

# Engaging Young People

Youth Development and Outcomes Conference  
at The Performance Institute  
May 2008  
Arlington, Virginia



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*“Preparing At-Risk Youth to Aspire to and Attain Their Highest Level of  
Success in School and in Life”*

## Learning Goals

1. Meet other professionals who can provide ideas and contacts.
2. Learn how to attract students to your program.
3. Learn how to keep students engaged.
4. Learn how to get your message/programs publicized to students and mentors --- and then re-publicized.
5. Learn about assessing and evaluating your program.
6. Walk away with practical applications for the lessons learned.
7. Have fun at the seminar while retaining memorable tips.



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## **Attracting Students to Your Program and Keeping Them Engaged**

1. Rule #1 – Ask young people what they want.
2. Talk with younger adults about what kids will want and need.
3. Understand the underlying motivations for students attending and participating in your program.
4. Contests and prizes add excitement. Each semester/year needs to have a “new and improved” focus (think Crest toothpaste).
5. The first event has to be well organized and enjoyable and well marketed.
6. Research what the competition is doing and what other activities are available at that same time.
7. Need a good (possibly “cool”) name for the program(s).
8. Relationships and connections between the young people and the organizers are important, but having their friends participate is key.
9. Realize that not every student will be interested or engaged by your program(s).
10. Be willing to update and change your programs quickly.



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# Recruiting Students and Mentors to Your Program

## Why Publicize?

1. Increases the number of persons utilizing your programs/services. Clients feel more comfortable utilizing your programs/services.
2. Increases the name recognition of your organization and visibility of the programs and services offered. Allows the non-profit to recruit board members, donors, and contacts.
3. Publicity saves on costs of advertising (publicity is usually “free”).
4. Helps you raise funds, receive in-kind donations and obtain resources.
5. Increases volunteer awareness and hopefully brings in more volunteers.
6. Gives recognition to staff, donors and volunteers.
7. Gives a record of organizational and program activities. Suggest keeping a notebook with major publicity and newsletters in it.
8. Gives third-party endorsements of your services and programs. Third-party endorsements are from people who are not on the non-profit payroll who say good things about your programs and organization.



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# **What is Your Message and Who will receive the Message?**

1. Start in Reverse Order.
  - A. Have an idea who will receive the message first.
  - B. Craft the message based on who will receive the message. Each public is different – e.g. donor, volunteer, client, etc. Don't forget internal publicity to staff also.
  - C. Proper steps are (1) Research, (2) Plan, (3) Implement, (4) Evaluate.
2. In an ideal world, what impression do you want to leave?
3. Be able to state the central message while riding on the elevator (Need one or two line “elevator speech”).
4. Make the message as interesting and compelling as possible. News must be NEW!
5. Who should not receive the message? Example – Using the term “At-Risk” Youth
6. Does your message fit with your organization's overall mission?
7. Take a poll (formal or informal) about the message that you are sending.
8. Send out the organization's overall message/mission at the same time that you are sending out the message about a specific program or service.
9. Without effective programs, all the publicity in the world is not helpful. There are times when you should not be publicizing programs or events. (Starbucks has to have good coffee, not just good publicity.)



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# How to Publicize your Message?

1. Prepare a press release.
  - A. Consider including who, what, when, where, why and how.
  - B. Include the first and last names and business titles.
  - C. List the physical address and ZIP Code of the location(s).
  - D. List the contact person with name and phone numbers (work and mobile) and e-mail address.
  - E. Release date (e.g., “For Immediate Release”).
  - F. Make it creative. The Media wants the news to be “new.” Start with the primary message, not hidden in the body of the text.
  - G. May need a different press release for each type of media.
  - H. Send in early enough (usually two-three weeks in advance).
  - I. Review the release thoroughly for misspellings and mistakes.
2. Send the press release(s) to your media list and follow up with a phone call.
3. Make a list of media contacts with name, address, phone, fax and e-mail and develop a relationship with the media sources if possible.
4. Tape the event to possibly be shown later on TV or used in a video.
5. Update your web site on the event before and after it takes place.
6. Partner with another organization that is advertising an event.
7. Partner with a media outlet (radio station, newspaper, TV station).
8. Have a well-known spokesperson or famous person or news personality connected to the event.
9. Put the information in a newsletter or letter to donors and volunteers and potential contacts (Do not forget the internal publicity).
10. Appear on talk shows.
11. Speak at seminars, conferences, or local civic organization meetings.
12. Obtain a proclamation from the City, County, or politician’s office.
13. Put up a display at a seminar, local mall, and high traffic locations.
14. Hire or partner with a public relations firm for assistance.
15. If necessary, write the story and hire the photographer yourself.
16. Pass out your card to anyone at anytime.



