Building a Comprehensive Agency-University Partnership

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Building a Comprehensive Agency-University Partnership: A Case Study of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium

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ABSTRACT. University-community partnerships are receiving increased attention in an era of rapid change and fragmented resources. This case study of a multi-county consortium of social service agencies in collaboration with four graduate social work programs and two foundations represents an innovative approach to building a partnership through the use of a consortium as a mediating structure. With a focus on training, research, policy development, and a think tank, specific implications

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for developing agency-university partnership are identified. The case is embedded in the expanding literature on university-community collaboration. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com <Website: http://www.haworthpressinc.com>]*

INTRODUCTION

As the pace quickens in our society, due in large part to technology, it becomes even more difficult to overcome the fragmentation caused by increased specialization. People are so busy working in their specialized areas that it is difficult to find the time to network with those in other workplaces. There is a growing recognition that special mechanisms are needed to bridge the gaps created by the fast pace and fragmentation in our society. Different forms of collaboration, partnerships, and consortia are emerging as structures to connect the shared concerns of other institutions. These bridges are known as "mediating" structures or institutions; platforms used to bring together two or more sets of collaborators to address shared concerns and interests. One such mediating institution is the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC), a collaboration established in 1987 between four universities, twelve county social service agencies, and two foundations. An analysis of the evolution and contributions of this Consortium is the focus of this case study.

Shared concerns and interests are frequently the cornerstones of partnerships. The "town-gown" distinction between community concerns and university interests is not new. However, as universities have begun to recognize their responsibilities to the society and taxpayers/donors supporting them, there has emerged in the last several decades a new interest in community involvement. This has occurred at the student level with community service projects, at the faculty level with collaborative research and training in community institutions, and at the governing board level with policy and funding decisions influenced by the need to address community issues in neighborhoods and regions surrounding university campuses. Similarly, local governmental agencies, including county departments of social ser-

vices, have recognized the value of collaborating with universities to recruit future employees, address critical issues through research and evaluation, and solicit faculty expertise in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Local foundations have recently arrived at the table of university-community collaboration. While foundation resources are always valued commodities in forming and sustaining collaborations, even more important are the ideas and perspectives of foundation executives. They bring the concerns of grassroots, community-based organizations to the collaborative process. An analysis of this mix of public, private, and university collaboration is a key dimension of the BASSC. BASSC grew from 1992 to 1998 from a $7500 foundation seed grant to a $1.2 million annual operation, and includes the following initiatives: (1) an Executive Think Tank, (2) an Executive Development and Regional Training Program, (3) a Research Response Team, and (4) a Policy Media Program.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

The BASSC experience can be best understood within the context of university-community partnerships. Over the past two decades, there has been increased interest in exploring ways for universities to connect with community issues and for community leaders to maximize the policy, research, and training expertise of universities. While there is not much literature in this area, there is a growing body of research that examines the structures and motivations underlying partnerships between universities and community institutions. Hackney argues that universities have a moral obligation to address the social problems in the communities where they are located, "to set an example of sensitive corporate citizenship" (1986, p. 136). In addition to the moral imperative, Harkavy and Puckett (1994) identify how partnerships with the community serve the following self-interests of universities: (1) advancing knowledge, teaching, and human welfare through community service, (2) generating increased public and private support for universities by giving attention to societal problems, and (3) facilitating faculty and student recruitment by promoting the health and safety of their surrounding community. Others have pointed out that initiatives to address community problems offer the potential for interdisciplinary teaching and research by addressing real life problems that can be inherently incompatible with the university's

compartmentalized approach to solutions (Ramaley, 1995). Similarly, research in communities can provide a "reality check" for the ideas and theories investigated by researchers (Young, 1995).

University partnerships in America have evolved out of a tradition of academic service to the community. An early example in the field of social work can be found in the work of Hull House and the University of Chicago. Hull House residents produced detailed demographic data and descriptions of immigrant neighborhoods, information which was integrated into their advocacy efforts. They worked closely with sociologists at the University of Chicago, who viewed scholarship, teaching, and community service as compatible elements of the university's mission (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Another form of university-community partnerships can be seen in the development of land grant colleges to provide research and consultation services to local agricultural communities (Hackney, 1986). However, for much of this century, universities formed their primary partnerships with business and government, turning away from local problems to focus on national and foreign policy issues (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Then, in the 1960s, foundations and the federal government began to focus again on the problems confronting local communities, especially those located in urban areas, by supporting a number of initiatives to foster partnerships between universities and urban communities. Some of these efforts have been criticized on the grounds that while universities have benefited from using communities as a laboratory for research, the communities gained little, and had no voice in the work that universities were doing (Hackney, 1986).

