

## Phase II The Building Plan

### *Planning the Program*

A building plan describes the specification of all resources needed to complete the building project. Building plan packages include detailed drawings and information such as foundation plans, floor plans, house and detail cross-sections, floor structural supports, and electrical layout plans. In developing an alternative-to-suspension program, the planning phase is much like drawing a plan to build a durable structure. Listed below are five important steps to work on during the planning phase. They are: recruiting a work group; determining the program type; developing a vision and mission statement; creating goals, objectives, and strategies; and designing a memorandum of agreement.

#### **Step 1: Recruiting a Work Group**

Recruiting a dedicated work group is a critical step in developing an effective plan. The work group can be compared to a construction management team or a general contractor. This group can help reach sound decisions developing the design and plan of the program.

The alternatives-to-suspension work group should consist of community leaders, local school superintendent, juvenile justice professionals, mental health professionals, student representatives, parent representatives, and other vested community and school leaders. While this group could have representatives from all the aforementioned groups, it should not consist of more than ten to twelve people to allow for more efficient decision-making.

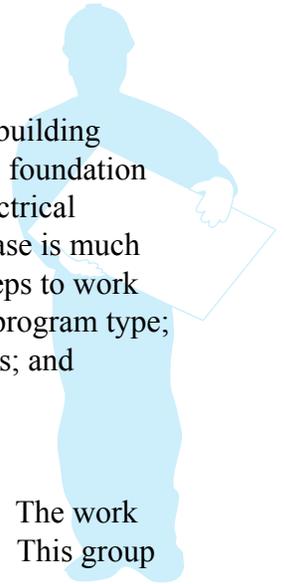
Each representative's unique skills, resources, and time commitment must be considered. The group should meet regularly and be the driving force behind the project, coming together to make all major decisions concerning the direction of the project.

#### **Step 2: Determining Program Type**

The purpose of an alternative-to-suspension program will be decided largely by information obtained during the assessment. Results from the assessment will guide the work group in determining if the focus of the program will be broad or specific. Specific programming may focus on targeted behaviors leading to suspensions or programs designed for a particular group such as one grade level of suspended students. However, if community members determined that a significant number of students are being suspended for a wide range of issues then a program with a broad focus may be in order. This aspect of programming should consider the students, staff, families, and community population to be served and utilized (i.e., specific age students to be served, staff to be utilized, and community involvement to be developed).

Research conducted by the DJJDP – Center in 2003 revealed thirty-three programs identified by local school systems as alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspensions. These programs were either classified as academic based, community service based, or counseling based. The following is a description of each program type as well as an identified program to serve as an example.

**Academic Programs** have traditional school-based approaches. In this type of program, students typically spend the day in a self-contained classroom, often on a separate campus from their school. Students participating in this type of program attend class on a normal schedule, completing assignments obtained from their respective teachers. During the school day,



they receive intensive one-on-one assistance on academic assignments. While community service or counseling aspects may be a part of programming, the primary focus is academic.

The **Glenn Center** in Cabarrus County exemplifies the academic-focused program. Beginning in 1997, students in grades six through twelve, who were suspended for three or more days were allowed to serve their suspensions at the Glenn Center. In this program, students provide their own transportation and report to the Glenn Center for normal school hours. During these hours, students spend time completing homework assigned by their classroom teachers. The Glenn Center operates as a division of Cabarrus County Schools and allows students the opportunity to receive one-on-one academic attention from certified teachers located on-site. Students participating in this program also receive full credit for completed assignments as well as for attendance.

**Community Service Programs** focus on service and community outreach. Students participating in this type of alternative program usually spend their suspension time conducting community outreach or service. Local school systems using this approach collaborated primarily with local non-profit organizations and other community organizations in order to provide supervision and structure while students were away from school. While academics are not the focus of these programs, all programs utilizing this approach provide specific time during the workday for students to complete homework and other assignments. Students receive full attendance and academic credit for time and work completed.

**Burke Alternatives to Suspension (BATS)**, located in Burke County, is a program serving as an example for community-service based programs. The program combines community service with successful completion of assigned schoolwork during short-term suspension (three to ten day) periods. Students in grades six through twelve “serve” their suspension time while providing community service at various county non-profit agencies. While time is set aside each day so that schoolwork can be completed, the focus of the program is on behavior modification through community service. Credit is awarded for attendance as well as completed homework. BATS has three staff members responsible for assigning and monitoring student involvement with community organizations.