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## Republicizing Your Message

1. Repackage the information and send it out again.
2. Include the information in your organization's newsletter.
3. Think of new places to republicize your message.
  - A. Your web site.
  - B. Access TV Channel.
  - C. "This Week" Section of Newspaper.
  - D. Local or Ethnic newspaper.
  - E. Statewide or National publication.
4. Store the information in a safe place. Utilize the information for distribution to volunteers and donors.
5. Keep a copy and list of all publicity. Copy the information in a way to maximize its effect -- put the name of publication at top and put the article below it.
6. Send out the information by mail, fax, or e-mail to persons who may not have seen it the first time.
7. Show the video again and again on Access TV Station or some other public broadcast station.
8. Use the same seminar/conference materials and do a similar presentation at a different seminar, conference, or civic organization.
9. If you missed the deadline the first time, it gives you a chance to meet it this time.
10. Evaluate the impact of your publicity if possible.



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# Evaluating Your Program

1. Need quantifiable measures.
  - a. Easiest measure is how many students/mentors participated
  - b. What were the results of the mentoring (e.g., improved grades, etc.)
2. Will the students/mentors return?
  - If they will not be a part of the program again, then you need to learn why.
3. Have a feedback session with key leaders from students and mentors groups both separate and then together.
4. Stay positive during the feedback process.
5. Let others know about your program so that they can learn from your successes and your lessons learned.



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## **Bonus Material**

### **The Value of Mentors**

1. Think of a teacher or coach who made a difference in your life.
2. Everyone needs a helping hand.
3. Aspiring Youth motto is “A helping hand at the right time can make a lifetime of difference.”
4. Have mentors for adult staff members also, not just the students (Everyone needs a mentor).
5. To get from one spot to another, you need a map if the path is complicated. Life is complicated, so we all need mentors to interpret where we have come from and show us the way.



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**Steps to Effective Youth Mentoring**  
(from Mentoring Consulting Group)

- 1) When establishing a mentoring program, make sure that **everyone in the community involved** with youth is part of the planning. The "table" should include members of the school board, superintendent, all school staff, parents, top officials in business and civic groups, union officials, parent-teacher organizations, advisory councils, churches and synagogues, and all programs in the community that are involved with youth.
- 2) If the program is going to take place in a school, **selecting the first school to begin the program is critical**. Make sure that it has an outstanding principal, a cohesive staff, and a friendly secretary. Unwilling schools should be put on a waiting list! The school board should craft a written policy on mentoring and have it approved at a public meeting. Make sure to check and see if the school district has any strict requirements to become a volunteer. Does the district have an insurance policy that covers all volunteers in a school building? Do they require a tuberculosis test to work with kids? If the program is taking a place at an alternative site in the community, ask similar questions before you begin.
- 3) **Gather demographic and dropout statistics**. Conduct focus groups, interviews, surveys, and meetings with Teachers and youth providers to determine the right grade level target audience to begin a program.
- 4) When recruiting mentors, do not forget those dedicated **volunteers from business who are already involved** in active partnership programs in their community. They should be approached first to consider becoming involved as mentors. They may be part of a school-business partnership or involved with their local Chamber of Commerce or United Way. They already know the importance of volunteering.
- 5) **Recruit only mentors who are caring, committed, and patient**. They should be good listeners who keep appointments, like kids, have an outstanding employment record and a good sense of humor. They should also be free of alcohol and drug problems. All others should not apply! Mentors can be recruited from many different sources. A few that come to mind include corporations; retirement communities or other senior citizen groups; fraternal, social, and civic organizations; church and synagogue groups; government, fire, and police agencies; institutions of higher education; health agencies; the IRS and FBI; United Way; mass media; and labor organizations.
- 6) **Conduct a thorough screening on all prospective mentors**. This includes criminal background checks, reference checks, personal interviews, and examination of employment history. Many school districts pay for background checks on new teachers and will include mentors in the budget. Other schools and community agencies do not have the money to cover the cost of the background checks. When this is the case, other options are available. In some communities, the chief of police works closely with the organization sponsoring the program and offers free or reduced cost for the checks. In other communities, businesses will pick up the cost for their own employee mentors. If none of these options are available to you, ask the mentors to pay for the check. It will be their only out-of-pocket cost.
- 7) **All mentors must be trained before beginning in the program**. School staff- particularly guidance counselors, psychologists and social workers-should participate in the training even if the site of the program is not the school. After all, they see and know these youth very well. Offer volunteers the skills to become good mentors, including strategies for building self-esteem in children; instruction in being a good listener; familiarity with the policies and procedures

of the school district, agency or organization, including mandated reporting of abuses; strategies for each session to assist them in their role; and insight into the typical profile of the child with whom they will be working. In school-based programs, invite the superintendent of schools to address and thank the new mentors. At the end of the session, give new mentors a table tent to put on their desk that says: "I am proud to be a mentor." It is also a great recruitment tool for new prospects.

