

Vermont Mentoring Partnership Task Force

Meeting Notes

October 26, 2011

Attending

Mike Loner, Amy Cunningham, Rebecca Majoya, Peter Ingvoldstad, Gabrielle Tufo-Strouse, Sue Cottrell (for Betsy Rathbun-Gunn), Robert Szpila, Kristen Hayden-West. Steffi Lahar, guest facilitator/consultant.

Discussed pre-meeting input (survey monkey results) from Task Group members on the value of key function and tools that a statewide organization could provide, and suggestions for guiding values and operating principles

- The framing the question provided helps outline the functions we’ve talked about previously, and the results help distinguish what’s important
- We may need to divide professional development and networking – they are different
- We may need to define how a statewide organization will help start up new programs
- The idea of being an information clearinghouse could be brought forward more
- In terms of guiding values, it can be helpful to think about images. Like the idea of a table we can gather around, rather than an umbrella that is “over” us. We need a central image that is one that lifts us all up. This group will not be able to measure itself with outcomes outside of the programs it serves.

Briefly discussed external conditions and trends

- Less government participation and funding is available than in the past
- Consolidation trend among nonprofits
- Pressure from funders
 - To be more measurement oriented
 - To do NEW
 - Get matching funds from private sector

We want to promote mentoring statewide. Trends may make it more likely for wealthier, bigger programs to be favored because of their capacity. Will they help subsidize smaller communities?

Charted what we want to achieve, preserve and avoid in designing a statewide organization

Achieve	Preserve	Avoid
More and better mentoring – quantity and quality	Preserve existing support relationships – e.g. people can still call regional support org’s	Competition/conflicts over funding – stealing from other programs
Strong enough voice and credibility (with statewide programs behind the org) to affect policy, including push back if policymakers tie supports	Programs able to come together in honest problem-solving	Subverting irreplaceable on-the-ground relationships Perception that it’s the

to the wrong outcomes (e.g. student grades)	conversations	statewide org that runs mentoring programs
Consistent and equal access to info for all programs	Value of local org's, networks, relationships	Starting a new <u>additional</u> nonprofit (if we want the support of VT Funders Collaborative)
Bring new stakeholders in and engage them – biz's, schools, etc.	Momentum (website, data collection) and good partnerships we have	Trying to determine the process to get there before we define what we want
Quantity and quality measures/metrics	Access to the funds we have now, including good relationship with VT Funders Collaborative	Missing the “corners” of the state
Trust, collaboration, and more synergy between programs	Partnerships in places that have programs now but may lose separate funding	
Clearly defined mission		
Ability to do funding pass-throughs clearly and systematically		
Statewide visibility and presence – people wouldn't think of starting up a program without calling		

Envisioned the highly effective and successful future statewide mentoring partnership organization

Envisioning prompt

It's October 2014, and the Vermont Mentoring Partnership is being asked to tell its story at a national symposium of mentoring organizations as a model and inspiration for other regions looking to create similar partnerships. The Partnership is widely seen as having accelerated the reach and effectiveness of the local and regional programs it serves throughout the state and increased their access to critical resources. Community leaders, educators, and human service policymakers in and outside of Vermont note that The Partnership has helped expand how many children are mentored and improved social and educational outcomes for those children. It has created an exciting buzz in Vermont about mentoring as it has secured new funding, volunteers and community support for programs.

1. What are the outstanding characteristics of the Vermont Mentoring Partnership in 2014 that people are finding so compelling?
2. What did members of the Task Force and the local and regional programs who designed the Partnership in 2011 do to set such a successful course?

Outstanding characteristics of the statewide	What we did in 2011 and 2012 to realize
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organization	these characteristics?
<p>The organization is lean, strategically opportunistic (doesn't chase funding at the expense of mission focus), highly efficient, and maximizes support for programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are well defined, clear standards and policies that board and staff members follow and are accountable to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We clearly articulated our mission and defined the role of the statewide org. ▪ We built a strategic workplan with a couple of high impact, feasible action steps – quick, visible wins – and got buy-in. Scrupulously avoided mission creep. Kept boundaries on extraneous activities. ▪ Collaborated with other statewide partnerships to develop robust, usable data systems that are compatible with national data-sharing. ▪ Used low-cost resources as much as possible – volunteers, interns, etc.
<p>Widely respected, trusted, and credible – has attracted financial and community support magnetically.</p>	<p>In addition to a great org. design and truly statewide focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inventoried our connections to people in power and figured out how to involve them as advocates, spokespeople, board members, funders, visible mentors. Asked them for advice as well as resources. ▪ Got a large corporate sponsor (e.g. GMCR, Comcast, etc.) with whom the fit with their corporate giving needs and our mission really works.
<p>Has a unique, smart, strategic and sustainable funding approach and plan. Provide for both the org's operating funds and some pass-throughs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We sought and evaluated funding opportunities pro-actively and with a sharp mission focus – kept boundaries. ▪ We systematically and early on shared our developing concepts and goals for the statewide org. and cultivated relationships with funders toward securing <u>new</u> monies. ▪ Prioritized our efforts toward multi-year funding. ▪ Reached out beyond foundations to individual and corporate donors. Clear definition of what a gift to the statewide org. is. ▪ Collaborated to share some funding relationships for greater gain, with care not to cannibalize programs. ▪ We've defined for funders the great outcomes that we can really deliver. ▪ Demonstrated cost-savings/business case to the state to retain and/or increase our funding.
<p>Board and staff leadership represents a wide array of stakeholders and includes some</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We set up a governance structure with clearly defined roles and specified the