**Counseling Programs** concentrate on behavior modification. These programs focus on student, family, and parent counseling. Sessions are conducted at various times and locations, depending on the specific program. Most programs attempt to offer group classes or workshops dealing with relevant issues (e.g., anger management, parenting skills) at times when both students and parents can attend. As with the other focus areas, counseling programs allow time for academics and community outreach.

**Project Stride** began as a collaborative effort between Wilson County Schools and a community counseling agency. The program has since been developed into a school system and is an example of an alternative to short-term out-of-school suspension program with a counseling focus. Project Stride is located on the campus of a local counseling agency and serves students in grades six through nine. Students are given the opportunity to complete assigned homework each day and are awarded credit for both homework and attendance. The focus, however, of Project Stride is on behavior modification. Each day efforts are made to develop problem-solving, decision-making, and other life skills.

Once the purpose of the alternative-to-suspension program has been defined and the type of program to be implemented determined, the place of the program must be established. The type of program will most likely determine the general location of the program (i.e., in a school or community). The work group must determine the details of the facility. A program with specific behavior modification or counseling goals will likely need several rooms. For example, a classroom for students and office space for staff will be needed. This space does not necessarily have to be provided by the local school system. In this type of programming, either the school or the community may be able to meet the program's place needs. Programs with a community focus, however, must have at least some use of community facilities. In addition to the specific location of the program, the work group must also decide what areas, schools, and communities will be served. If a school system covers a large geographic area, transportation considerations will have to be made when deciding the physical location of the program.

### Step 3: Developing a Vision and Mission Statement

Beyond soliciting community and school support, the work group will be responsible for clearly defining the program's vision and mission as well as desired outcomes. Short and long-term goals must be developed to drive the mission of the program.

Developing vision and mission statements is an important step for several reasons. First of all, these statements help the program or organization remain focused on what is really important. Second, these statements reveal to other individuals and organizations who the group is and what it wants to accomplish. Finally, vision and mission statements are helpful in having members who are focused and bound together in a united sense of purpose.

The vision is the overall "dream" and what the program or organization believes to be the ideal conditions for the community. A vision statement should be concise, realistic, well articulated and easily understood. It should orient the group's energies and serve as a guide to action. In short, a vision should challenge, unite, and inspire the group to achieve its mission.

There are certain characteristics that most vision statements have in common. In general, vision statements should be: understood and shared by members of the community; broad enough to allow a diverse variety of local perspectives to be encompassed within them; inspiring and uplifting to everyone involved in the effort; and easy to communicate.

Mission statements are similar to vision statements. They look at the big picture but are more concrete, and more "action-oriented" than vision statements. The vision statement should inspire people to dream; the mission statement should inspire them to act.

An organization's mission statement describes *what* the group is going to do and *why* it is going to do that. Some general guiding principles about mission statements should be:

- **Concise** - While not as short as vision statements, mission statements generally still get their point across in one or two sentences.
- **Outcome-oriented** - Mission statements explain the fundamental outcomes the organization is working to achieve.
- **Inclusive** - While mission statements do make statements about the group's key goals, they need to do so very broadly.

Good mission statements are not limiting in the strategies or sectors of the community that may become involved in the project.<sup>1</sup>

#### Step 4: Creating the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The work group will create strategies to accomplish the goals and objectives, determine target dates, and decide how the program will be evaluated. An operational plan can be derived from the goals and objectives and should address all aspects of how the program will function. In doing this, the work group must consider the purpose of the program, who the program will serve, and the location of the alternative program.

