

## **A Dozen Tips for Multi-Site Management**

### **Tip 1. Be patient and caring with your sites.**

Remember to be patient and caring with each other as you work through your problems together. Sites are like families. They are composed of individuals who each have their own special skills, perspectives, and challenges. Be supportive. Reduce status markers that make some site members seem more important than others. Eliminate inappropriate titles, special treatments, or privileges. Treat everyone fairly. You'll measure your accomplishments in a series of small improvements, often feeling as though you take three steps forward and then two steps back, seemingly losing your hard won ground. More often than not, it is simple perseverance that determines the difference between the winners and the losers. No one ever said teaming is easy. But it is usually better than the alternatives.

### **Tip 2. Assume the best about people.**

You will find that very few problems are caused intentionally by carelessness or deviousness. Sometimes in our frustration with the headaches caused by these problems, we assume that others we work with are lazy, or mean, or stupid. This is very counterproductive. Comments about how one site always causes problems, or how only project coordinators are supposed to make decisions, or how the site partners are trying to make things difficult, etc. are not likely to yield improvements. These kinds of assumptions will get in the way of sites work. They cause people to defend their points of view and fight to win for "their side." They make it hard to sit down and work things out together. Good problem solving has to start from a foundation of mutual trust and a common desire to improve. Even though it is true that there are a few malicious people around, the vast majority of us share the common goal of wanting our sites to succeed. Effective sites rise above their differences and focus instead on common ground. Assume that the problems you see were caused by good people doing the best they could with the information, systems, and skills they had at the time. Then work to improve information, systems and skills.

### **Tip 3. Fix the problem, don't fix the blame.**

Experience shows that blaming doesn't solve problems; it just causes them to go underground. When people believe that discussing problems will cause them embarrassment or affect their job status negatively, they will not discuss the problem. The road to continuous improvement requires open and honest communication. The key to that is to avoid blaming - and focus instead on solving the problem at hand.

#### **Tip 4. Focus on behaviors, not attitudes**

You can't change other people's personalities and attitudes. But if you work together, you can help each other demonstrate effective behaviors. Remember this when working with others and giving them feedback. Be specific and focus on the real things people say and do. Don't say, "You make me mad, or "You're disorganized." There is nothing people can do about those kinds of comments. Instead say, "When you talk to community people about problems in members' performance, without speaking to the frontline supervisor about it first it is problematic," or,

"When you refuse to include members in meetings it makes it harder to identify and meet your needs and members have to guess what should be done". These comments help people know what they can do to make an improvement and set the stage for working through the issue.

#### **Tip 5. Establish regular, effective site meetings.**

Most Multi-Site Management problems parent organizations run into will come from miscommunication. Establish a regular time and place for meetings. Use these meeting times to pass along information, clarify who is supposed to do what, update each other on your assignments, check progress toward your goals, and just take some time to talk with each other. Have information systems that provide you with up-to-date job information. Create a climate that fosters frequent, open, and honest discussion where people can share their feelings and learning without fear.

#### **Tip 6. Focus on the goal, not the obstacles.**

Although your sites must learn how to resolve problems successfully, avoid getting caught in an endless downward spiral of problem solving. Just as there are many obstacles on the track of a high hurdle race, there are many problems in the way of effective sit-based operations. Staying too focused on an individual hurdle can make you lose the race. Too much focus on problems can be discouraging, depressing, and distracting. Sites keep motivation high by maintaining their focus on the end goal, not by draining their enthusiasm in an endless series of difficulties. Keep your heads up. Effective sites are purpose-oriented rather than problem-solving oriented. They renew their energy and commitment by keeping their eye on their mission and by not allowing their normal day-to-day frustration to slow them down. They celebrate their victories, encourage each other regularly, and maintain their spirit by reminding themselves about the overall race, even when all they can see are the seemingly endless parade of hurdles.

**Tip 7. Involve the right people in problem solving.**

People are most committed to implementing ideas that they personally participate in developing. Remember this when you decide who should be involved in solving site problems. Does this mean that every problem needs to be solved by the whole site? No. Many can - and should - be delegated to a subgroup, individual, or site leader.

**Tip 8. Don't use up all your energy on unsolvable problems.**

Serious problems should be resolved immediately before they grow into monumental issues requiring extreme measures. Some problems however, can't be resolved at all, and continual discussion will simply aggravate injuries, which will distract your sites from running the race the best they can. Some problems are best ignored and will resolve themselves over time as the sites progresses towards the finish line. Only a skillful and well-trained program manager or director will know the best course of action. A good manager or director will coach the sites through these issues successfully.

**Tip 9. Develop the skills and discipline of effective problem solving.**

Multi-Site Management is a skill. The tips in this ready reference will provide your sites small benefits if you haven't properly diagnosed the problem, or if you ignore other elements of effective problem solving. Don't worry if you find, as most sites do, that these methods seem a little awkward at first. As your sites mature and you regularly practice using these methods, you will begin to find that they feel more natural over time. Just keep at it. It's like riding a bicycle.

**Tip 10. Know your roles, purpose, boundaries, and resources.**

Many problems result from a lack of clarity about what you are supposed to do and how much help you will get to do it. Strive to understand your task as a parent organization and as a site partner or site leader. Understand your new roles and responsibilities. Site-based organizations have fundamentally different assignments. If you don't understand these roles, get some help from your sites leader or project coordinator.

Understanding these things will keep you focused on results and customers, not on activities and busy work. And once that is clear in your mind, get agreements from the appropriate people about your purpose. Don't assume that, if other people don't say anything, they agree with you. Vocalize agreements to ensure mutual understanding. Good questions to ask when you are developing these performance agreements are: "How will we know if we have successfully completed this work?" and "What boundaries are we working with as far as time, money, and other requirements?"

**Tip 11. Focus on results.**

Remember to stay focused on results. Don't get off track. Avoid the temptation to get swept up in the day-to-day tyranny of the urgent. It can be easy to get carried away with lots of activities, or bound up in lots of programs, red tape, or bureaucracy that don't actually produce results. Keep thinking about your goals. Create a solid information system that will tell you how you are doing on your results on a regular basis. Post this information where people can see it and use this data to make better site decisions. Measure key result areas. Get good results in quality, cost, responsiveness, timeliness, or whatever your sites and site leaders agree are the overarching purpose of your organization.

**Tip 12. Remember that the grantee/sub-grantee relationship is not an end in itself.**

Partnering is a means to accomplishing something, not an end in itself. Measure ends, not means.

Instead of measuring how many sites you have, measure your results. Instead of asking how to make things more comfortable for the sites, ask how to deliver better service to the community. If your site becomes too inwardly focused, they will not survive. It doesn't matter how good your sites are if you don't have products and services that communities value. Meet their needs. People will be happier, and many site problems will dissolve if your operation is successful. People like to be on a winning team.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>i</sup>*Adapted from: Tips for Teaming, by William Belgard, Kimball Fisher, and Steve Rayner, 1995.*