While there are relatively few successful organizational models of university-community partnerships presented in the literature, Harkavy and Puckett (1991) note that most successful partnerships are tailored to the particular circumstances and needs of individual universities and community organizations. In addition, a few case studies in the literature make it possible to identify some principles and strategies that should be generalizable to a broad range of partnerships, such as studies of the efforts of universities to incorporate community service into their mission statements (Scott & Ludwig, 1995), understanding the challenge of bridging two different cultures represented by the university and the community (Bartlet, 1995), building partnerships between universities and state mental health agencies (Talbot, Bray, Flaherty, Robinowitz & Tainter, 1991), and partnership develop-

ment between universities and local public schools (Zetlin & Mac-Leod, 1995).

Although these case examples and models have emerged in different environments, they all reflect the theme of mutuality as part of a process of developing a set of principles for collaboration. These principles include the importance of: (1) equity among partners, ensuring that each has an equal voice, and that the contributions of all are recognized, (2) partners identifying their own self-interest in the collaboration as well as recognizing the goals and objectives of the other organizations involved, (3) a clear rationale for working in collaboration despite different interests, (4) leadership to sustain collaborative partnerships and ensure longevity as well as institutionalization (e.g., supporting structures, mediating structures, faculty reward systems, and outside funding), and (5) full participation of faculty, staff, and community members to build a strong foundation for university-community partnerships. While the literature includes interesting descriptions of partnerships and their developmental processes, some of the most substantive analyses of partnerships and consortia can be found in the field of public education. There is also a strong parallel between university schools of education with their public school counterparts in the community and university schools of social work with their counterparts in public county social service agencies, as well as non-profit, community-based social service organizations.

Goodlad (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) has conducted extensive work on university-school partnerships over the past three decades through the National Network for Educational Renewal. From his assessment of successful university-school partnerships, Goodlad has identified the following five relationship-building processes for building and sustaining partnerships:

Partnerships involve equal partners working together toward satisfying mutually beneficial self-interests, as reflected in the following essential characteristics: (1) a moderate degree of dissimilarity between or among partners, (2) the potential for mutual satisfaction of self-interests, and (3) sufficient selflessness on the part of each partner to assure the satisfaction of self-interests by all involved.

Communication in a partnership involves efficient and effective sharing of information and knowledge produced by its members as well as communications coming from other sources.

Leadership involves organizational leaders possessing, endorsing,

and communicating a clear, coherent set of fundamental values to which all participants can be committed.

Renewal involves change which requires the ongoing involvement of the significant persons responsible for developing and promoting innovative activities, along with the resources and time needed for the ongoing process of inquiry and organizational change.

Accountability is best understood and acted upon as a system of shared responsibilities carried out by members of the partnership.

These characteristics of mediating structures in the field of public education will be used in analyzing the BASSC partnership.

THE BASSC CONSORTIUM AS A CASE STUDY

In its first five years of existence BASSC developed a number of regional training events and task forces on child welfare curriculum issues designed to reengage social work education with the public social services. As a result, a common mission statement on education for public social services was adopted and led to the creation of a statewide consortium–the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)–for the development of new educational programs to meet the needs of publicly supported social services.

Building on the success of these initial collaborative efforts, in 1992, BASSC members began to think about defining their activities in a broader and more formalized way. With the assistance of a staff consultant from the University of California School of Social Welfare, the consortium developed an agenda related to the three broad areas of training, research, and policy development. The following sections include the description of initiatives in each of these areas and the think tank process used to generate and monitor the initiatives.

THE BASSC THINK TANK

The bi-monthly BASSC Think Tank meetings provided a rare opportunity for busy executives to step back from the day-to-day realities of administering programs and focus not just on how things are, but how they might be. An early outcome of these discussions was the recognition of a shared desire to influence future human services policies and programs in a coordinated and proactive way.