When determining goals and objectives for the alternative-to-suspension program, the work group should consider that the DJJDP – Center has identified six promising strategies through past research projects. These strategies were used as part of selected schools' overall efforts to reduce discipline problems, thus reducing suspension and expulsion rates. For more details on these strategies, see the Tool-Kit website at [www.cpsv.org/toolkit/](http://www.cpsv.org/toolkit/). The promising strategies are as follows:

- **Leadership** - Leadership is critical in the implementation of alternative-to-suspension programs. Administrators at the Project EASE sites not only saw the need to reduce their suspension and expulsion rates but also took action to address the need(s) of their school. Many of the school sites empowered assistant principals and student support staff in the initiative. Administrators served as role models and were visible in school activities.
- **Parental Involvement** - Many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have documented the importance of parent involvement as a critical component to a school's success. When parents participate in their children's education, the result is an increase in student achievement and an improvement of students' attitudes. Project EASE school sites increased parental involvement through the utilization of Saturday School, home visits, recognition and reward programs, and parent newsletters.
- **Alternative Placement** - Alternative placement was used to address two behavioral issues. First, when a student was disrupting class or acting out in a manner that did not warrant suspension, alternative placement was used to offer both teachers and students a reprieve. The second reason for alternative placement was when a student had performed an action that required short-term removal from the school environment. Alternative placement programs that remove students from the general student body and allow students to continue their education while addressing the behavior that caused the suspension is critical to ensuring student success. Schools utilized a Saturday Academy program, Behavior Intervention Center, and in-school suspension programs (i.e., Chill Out and Genesis).
- **School Climate** - Participating schools attempted to create environments in which positive behavior was celebrated by focusing on positive recognition of student actions and celebrating student differences. Improving the school climate at the sites was accomplished through the use of In-School Positive Recognition Programs, Glad Calls, Student Planners, and student artwork.
- **Staff Development** - Staff development enabled schools to keep up with the changes in legislation, school system guidelines, and overall education trends. All schools must continue to provide staff with new training to aid in the overall success of youth. Various staff developments that participating sites engaged in included conflict management, bullying prevention, understanding youth culture, and understanding the impact of poverty.

- **Community Involvement** - The involvement of the community and key stakeholders can yield positive results in the reduction of suspensions and expulsions. Community leaders were involved with participating sites in various manners. Town hall meetings, career exploration programs, job shadowing / apprenticeship programs, and alternative-to-suspension sites were all various ways the schools were engaged with the community.

Often writing goals and objectives can be a difficult process. Much of the difficulty is attributed to the confusion between a goal and an objective. A goal is a long-term, broad, or global statement of what will be accomplished. For example, if you were writing a proposal to help youth transition back into the community from a secure juvenile facility your goal could be: *“The goal of the Transition Program is to increase the percentage of students that successfully re-enter the community after being released from a youth development center, thus helping to reduce North Carolina’s juvenile recidivism rate.”*

Objectives are a specific, measurable target that aid in accomplishing the goal. An objective for the previously stated goal could be: *“The project will increase the number of youth who enroll in an education program after release by 25 percent.”* The objectives should be clear, realistic, practical, beneficial, and consistent with the mission of the agency. These objectives should be measurable so they can be used during the evaluation process, as discussed in Phase V – The Inspection.

### **Step 5: Designing a Memorandum of Agreement**

Depending on who is involved in program and service delivery, contracts or memorandums of agreements may need to be completed. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is a formal agreement between agencies that specifies how the agencies will work together on the particular program to accomplish the goals and objectives.

A MOA is used to define inter-agency agreements. The purpose of a MOA is to:

- Outline specific responsibilities and commitments of agencies for implementing strategies, programs, or activities. It might also clarify in-kind support related to the joint plan. (Examples of in-kind services include lending a building for use, or providing volunteers for a program.)
- Specify who will do what, for whom, over what time period, at what cost, and to what standard of performance.
- Acknowledge acceptance of responsibility by an organization for implementation and evaluation of strategies.

Basic components of a MOA include:

- Legal name of entities entering into the agreement.
- Beginning and ending dates of the agreement.
- Detailed program activities including location and funding level (if applicable).
- Procedure for termination or amendment of agreement.
- Signatures and titles of authorized partners.

The following tools are included to assist the planning phase:

**Tool 1 – Stakeholders**

- Possible participants in a work group can be derived from stakeholders. This form will help brainstorm key stakeholders in the community to serve on the work group

**Tool 2 – Vision and Mission Statements**

- Directions and examples for creating vision and mission statements

**Tool 3 – Goals, Objectives and Strategies**

- Directions and examples for creating goals and objectives

**Tool 4 – Memorandum of Agreement**

- Directions and examples for creating memorandums of agreement