- 8) Parental permission must be obtained for all minor children who enter the program.** If the family speaks a language other than English, make sure the permission form is in their first language.
- 9) School principal, teachers, and support staff comprise the committee that recommends and matches mentors and mentees for school-based program.** Community-based programs will include experts from each agency on the team. It is very important to match a diverse group of youngsters as the program begins. Typically, the kids who are selected have poor self-esteem, are hostile and angry, do not take risks or get along well with their peers, are socially and emotionally detached at school, and lack a safety net and support system in their lives. The youth selected should include those from one parent as well as from two-parent families; those who are rich and those who are poor; those who are minorities and those who are not. These deliberate matches send a critical message to the community from the beginning of the program. Mentoring benefits all kids in a program, not just a few. If we label just a certain few for the program, we will lose in the end.
- 10) Identify one person at each school or community site who is the liaison for the program.** The individual is typically a youth worker, guidance counselor, social worker, nurse, psychologist, or teacher. Each business or organization identifies one person to be their company or agency liaison to work with the program staff to ensure success of the program.
- 11) Weekly sessions include activities that mentors and mentees decide together.** For elementary aged youth, these may include reading, working on the computer, doing an arts-and-crafts project, writing stories or poems, playing basketball in the gymnasium, learning a foreign language, or just walking outside or sitting under a tree and talking. For middle and high school aged youth, activities might include doing a community service project; taking a career-interest inventory; or learning how to interview, write a resume, and dress appropriately for a job. It also could include searching the want ads and exploring careers, post-secondary education, and financial aid and career opportunities. Program staff and youth understand and must be flexible if a mentor has to cancel a meeting. If mentors are unable to make a scheduled meeting, calling the school or agency liaison is one way to communicate the change and to reschedule. Another is to fax the youth at school and have the message delivered straight to their classroom. In my experience, the kids like this fax almost as much as the real live person!
- 12) Mentors cannot work in a vacuum.** At regular intervals in the program, schedule brown-bag lunches. The mentors come together to discuss how they are doing and what additional assistance they require from program staff. Allow mentors to communicate with teachers and program coordinators by notes and telephone calls. Input from staff provides ongoing support and feedback which mentors require in order to stay the long haul.
- 13) At year-end, the program hosts a recognition event to thank and encourage mentors.** You may wish to consider awards in various categories:

to the company that has recruited the most new mentors; the company liaison who is the most enthusiastic supporter of the initiative; the school principal who is the greatest proponent of the program; and the teacher, school liaison or youth worker at the agency who has dedicated him or herself to the program. It is a good idea to recognize and thank a devoted school secretary who assists with the mentoring program, too!

- 14) The family can play an important role in the partnership.** Invite the family to participate in events at the program site three or four evenings a year. Mentors and mentees join the youth's family for potluck dinners, a square dance, or other activities. The best way to ensure that the family will be there is to offer them free transportation, food, and child care for younger children.
- 15) School-based mentoring takes place during the school year only.** Many mentors would like to stay in contact with their mentees during the summer months. Mentors should address and stamp a few envelopes and give them to their mentees. Ask each to write mentors a note or draw a picture and drop it in the mailbox. Mentors can do the same. Swap photos before the end of the school year to remember each other during the summer months. Examine a calendar and determine how many weeks it will be until you see each other again. Of course, if this is a program that meets during the summer, it will simply continue throughout the year.
- 16) All programs should be evaluated frequently to measure outcomes.** Mentors, teachers, agency staff, parents and the youth themselves can all be administered pre and post surveys to determine success. The nature of each survey and the questions asked will be determined by the program's goals and objectives. As an example, teachers can be asked about growth in students in areas such as self-esteem, taking risks, getting along with peers, communication skills, work habits, school attendance, attitudes and interest in and mastery of subject areas.

Very important: Have a completion date for volunteers to know when their commitment is completed if they choose.



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