As a first step, the group agreed to draft a vision statement that would place the county social service agencies' short-term strategic plans into a broader and long-term perspective. This statement was intended to create a picture of what the ideal human services system would look like, in order to provide a forum for county directors, staff, political leaders and citizens to work together to articulate a collective future. After fifteen months of deliberation the vision statement emerged with the core values that: (a) social services should be universal and guaranteed, and (b) communities should be supported in the design and development of services that work for them (BASSC, 1994). In essence, services should:

- Be provided to all families in need.
- Provide guaranteed access to a minimal level of care and support.
- Encourage consumers to use available resources to foster self-sufficiency.
- Use a prevention model whereby success is measured on the basis of community health and well-being.
- Work with existing community institutions to develop neighborhood-based services which involve minimal government regulation.
- Reflect a belief in the capacities of individuals and neighborhoods to promote change and a commitment to racial and cultural diversity.

From these core values arose the service principles and assumptions outlined in Figure 1. These principles and assumptions constitute the core of the BASSC vision and provide a road map that now guides how daily actions can lead to individual and organizational success. In essence, the BASSC "Vision of Human Services–2000," describes a human services system that is interdisciplinary, neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and accountable for contributing in a measurable way to the overall health and welfare of the communities it serves.

Since this vision was articulated, BASSC members have used the Think Tank meetings to identify and address administrative challenges to implementing the vision. Examples of such challenges include fostering community leadership, supporting staff autonomy and creativity, transferring responsibility and authority from the county to local units, developing safeguards to assure accountability in the use of public funds, and designing inter-agency mechanisms to assist local

FIGURE 1. The Principles and Assumptions of the BASSC Vision

Principles	**Assumptions**
Resource Distribution	Resource Distribution
1. The ideal system will redirect societal resources to those individuals, families and communities most in need of assistance, especially those who have been historically deprived of a fair share of economic and social benefits and opportunities.	1. Resource allocation can best be accomplished by offering services universally to those in need.
2. The ideal system will provide a minimal level of health and decency to individuals and families.	2. Historically, social service programs have been under-funded.
3. The ideal system will provide all service consumers with equal opportunity to access benefits.	3. Opportunities for access must include convenient locations and hours, appropriate physical facilities for the elderly and the disabled, access to all services to which one is entitled, access to relevant information, and the provision of services in a manner that is sensitive to language and cultural differences.
Decision Making and Authority	Decision Making and Authority
4. Decision making should involve community-based approaches to problem solving.	4. Individual and family problems are rooted in the well-being of the community overall, and therefore solutions must address both individual and environmental problems. Communities can solve their own problems if they have the resources and assistance to do so.
5. Local needs must be defined by the community.	5. Local citizens must have decision-making authority to determine priorities, resource allocation and criteria for success.
6. The service delivery system should be decentralized and neighborhood-based.	6. People interact most effectively with systems that are near their place of residence and that reflect the particular characteristics of their living environment.
Service Design and Delivery	Service Design and Delivery
7. The ideal service delivery system will take a proactive, prevention-oriented approach to problem-solving.	7. Services should be linked to other major community institutions, in particular, all aspects of economic development.
8. Services should be comprehensive, and non-categorical.	8. Services should be responsive to a range of individual and community needs including those of young children, adolescents, young adults, senior citizens and families.
9. Services should be universal, based on federally-funded family investment policies.	9. A universal approach avoids stigmatizing recipients and acknowledges the potential of all individuals to contribute to society. Only the federal government possesses sufficient resources to implement investment policies of this magnitude.
10. Services and service delivery should reflect a deep commitment to racial and cultural diversity.	10. This commitment is at the core of the principles of equity, access and community participation, and it recognizes the importance of bringing the service delivery system in compliance with the demographic and social realities of the 21st century.

community service centers with job training programs, economic development activities, local taxing authorities, and public education.

Recently, BASSC Think Tank meetings have focussed on the implications of national and state welfare reform proposals and the block-granting of federal funds. As county directors shared their concerns and perceptions, two themes emerged. First, counties were not waiting to see what would happen at the federal and state levels, but were moving forward with their own plans for changing their welfare systems. Second, even though each county's welfare reform planning process and subsequent actions would be unique and reflect the particular demographics, economics and politics of that county, the county directors identified their common perspectives:

- The importance of increasing communications with local "stakeholders" (elected officials, service providers, community members, business leaders and so on) about the realities of providing social services in today's environment with counties being positioned as facilitators rather than drivers of the planning process.
- The need to abandon the traditional isolation associated with managing the enterprise and involve a wider range of community organizations in program planning as well as actively pursuing partnerships with other county departments, private nonprofit agencies and businesses, thereby helping to shift organizational thinking from inward-focused and present-oriented to outward-focused and forward-looking.
- The importance of experimenting with new ways of delivering community and neighborhood services by allocating resources that can potentially increase the efficiency and effectiveness of activities on behalf of clients and communities.