<p>“heavy hitters” (people with substantial influence in the state).</p>	<p>leadership characteristics we needed in governance/advisory roles to be successful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intentionally recruited strong and influential leaders to serve as board members and advisors.
<p>Phenomenal marketing and PR campaign that has gotten everyone talking about mentoring. It’s politically advantageous and socially cool to support it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prominent citizens/political leaders who are mentoring are media stories ▪ People are connecting to the value of ongoing relationships and the give-back of mentoring ▪ Celebrates and has capitalized on the “help your neighbor” culture and post-Irene sensibilities, and the overall culture of VT ▪ Have significantly increased the volunteer base for mentoring in Vermont. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed a solid, memorable BRAND – images, tagline and key messages with the help of skilled volunteers. Collected best stories from programs to help build. Engaged program leaders statewide to sign on and support before launch, and provided ideas/materials for locals then to reinforce the statewide message. ▪ Gotten foundation of an appealing, useful, up to date website established to launch from. ▪ Allocated \$ for paid as well as earned media. ▪ Looked into sponsoring special event(s) that fulfill both mentoring program goals and provide great marketing – e.g. mentors/mentees day at Smuggler’s, with VPR and VPT coverage. ▪ Articulated a model that includes a menu of options for mentoring volunteers ranging from one-time contributions to long-term commitments
<p>Enables statewide mentoring through supporting diverse programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed a graduated system of standards and recognition for meeting standards that allows programs, small to large, measure their quality and plan for growth.
<p>The organization regularly represents the VT mentoring community at big statewide conversations about education, social services, economic justice, etc. It has successfully promoted the message that mentoring is a key part of the system of care for children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has set ambitious but reachable medium and long-term targets for how many children in VT have mentors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lobbied to retain VT Mentors AHS funding. ▪ Collected and analyzed data to demonstrate that VT mentoring organizations are effective in achieving goals and outcomes – both quantitative and social/education outcomes that can be documented. ▪ Prioritized key relationships from org’s including the following and provided info, established credibility and built connections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VT Principals Assoc • VT Superintendent’s Assoc • Voice for VT’s Children

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VT Family network • Family Ctrs • Ecumenical Council • VBSR, Chamber • Rotaries • Higher Ed. Student Services
The organization is a catalyst for getting VT programs, models and innovations out and visible in national networks.	

Discussed and outlined key structural elements

What's the funding model?

- The majority of funding would need to come from a combination of foundation, state, and private/corporate donations.

The question of dues – should they be part of the program model?

- Pro's – skin in the game, promotes intentional buy-in. Funders would like to see this.
- Concerns – can't get enough \$ to substantially support operations from other non-profits. Small mentoring programs won't feel able to join. If people opt out, could create tensions.
- Options to address concerns
 - Lowest dues level is 0
 - Make dues not odious/do-able in budgets
 - Start dues year 2
- The dues discussion ties directly in to the question of the value of the statewide organization to programs – what are the benefits? It will be important to articulate and measure these.
 - Something that's hard to measure is the benefits of increased advocacy to programs, in terms of their own funding viability and community support. Also networking and info-sharing.
 - More concrete benefits may include
 1. A share of pass-through funding (may be tiered according to program size which would connect to dues level)
 2. PR materials
 3. Exposure on state website, and members-only access to portions of website
 4. Ability to buy-in to shared resources like background checks for a fee less than they'd pay if they bought them independently.
- May want to do a survey monkey question – how valuable to you are the following benefits, with a matrix of choices, to identify what benefits to establish first.
- What are the goals of having dues?
 - Diversify funding/provide a portion of core funding
 - Express commitment
 - Gain benefits for members – visibility, share of pass-through funds

- What are dues not for?
 - Excluding a program from benefits
 - Forcing accountability to standards not appropriate to a program
 - Indicating quality standard approval by virtue of paying dues
- A 501c3 structure includes a commitment to public good, in comparison to a 501c6 (trade association) structure that is meant to provide services specifically to members. We're only thinking of a 501c3 structure for this organization, so although there are still some membership questions to be worked out, this provides some safeguards from exclusion of programs from benefits.

