

# Strategies for Sustaining Youth-Serving Organizations in a Difficult Economy

Interview Transcript of Interview

The Finance Project on October 6, 2009

with Debbie Moellendorf, Lincoln County 4-H Youth Development Educator

## Background on The Finance Project:

*The Finance Project (TFP) is a specialized non-profit research and technical assistance firm for public and private sector leaders nationwide. We help leaders make smart investment decisions, develop sound financing strategies, and build solid partnerships that benefit children, families and communities. Please visit us at [www.financeproject.org](http://www.financeproject.org) for more information. TFP provides a number of resources that may be useful to afterschool programs. Through the federally funded Afterschool Investments Project, staff have developed profiles for each state to provide a snapshot of the "state of afterschool," as well as an opportunity to compare afterschool activities across the country. See <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/statep.html> for more information. Afterschool Investments also provides a resource list for afterschool program developers and policy makers looking to build the supply and increase the quality of school-age programs in their states and communities. The resource list is available at <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/rresources.html>.*

## *Research Interview Questions and Debbie's Responses*

1. Confirm key facts about the organizations background. (**This research will be done prior to the call**) What kinds of programs and services does the organization provide? What is the population that receives these services? What geographic area does it serve? What is the size of the organization?
  - Confirm that focusing on our After the Bell program only and provide this information. (Note – The interview included both broader UW-Extension but primary focus was on the “After the Bell” program.)
  - If broader, indicate that our mission is:  
*“As part of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, we provide knowledge and resources to engage people and their communities in positive change where they live and work.”*
    - We provide University research-based information to meet the needs of residents from birth to grave and everything in between.
    - We have four program areas and staff in each of them – Agriculture Development, CRD, Family Living which includes WNEP and 4-H YD.
    - There is an extension office in every county in the State of Wisconsin.
  - If focus on “After the Bell” program share:
    - For the past 5 years, a steering committee facilitated by UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development staff have planned and conducted the “After the Bell” program. During this five year period, 293 different youth have been provided with a positive place to go during the after

school hours. Many of the youth who have participated have come to the program for all three years they are in the middle school. The steering committee includes representatives from T.B. Scott Library, Prairie River Middle School, Merrill Park and Recreation, Child Care Connection, Merrill Forward Together Healthy Community Initiative, Lincoln County 4-H, Social Services, the Merrill Police Department and middle school age youth. This committee continues to meet quarterly and provides on-going support for the program.

- The “After the Bell” program provides a safe place for middle school students to learn new skills. “After the Bell” operates from right after school to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday at the Prairie River Middle School on days school is in session. Students do not need to attend the program each day to participate. The program is supervised each day by two-three adult supervisors.
  - Each day the program offers students a place to play board games, do homework, make crafts, visit with friends and have a snack. In addition, community volunteers (youth and adults) provide special enrichment programs. Programs have included learning to knit and crochet, nutrition and cooking, learning about money, health and fitness, learning to babysit, sewing, ceramics, visual arts, yoga, environmental education, basketry, and visits from a variety of local agencies to learn about the work they do. Some adults and older youth come on a weekly basis or monthly basis to offer programs. Youth involved in the program also completed several service projects during the year as a way of contributing to the community in which they live.
2. How has your organization been affected by the recession. Have you seen reduced funding? An increased demand of services? Has there been increased pressure to do more with less? (This question should get at the specific problems that are being addressed) Which of these problems or issues have been most significant?
- Overall organization yes due to budget cuts at state and county level which is resulting in University employees taking 8 days of furlough each of the next two years. Discussion right now on one of our two full time support staff being laid off in January and another current support staff filling in a portion of this time. If this occurs, will result in educators/professional staff doing more of their own support staff work leading to less time to do actual educational programming.
  - These staffing cuts will also have an impact on the amount of time professional staff will have to program at the “After the Bell” program and other after school programs in the county.
  - Current donations from community organizations and businesses for the “After the Bell” program are coming in slower than they have in prior years but not sure if the end result of donations will be less – too early to tell yet. However, most of our sponsors donate each year.
3. What specific strategies has your organization taken to address challenges brought on by the recession? How and why did you make the decision to implement these strategies?
- Overall organization – inform partners and groups work with of these cuts and involve them in deciding what is no longer done/offered

- Diversifying funding options – from the beginning we have had multiple sources of funding for the ATB program. I believe this strategy has allowed us to continue to raise necessary funds to keep the program going.
  - Aggressively managing costs - We also continue to seek out in kind donations to keep supply expenses as low as possible for the program (i.e. grocery store for snacks, craft supplies from individuals in the community, paper from local business)
  - Considering partnerships – we are always open to involving new partners, the school have been a strong partner and provides the space free
4. Please explain the process of implementing these strategies in your organization. What steps were taken? Who was involved? Did staff already have the necessary skills to implement these changes?
    - Started out with these strategies since knew from past experiences/other programs that this was the only way ATB could be sustained over time.
  5. What were the major challenges that your organization faced in implementing these strategies? What are the keys to success? What recommendations or advice would you give to another youth-serving organization seeking to implement these strategies?
    - Have to have faith that donations will come through and willingness to raise funds year round.
    - Also, need to spend time thanking donors publically throughout the year.
    - Always being open, looking for new partnership opportunities which some time creates small grant opportunities (i.e. Wal-mart Healthy Living grant).
  6. How has your organization changed as a result of these implementing these strategies? For example, have you changed the way you deliver services to your target population? Have there been changes in the way the organization is staffed? Please describe any outcomes, results or evidence of success that you have seen thus far.
    - Again, started with these strategies so no.
    - It was important from the beginning to the steering committee that the program be free since we are trying to reach youth who may not have the resources to pay for a program. Over 50% of the youth we reach in the program qualify for free-reduced lunches. The overall school is around 30-35% with this number rising due to current unemployment rate in area.
    - Would anticipate that this will lead to even higher percentage participating in our program.
    - Keeping the program free started out and continues to be a priority for the steering committee. We want this to be a program that all youth can experience positive youth development.
  7. Is there anything I did not ask you about that you think is important for other leaders to know or consider as they face challenging economic times?
    - It's important to be creative, think differently and be open to having programs supported in multiple ways by multiple organizations.
    - We have around 20 businesses and organizations that provide support for the program. In addition, have received small grants periodically for special programs offering as I talked about earlier.
  8. Are there any other organizations that you recommend we interview in our research?
    - None that I can think of right now.