The BASSC Think Tank continues its exploration of these issues, primarily through the analysis and discussion of cross-country comparisons of welfare reform implementation (Carnochan & Austin, 1998).

THE BASSC EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

As the Think Tank evolved, agency directors began to feel more comfortable sharing some of their most pressing administrative dilemmas. Members found it helpful to address their dilemmas as case

presentations. One issue that received unanimous support involved their shared frustration in recruiting experienced, trained women and people of color for senior management vacancies. This discussion led to a proposal for a multi-county Executive Development Training Program which would involve the selection of their most promising upper and middle-management staff to participate in the program, the involvement of the directors themselves as part of the teaching faculty, and the use of their cases as teaching tools (BASSC, 1997).

The original goal of the BASSC Executive Development Program was to develop a cadre of leaders who can play key roles in preparing and transforming public agencies into the service system of tomorrow. County agencies require leaders who understand bureaucratic barriers and can get the job done, despite obstacles. Acquiring the critical thinking skills, socialization, and leadership styles of senior managers requires a learning environment where leadership issues and skills can be refined and applied to current organizational realities. The key skills include the ability to organize agencies for change and to assist others in overcoming fear and uncertainty generated by change. The transformational leader has the ability to overcome bureaucratic regulations to create new organizational forms. Such leaders are able to solicit input from all levels of the organization, from client populations, and from resources inside and outside of the agency.

The Executive Development Training Program consists of: (1) three week-long, thirty-hour classroom modules which take place during an academic year, (2) an interagency site visit exchange, and (3) a fifteen-day internship project in a county other than the participant's own. The three classroom modules are organized by themes. The first module's theme is leadership in public social services organizations. The module includes sessions on the history of social services, leadership development and self-assessment, client-centered administration, community relations, the administrator as community organizer, and working with community-based organizations.

Between the first and second modules, each participant has a half-day visit to another county to learn about an interesting or innovative program. Each perticipant's objectives are to: (a) strengthen the peer learning relationships formed during the first module, (b) reflect upon their learning experiences in a memo to their director that describes the observed project or program with implications for the home county, and (c) to identify leadership and organizational change issues.

The theme of the second module is managing organizational change with an emphasis on change management, program development, presentation skills, budgeting, and grievance handling. The third module includes an array of management skills such as media relations, management information systems, advocacy and ethics in lobbying, conducting outcome evaluations, managing a diverse workforce, and executive-board relations. As the concluding module for the program, it also includes case presentations, evaluation sessions (participants, faculty, and mentors), and a graduation dinner.

Between modules 2 and 3 is a fifteen-day internship project. Each participant: (1) observes administrative practices in other agencies while acquiring new skills under the guidance of a senior manager, (2) builds networks and contacts in another county, and (3) develops a case study which describes the learning experience, identifies implications for their own agencies, and suggests action for future implementation.

A unique feature of the program is the involvement, at every level, of the county social service directors. They select the participants from their agencies, provide classroom instruction, assist their participants in selecting internship projects that would be beneficial to the agency as well as the participant, and recruit mentors in their own agencies to oversee internships for participants from other countries. While a detailed evaluation of the program is available (Murtaza, 1998), some of the program successes include peer learning and networking, learning from agency directors as instructors, and learning from the experiences of other counties.

Based on the success of the Executive Development Program, a comprehensive BASSC Bay Area Academy has been developed with Title IV-E funding from the state. This million dollar academy is designed to support the child welfare and human service training needs of the counties in such areas as supervision, team-based interdisciplinary practice, change management, ethnic-sensitive risk assessment, domestic violence, substance abuse, concurrent planning, and related topics.

THE BASSC RESEARCH RESPONSE TEAM

With the successful launching of the Executive Development Program, the BASSC members turned their attention to another important issue: the need for timely and relevant agency-based research, which

resulted in the development of the BASSC Research Response Team (RRT). In 1994, members of BASSC identified the importance of building a research bridge between universities and Bay Area county social and human service agencies. In response, a BASSC RRT was launched in 1995 to respond rapidly to the agencies' needs for information about their changing environments. The RRT, financed with $25,000 per year from each of four large Bay Area counties and a start-up grant from the Zellerbach Family Fund, is staffed by a research coordinator, several graduate research assistants, and two faculty members.