The task force recommends that a portion of the budget come from program dues, that there is a tiered dues structure (several levels, the medium level might be about \$250), and that they begin in Year Two.

Staffing

- We'll initially need a volunteer process (reaching out to the larger network to form a Steering Committee) to further develop the organizational structure and strategic plan.
- What staff will we need to accomplish the goals of the organization?*
- Considered two models
 1. Full time Executive Director
 2. Half-time administrator plus consultants to organize a conference and do fundraising
 - If we're going to achieve our vision, we need a full-time entrepreneurial E.D. who can be a powerful "face" of the organization and pull all the pieces together – we don't see getting that with a half-time person plus consultants, nor the fundraising power. The half time administrator plus consultants model may not represent much savings, and we'd likely be buying less total staff hours.
 - There seems to be a window now when we could seek funding. This may not exist in the future.

The task force recommends seeking seed funding for a full time Executive Director

Quick outline of qualities and critical functions for this position

- Entrepreneurial and passionate about serving the needs of children
- Proven and savvy fundraiser
- Great people skills and specifically skilled at building collaboration across diverse organizations and interests
- Knowledge of children and of nonprofit management – and able to find a passion for mentoring (may not necessarily have a mentoring background)
- Facilitative/inclusive leadership style
- Able and willing to envision the big picture and work with details
- Relationships/contacts in Vermont an advantage – this person may or may not come out of our network
- It will be important for relationships for the E.D.'s compensation to be in scale with other Vermont program directors

Leadership/governance

Who do we need in our governance/advisory group(s)?

1. Mentoring coordinators
2. "Heavy hitters" – influential friends willing to use their contacts for funding and advocacy influence
3. Stakeholders with time and/or valuable skills (e.g. organizational development and planning, legal, fundraising)

What is the future of this Task Force?

The existing Task Force had a specific charge to come up with a proposal which we are completing with today's work. Members have limited time and need an end point, so we will open this up in our network to form a group to carry forward the design and implementation of a statewide organization, that can provide initial governance. The Task Force proposes:

1. A Steering Committee (initially) that evolves into a Board

- This might begin as 8 people, half from the mentoring community, and half stakeholders who are skilled, influential, and have time to give.
- Evolve to a larger board with geographic representations and a very intentional composition including a ratio of mentoring professionals, with skilled and influential stakeholders.

2. Plus a Leadership Council of program coordinators that gathers/talks by region and provides input, and is regularly tapped for advice by the Board.

- Ensure statewide coverage. 4 members of this Council (from each of four quadrants of the state) elected to serve on the Board. Their role is to represent ALL programs in the region.
- Develop/specify mechanisms to ensure that LC can exercise real control of organizational goals.

Organizational Structure

- Do we need the statewide organization to be its own nonprofit, or could it be more of a partnership that uses another organization as a "home" and fiscal agent?
- If the organization uses a fiscal agent, there will be some liabilities and ineligibility to receive funds from some foundations and funders. There are also concerns about the autonomy of the mission.
- We want to avoid, however, proliferating nonprofits.

The task force proposes that the statewide organization exists as an independent 501c3 organization. We are conceiving of this either as an organization that replaces one or more existing organizations, or as a merged organization.

- Mobius is one organization that could be a candidate for transforming itself into what we envision. There could also be other umbrella organizations (Mentoring Connector, SerVermont) that could also do that.

Identified next steps and discuss roles for the task force to gather feedback from the greater mentoring community

1. Task force will share info that we held this work session and that we developed elements of an outline for the structure, functions, and core values of a statewide organization. Message to expect notes, and that the task force, having completed the outline, recommends establishing a Steering Committee to carry this forward.
2. Send the notes in early November.
3. Follow with a survey asking for support/non-support for general concept – would you want to be a part of this? Serve on the Steering Committee?
Steering Committee will:
 1. Seek and invite proposals to fulfill this role from statewide umbrella groups that may be interested in transforming to this.
 2. Further articulate key concepts and core values (the task force has some language and materials to contribute to this from survey work completed in preparation for this meeting) and draft mission statement.
 3. Continue to develop structure, seed funding options, etc. for the organization.
 4. Consider convening a symposium to share stories to use, create buy in, refine messages for outreach.