noteworthy efforts to empower and dignify teen participants help make THE GARAGE a place where young people can gather and feel safe and comfortable.

History and Development

The idea for THE GARAGE emerged in 1995 when the city developed a strategic plan for a multi-purpose community center that would offer activities for youth and seniors as well as serve as a fitness center. Though the referendum to build the center was voted down, community leaders pursued efforts to develop a youth center in Burnsville. Two years later, the city was able to obtain grants for operational expenses of a new youth center, approved a 6,000 square foot garage, but did not have funding for necessary construction or capital improvements to convert the building into a usable space.

In 1998, a non-profit foundation called the Burnsville Youth Center Foundation was created to actively seek funding to support the capital costs for the facility.

The city provided the foundation with a loan of \$99,000 under the condition that the funding for operational expenses would no longer be available if the building was not renovated and the loan not repaid within five years. The foundation sought donations from civic organizations and local businesses and was able to secure funding before the end of the year. Then, with the added help of a city family services collaborative grant and Department of Public Safety funds, they were able to hire a full-time staffer to develop the youth center. The Department of Justice Weed and Seed money and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning also brought additional funds to the project during the initial stages of development. This combination of funding streams and community support led to the opening of THE GARAGE center in July of 1999.

THE GARAGE's popularity within the community is hard-earned, largely due to its ability to engage youth in its design. Initially, staff attempted to administer typical teen center activities and found they were not being adequately utilized. In response, they began to ask their clients, local youth, for programming ideas. Local youth have not only designed a number of the center's variety of activities, including the development of their teen night club and future recording studio, they are involved in overall decision making by their representation on the organization's governing board.

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Financing Strategies

- Making Better Use of Existing Resources
- Maximizing Federal, State, and Local Revenue
- Creating More Flexibility in Existing Streams
- Building Public/Private Partnerships
- Generating New Dedicated Revenue

Financing

Maximizing Federal, State, and Local Revenue

THE GARAGE subsisted only on grants and community fundraising efforts until 2003, when the city, impressed by the positive outcomes from the programming, began to allocate general funds toward the center. Currently, the center is funded by a diverse set of funding sources, with the majority coming from the federal Community Development Block Grant and the city's general funds.

Though the grant administering offices within the Department of Public Safety (DPS) have varied over time, it has offered a steady stream of support for THE GARAGE's operational expenses as the center has undergone expansion. The DPS funds both full-time and part-time staffing needs and program supplies while the remaining staff resources are supported by a combination of federal, local, McKnight Foundation grant money, and revenue from fees. There is a sliding scale fee structure in place for regular programs and on weekends, but participants who occasionally drop into the center are not required to pay anything. The center, which averages 250 teens per night, charges approximately \$3-10 on weekends; \$25-50/week for summer day camps; and \$75/month for karate classes held five times a week. Scholarships are offered based on Housing and Urban Development income guidelines to participants who qualify for a reduced charge to attend the center's activities.

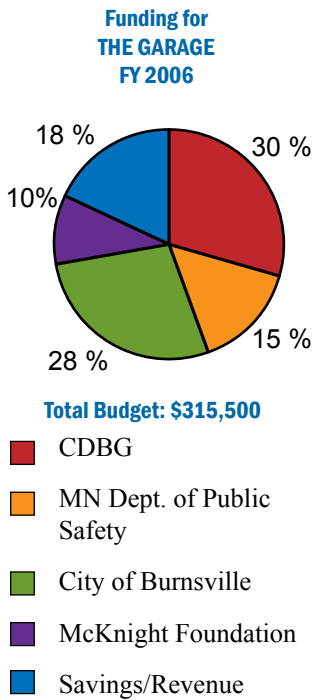
The Burnsville Youth Center Foundation also plays a significant role in supplementing THE GARAGE's revenue with its efforts to secure contributions from civic organizations and the local business community. The foundation

is focused on gathering resources for two main projects: future infrastructure improvements and awarding scholarships for participants interested in pursuing higher education.

Building Partnerships

Since its inception, THE GARAGE has encountered numerous challenges to sustainability, forcing its supporters to take action and seize opportunities for collaboration. First, the referendum that would have provided initial funding for a community center was voted down, preventing general funds from being used to develop the youth program. The Burnsville Youth Center Foundation was able to capitalize on the support within the community and meet the fundraising deadline in time for city grants to be useful. Then, in the fall of 2000, the Department of Public Safety grant, a major funding source for THE GARAGE, was subject to the state spending freeze enacted by the governor of Minnesota. Facing the possibility of losing THE GARAGE, community youth responded with 200 signed petitions to protest the freeze, bringing THE GARAGE recognition from the media statewide and eventually leading to the restoration of state funds. Due in part to the new publicity, participation increased from 100 to 200 kids a night, a testament to its popular services.

Coordinators at THE GARAGE are aware of the value of partnerships and credit their local allies as well as youth for their program's success. The Community Action Council, another partner of the program, provides a human services liaison to conduct family outreach on site at the center, a position supported by CDBG funds. Coordinators of THE GARAGE also enjoy a close relationship with the school district and are able to visit junior high schools during lunchtime to talk



THE GARAGE FY 2006 Budget	
Federal	
CDBG	\$95,500
State	
MN Dept. of Public Safety	\$46,000
Local	
City of Burnsville	\$87,000
Private	
McKnight Foundation	\$30,000
Savings/Interest/Revenue	\$57,000
Total	\$315,500

about their activities. They also help with transportation issues by taking students from school to the center and back home afterwards.

recreational environment for local teens. The youth petitions are an excellent example of the impact the center has had on local youth and their commitment to keep programs funded in the future. When staff members seek youth opinions through surveys and for making decisions about how to improve the center's activities, youth feel empowered to make contributions to their community through their ideas and civic participation. Staff members of THE GARAGE also collaborate with law enforcement to address gang prevention in the community by holding briefings to educate police officers on their activities and ask officers to become involved in prevention-based activities with youth.

Next Steps and Future Challenges

In anticipation of future economic challenges, the director has been able to reserve 35% of their operating budget in savings to help fund the center. There are plans to grow the initiative to meet the rising demand from the community; currently, program leaders have to turn participants away due to limited space. They are looking to double the facility space from 5,000 to 10,000 square feet, building a recording studio, and adding gym space and more classrooms. Results from THE GARAGE's participant surveys indicate an interest in focusing more on community and less on the music venue portion of the center.

- **Tracking results**

THE GARAGE has also been strategic in measuring its success. Their data collection activities include surveys of both participants and their parents, obtaining demographic information on youth participants, and analyses on the cost effectiveness of THE GARAGE programs. Using data from 2005, the managers concluded that the costs to offer programming for 24 youth per day is equal to the taxpayer cost of holding one youth in a juvenile corrections facility for one day. This ability to document positive outcomes for youth attending the center programs prompted the city to commit general funds for the center in 2003.

Keys to Success

- **Community collaboration and youth engagement**

THE GARAGE has benefited from both community collaboration and active youth engagement in its efforts to provide a safe



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