The RRT, with guidelines developed by the BASSC members, was designed to be: (1) practical and oriented toward improvement and/or expansion of services at the provider level; (2) sensitive and relevant to the community's needs and values; (3) committed to involve agency staff in the design and implementation of studies; (4) carried out in the context of continuous consultation between agency administrators and researchers who would assume ultimate responsibility for the independent presentation of findings and recommendations; (5) available to build agency capacity by providing technical assistance to agency staff; and (6) complete within eight months of an agreed-upon scope of work *per* the a signed contract.

At the beginning of each research study, the BASSC Research Coordinator and at least one faculty member meets with county staff to define the scope of work. Agency administrators and staff are central to designing the study, facilitating the data collection process, and providing feedback to be incorporated into the final report. Graduate student research assistants conduct a literature review on the topic, help create the research instrument, gather and enter data, and transcribe the research findings. The Research Coordinator oversees all phases of the project and prepares and presents the completed study in report form for discussion with the county. The faculty serve as consultants throughout the research project.

In the first three years of operations, a total of ten research projects were completed on the following topics:

- Homeless Needs Assessment–San Mateo County
- General Assistance Client Demographics Study–Contra Costa County
- An Assessment of the Quality of Care in Kin and Non-Kin Foster Homes–Santa Clara County

- A Study of Gay and Lesbian Foster and Adoptive Parenting–Santa Clara County
- Factors Associated With Successful and Unsuccessful Reunification from Foster Care–Alameda County
- Service Use and Service Needs Among Long-Term AFDC Recipients–San Mateo County
- Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Rate Setting–Santa Clara County
- Developing a Public Information and Community Relations Strategy–Contra Costa County
- Managed Care and Child Welfare Reform–Alameda County
- Child Welfare Outcome Evaluation–Contra Costa County

A comprehensive evaluation of the first three years of the BASSC RRT is also available (Dal Santo, 1998). With the successful launching of the RRT, the BASSC members turned their attention to the changing political environment of welfare reform and the need for social policy responses.

THE BASSC SOCIAL POLIC MEDIA PROGRAM

BASSC members were laying the groundwork in their counties for implementing their shared vision for human services, while a national welfare reform debate escalated after the 1994 congressional elections. As a result, BASSC members felt an urgent need to inform and educate local and regional constituencies about the realities of welfare reform given all the rhetoric of the time. While the politics of each county varied, the BASSC members sought to "speak with one voice" in educating the public. Members struggled with the competing goals of promptly informing the public about welfare and developing the infrastructure to effectively address long-term, broad policy issues.

In 1995, with a small foundation grant, the BASSC Policy Media Project gathered relevant information on poverty and welfare. The resulting briefing packet targeted local media representatives, elected officials, and the business community. The contents of the packet entitled Social Welfare at a Crossroads: A National, Statewide, and Local Look at Poverty and Public Assistance (Martin & Austin, 1997) included:

   I. ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT: The Impact of ''Welfare Reform'' on the Bay Area
   II. SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS IN THE U.S.
  III. MEDICAID: Health Care Program for the Medically Needy
  IV. SSI: Supplementary Security Income for the Elderly, Blind, and Disabled
   V. FOOD STAMPS: Program to alleviate Hunger and Malnutrition for Low Income Families and Individuals
  VI. JOBS: the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program
 VII. AFDC: Aid to Families With Dependent Children
VIII. FACES OF POVERTY: Personal Stories of Women and Children on Public Assistance
  IX. OUR CHANGING SOCIETY: American Trends and the Social Welfare System
   X. SOCIAL WELFARE BY THE NUMBERS: National, State, and County Data

This educational tool is now being supplemented by a foundation-supported media campaign to educate the public about the implementation of welfare reform. Identifying critical media messages, especially for employers of former welfare recipients and those providing family support services, is the core of such a regional media campaign. In the context of implementing welfare reform, additional BASSC policy initiatives are under development in the areas of child care, adult services, and a living wage.

CONCLUSION

The agency-university partnership established through the mediating structure of BASSC provides an opportunity for continuing dialogue on issues related to education, training, research, and policy development. Some examples of the outcome of such dialogue can be found in BASSC training monographs (BASSC Academy, 1998) and policy research (Baum, Martin & Austin, 1997).

