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# GROWING A VOLUNTEER TUTOR PROGRAM

**Engaging Communities to Support Schools**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **SPRING –**

Take Root: Grounding the Effort in Schools 1

### **SUMMER –**

Branch Out: Building Community Partnerships 11

### **FALL –**

Bear Fruit: Putting Students and Tutors to Work 21

### **WINTER –**

Take Stock: Measuring Gains and Guiding Growth 31

### **SPRING AGAIN –**

Sustain Growth: Planning the Second Year 41

### **CONCLUSION –**

Reflecting and Moving Forward 45

### **RESOURCES –**

Information, Organizations, and Manuals 46

## **Volunteer Tutor Program Start-Up: The Greatest Challenge**

Not all start-ups are created by technology whiz kids anticipating enormous profits. In urban and rural communities across the country, extraordinary people have come forward to jump-start community volunteer programs in schools—for rewards that are defined by student progress, not quarterly statements of profit or loss. People of goodwill from many generations are freely giving their time and their talent, united around a shared idea—that we can build our community's future by improving the confidence, abilities, motivation, and achievement of our children.

Often on a shoestring budget, a typical tutor program delivers services to hundreds of students a year. The start-up year is most challenging. It requires leadership to muster the energy and resolve, often in resistant environments, to try something new. It requires crafting a working model, identifying mistakes, refining the system, and establishing reporting systems to track progress and success. Important features of successful tutor programs include: planned partnerships with schools, research-based practices, structured sessions, a variety of strategies and materials, ongoing training, and evaluation for continuous improvement. A single person, the program director, usually orchestrates all of these start-up elements and activities. It is from this perspective that we develop the story that follows.

Meet Maria Martin, a representative (albeit imaginary) program director and the heroine of our story. Her experience launching the TUTOR LINKS project in mythical Grand Valley captures the essential activities in the start-up year of a volunteer tutor program. Understanding this story is essential to the intended audience—those who are considering finding partners and building their own programs:

- School administrators, staff, and teachers
- Community-based organizations that deliver volunteer services
- Businesses and other community groups that can provide volunteers

This story can serve as a guide to help you envision your own programs, jump in with both feet, and make your start-up year successful.

## **How to Use This Book**

The events in this story are very real, all existing in one actual program or another, but the names and places are invented. We have combined details and events drawn from our experience with many programs to create one virtual model of program development.

The story is told through four main vehicles:

- A simple narrative asking key questions and outlining major activities as the year progresses. Look for this on the sidebars to each page.
- Common office documents: faxes, flyers, meeting agendas, business letters, job descriptions, report forms, even the sticky notes that become the live file of any developing program. Look for these posted on the interior pages.
- E-mail conversations between Maria and her mentor, Jessie Dana, an experienced teacher from the school district. Look for the standard e-mail headers.
- Maria's journal, detailing her personal journey as she moves through this challenging year. Look for the handwritten typeface.

You can browse through this book, reading selectively from the sidebars and documents to develop a cursory knowledge of a start-up year's activities and challenges. Or you can look more deeply into the text of each document to gain specific ideas about the thinking, planning, and questioning required by each season's activities. You'll find a list of helpful resources at the story's conclusion. And if you have any questions, contact us at the number inside the book cover. The LEARNS team at NWREL is available to provide technical assistance in your start-up efforts. But don't try to call, fax, or e-mail Maria. She lives only within these pages.