



Opportunities for Success for Out-of-School Youth

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH NETWORKING BASICS FOR MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

WHAT DOES NETWORKING MEAN?

Merriam-Webster Online defines networking as the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; *specifically*: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business. Since we are in the business of expanding opportunities for Out-of-School Youth (OSY), the definition fits our needs. Some important things to remember are:

- Networking requires that you have a plan BEFORE you begin. Know your goals and keep them in mind.
- Networking is WORKING among organizations or individuals with similar interests or targeted outcomes. It is mutually beneficial.
- Networking requires significant investment in recruiter/service provider time, but in the long run provides stronger support and resources for your students.

HOW CAN NETWORKING HELP ME AND THOSE I SERVE?

Networking can help Migrant Education in the areas of Identification and Recruitment (ID&R) and service provision.

- For ID&R efforts, networking can help new recruiters find students faster and more comprehensively cover a service area. For example, pre-schools and other school readiness agencies can provide space or information leading to increased recruitment of pre-K children and possibly their out-of-school parents. Agencies can be trained to co-recruit with MEPs, saving both time and gas for the agencies, the MEPs, and (often) the students.
- The MEP has limited funds, and can increase its ability to provide services by networking with others. For example, through collaboration with a clinic, MEP can assist in delivering health education information to OSY. Universities and non-profits can have their summer interns work with Migrant Education Programs, providing a rich experience for interns and increased human resources for the MEP.
- Effective networking will attract resources to the MEP on local, state and even national levels as other organizations become aware of the services of MEP.

FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING

1. Know Your Population

Complete a student profile/needs assessment for your population (See OSY website for sample). Include data on the number of in-school students and OSY. Compile data from your surveys of students, parents and teachers to determine needs and strengths. This will help you design programs that are responsive to needs and capitalize on strengths and resources within the community.

Travel your service area. Do the students live in farm labor camps, in single family homes, in apartments, in trailers? Are there clusters of students, or are your students widely dispersed? Are growers and crew leaders supportive of your MEP's efforts, and can they be allies?

Drop in just to chat at a time when it's convenient for OSY. Watch and listen carefully and note *their* priorities. MEPs are most effective for OSY when they are participant driven. In other words, when participants communicate their needs, aspirations, fears, perceived barriers, dreams, short and long-term goals, MEP staff is better able to call on collaborators and design services that truly add value to the education of its participants.

2. Prioritize Organizations By Their Concentration And Potential To Serve OSY

Begin with a positive approach. What are the assets of your community when it comes to education for farmworker youth? Compile a list of service providers and other resources in your area. This can include non-profits, churches, schools, clinics, daycares, governmental agencies, food banks, and others. Utilize lists already compiled, such as those compiled by Joblink, to save time in developing your list.

Find out if the organizations you have researched have the capacity to speak the home language of your students and families. Even if they do not have that capacity, do not discount their resources. For example, churches might donate clothing, blankets, heaters, fans, space, transportation, and summer educational activities IF they had the ability to communicate. Arranging interpretation in such an instance might help to build a collaboration that could be extremely beneficial to OSY.

Determine whether each program has an outreach component and if there is a program mandate to perform outreach. Other programs who provide outreach can be wonderful collaborators for identification and recruitment of migrant students and provision of services. In compiling these resources, you will be mapping your assets.

When doing this "asset mapping," don't forget to include the assets of your students: desire to learn a new language, time available, interest in technology, artistic skills, leadership skills and basic medical skills like CPR. Inquire with OSY about specific interests that can be met through service-learning and "shadowing" opportunities. This

increases interest in education overall, builds social skills and encourages OSY to develop goals for their future.

3. Meet To Discuss Common Needs And Resources

Share your mission and your understanding of your students' needs and strengths with other organizations. Develop a diagram or "map" of how you can work together toward common goals. Make sure to leave space in the map for new collaborators!

Challenge current members of your working groups to bring at least one new member to the table at some point. Follow meeting rules by having a framework in mind.

Learn something about the organizations you invite. For example, WIC, Migrant Head Start Program and Migrant Health programs have federal guidelines for serving migrant farm workers. It is fine to openly discuss (diplomatically and in a helpful tone) the shared mandate to serve farm workers and ways working together may have greater effects.

4. Allow Time To Develop The Connection

Some relationships are fast and cooperative. Others can take 12-18 months before the first collaboration is developed. Sometimes an agency supports MEP efforts but doesn't 'fit' in a way that allows for direct service delivery. These relationships are just as important because they build bridges to other resources and strengthen the community of support for MEP students.

The networking process can seem one-sided in the beginning. Local MEPs must take the lead in identifying and recruiting other organizations to assist MEP students. It is the MEP's job to search for the common ground that enables each organization to meet its goals in serving children and youth.

EXAMPLES OF NETWORKING

Organization A: A religion-based disaster relief agency that advocates on behalf of people affected by climate, fire and homelessness. Numerous church congregations donate clothing, food, funds, volunteer hours, and transportation to a central organization in charge of distributing the resources. While Organization A regularly assists minority populations, its leadership demographic does not reflect the diversity of the community-at-large.

Organization A realizes this gap, and has recently donated space for a Hispanic church service, is training a pastor who is a former migrant farm worker from Mexico, and sees the need for stronger ties to its minority constituents. Its current challenges are communication, marketing available assistance to those in need, and coordinating the delivery of that assistance by volunteers.

The local MEP can effectively build a bridge by creating a relationship based on the mutual desire to limit the impact of poverty and disaster on migrant children/youth.

Examples of activities are:

- Utilizing MEP staff as the “go-between” would allow for adequately coordinating the delivery of goods and other supplementary assistance during times when Organization A’s volunteers are scheduled;
- MEP could help place Organization A’s volunteers who can teach skills like piano, first aid, disaster preparedness, skilled trades, and youth group development;
- MEP could gain meeting space during times when schools are closed (evenings/weekends);
- MEP would gain access to necessary clothing, blankets, heaters, food and other basic needs for its participants;
- MEP could arrange a contractual arrangement for transportation to and from educational offerings due to the similarities in DOT requirements between school system transportation and religion-based organizations, including insurance.

Organization B is a division of the local university that places interns in social service environments. The MEP is introduced to a professor through an invitation to sit on a committee for a Latino-focused conference. The MEP openly expresses an interest in hosting interns. The university professor immediately begins networking between the MEP and intern field office to secure placements for his master’s level students. Within nine months of the initial meeting, interns are placed, training takes place, and the students concentrate on intensive home-based service delivery to in-school migrant students attending middle and high school.

Organization C is a children’s referral organization designed to oversee the quality of childcare, among other services. The networking and resulting collaboration has led the MEP to identify powerful community leaders who have the desire to implement action-oriented service activities. These leaders require collaboration due to language and cultural barriers. The relationship yields results through an exchange of services.

- The MEP volunteers to train and assist the program regarding the needs of migrant children.
- The MEP funds an Organization C tutor to serve migrant children using the organization’s expertise in early childhood education.
- The community leaders donate land, space, time and effort for a community garden for MEP families and youth.
- The community leaders raise the needed money for a necessary operation for a migrant child identified by the MEP.