As noted in the introduction, community-university partnerships require commitment to collaboration and on-going nurturing. Using Goodlad's five criteria for effective relationship building (partnership, communication, leadership, renewal, and accountability), it is possible to assess the BASSC efforts to date. With respect to partnership,

BASSC members representing universities, agencies, and foundations have worked together toward satisfying mutually beneficial self-interests in research, training, and policy development. However, it is also important to note that partnerships can reflect precarious relationships, especially when the membership is changing. For example, during the past five years, the deanship has changed in all four participating schools and in the case of one school and one foundation the leadership has changed three times. Fortunately these changes have not significantly disrupted the momentum of the consortium. However, these changes call for increased attention to the process of orienting new members.

Regarding communications, there has been effective and efficient sharing of information and knowledge, usually facilitated by BASSC staff. Since the social service agency directors out-number the deans and foundation directors, the majority of information sharing relates to agency issues. Nevertheless, there is an on-going interest in addressing university curriculum issues and agency directors are interested in seeing more than one profession participate in the consortium.

On the issue of leadership, the BASSC Chair and members have articulated a clear and coherent set of values to guide and strengthen the Think Tank and related BASSC activities. In addition to shared values, there is a consensus that the elected chair of the consortium should be an agency director partly because agencies are the largest group of dues-paying members. There is also agreement that the consortium bylaws should be simple and brief.

With respect to the criteria of renewal, the ongoing involvement of agency directors, deans, and foundation directors has demonstrated BASSC's capacity to engage and re-energize colleagues in continuous inquiry. This revitalization is needed to manage constant organizational change. Members are finding the think tank approach to be both intellectually stimulating and emotionally supportive. The beginnings of an on-going support group can be seen among members in the informal exchanges on personal as well as professional topics. Again it appears that the group of agency directors are benefiting most from the support group environment given the recent arrivals of the new deans and foundation directors.

The fifth criteria, accountability, can be seen in the mutual support of BASSC members in the form of contributed financial and staff resources. This clearly demonstrates shared responsibility for the suc-

cess of BASSC. The levels of accountability vary between those who pay dues (agencies and foundations) and those who do not (universities). One of the deans demonstrates considerable commitment and accountability because the consortium's administrative office is located in his school. In the final analysis, the consortium works because its members constantly search for ways to make it work.

In addition to meeting Goodlad's (1988) five criteria for effective relationship building, it is useful to identify several lessons learned while building the BASSC:

1. So that busy agency, university, and foundation administrators can maintain a clear focus on and commitment to a regional consortium, staff must assist in framing the agenda and following up as well as managing projects which evolve out of consortium decision-making.
2. So that university faculty and students stay involved and commit to the program, there must be freedom to explore new avenues of inquiry with minimal organizational barriers to creativity.
3. Deans and foundation representatives must bring a deep commitment to strengthening public social services so they can invest in a social services consortium.
4. For county social service directors to invest personally and financially in a consortium amidst many other competing priorities, the dialogue must focus on the realities of current administrative practice and the needs of public social service personnel.
5. For a consortium to maintain its fiscal viability, counties must be willing to pay annual dues to support the consortium staff of faculty and students.
6. For a community of local leaders to engage in an ongoing Think Tank, the benefits must exceed the costs in time and money. The elected consortium chairperson must be a skillful leader.
7. Other county administered social service agencies that are interested in replicating aspects of the BASSC must have at least three key people step forward: (1) a county social service director who can envision the future and effectively network with other counties; (2) a social work dean with substantial commitment to the public social services; and (3) a faculty member or consultant interested and willing to staff a consortium. (These three also need to be able to secure a small start-up grant from a local

foundation to cover expenses until the county participants recognize the value of sharing and commit agency funds as annual dues to maintain the consortium.)

8. To staff it, the consortium must recruit doctoral and master's level students to create research teams, prepare training materials, assist in event planning, and coordinate information exchange. Similarly, experienced clerical and administrative support people are needed to facilitate mailings, fiscal arrangements, and manage university policies.

9. A flexible governance structure fosters participation through the use of a rotating chairperson and the involvement of county directors in leading ad hoc task forces on various BASSC initiatives. Similarly, the involvement of committed foundation representatives offers new perspectives on policy and practice issues as well as information about sources of financial support.

In conclusion, the regional training, research, and policy programs of BASSC provide a unique forum for exchanging ideas to promote creative solutions to the challenges which confront public social service agencies. BASSC provides a vehicle for county directors, university deans, and foundation representatives to communicate shared values and advocate for realistic and humane social welfare policies.

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