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Growing
community
leaders:
How Community
Leadership Program
Mini-Grant Funding
Propels Graduates to
Address Community
Needs

Background

- Community leadership development hold promise in creating equitable communities¹
- Low-income participants experience more difficulty bridging leadership skills into community engagement²
- Few leadership development programs with low-income community members offer grants to close the gap

Step-Up to Leadership



- 12-week course tailored towards community members with low-income
- Created by MU Extension in collaboration with Community Action Agency of St. Louis County to address low participation on boards
- Initial goal was to empower participants with the skills that they needed to actively serve on boards
- Pilot study (2012) observed increased self-confidence and self-worth and recognition that they are valued and have a role in community³

Curriculum

- Sessions:
 - Come as you are
 - Planning for your passion
 - Understanding and embracing diversity
 - Board legality skills
 - Speak up, speak out
 - **Funding the Way**
 - Stepping out (Graduation)

Study Objectives

- To evaluate the impact of the Step-Up to Leadership program in a bi-state area
- To examine how effective mini-grants are in helping graduates transform learned leadership skills into practice

Mini-Grant

- Participants identify their passion in their community
- Participants can apply for up to \$500 from the Community Action Agency at the end of the course for value-adding community activities
- Projects must add value to the lives of people living in poverty in their community

Social Cognitive Theory - Bandura

Process of Goal Realization⁴



Methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted June - September 2014 with:
 - Graduates (n=55, Women - 44, Men -11)
 - Facilitators (n=19, Women - 13, Men - 6)
 - Community members (n=12, Women – 11, Men -1)
- Interview sites:
 - 6 Community Action Agencies in Missouri
 - 1 State Extension office in Illinois

Analysis

- Audio recordings transcribed by a professional transcriber
- Coding conducted by team using NVivo 10 software
- Data categorizing strategy
 - Thematic Analysis
 - Memoing

Results – Demographics

- Mean age = 47 years old
- Length of residence in community > 5 yrs
- Mean household size = 2.9 people
- Race/Ethnicity: White (68.8%) Black(26.2%) AI/AN (2.5%) Other (2.52%)
- Employment:
 - 31% Full-time
 - 10% Part-time
 - 3.8% Self-employed
 - 7.5% Looking for work

Results – Mini Grant as a Skill

- Opportunity to apply for a mini-grant was motivating factor to join the course

“[O]ne of the main things that he said is [we would] be learning how to do grants, and that clicked right away with me because I know that our church is in need of [funding]. That’s how he captured me to get into it.” (Graduate, CAASTLC 3)

Results – Mini Grant as Capacity

- Graduates discussed how mini-grants allowed them to address needs in their communities

“Our group applied for a farmer’s market grant. My husband and I worked on a group to start this farmer’s market that they had tried to get here for 15 years. We were in groups at this Step Up to Leadership, and our group decided to apply for the \$500 grant for the Farmers Market, and we won it. I was tickled to death.” (Graduate, MOCA 3)

Results – Mini Grant as Capacity

- Graduates have taken grant writing skills from the program and have applied for other grants in their community

“The grant writing program helped and that’s something I’ll be able to carry with me.”

(Graduate, EMAA 5)

Results – Mini Grant as Capacity

- Mini-grant allows skillset to be put into action

“I think the mini grant is really an important aspect of the whole curriculum because otherwise you get everybody all geared up to do all these things and then if they don't have the resources to do it, it just kind of falls flat for them.” (Facilitator, CAASTLC 22)

Results – Mini Grant as Capacity

- Skills and connection to resources turn into sustained community engagement for graduates

“We’ve had graduates that were involved with back to school fairs and still are involved beyond their grant. So those activities that they had as visions for themselves, they saw them to fruition and some of them even beyond that because they’re continuing it without any funding.” (Facilitator, EMAA 7)

Previously Funded Projects

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Children | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fence for playground at homeless shelter• Socks in back to school backpacks• Handicapped Swings in local park• Child theatre and literacy program for inner city children• Car seats for low-income mothers |
| Youth | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emergency overnights backpacks for homeless youth• Community movie night at church in rural community center• Computer room and tutoring service for inner city youth• Youth basketball camp/league |
| Individual/Family | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource room in homeless shelter• Utility support fund for families in need• Back to school fair |
| Hunger | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Garden• Community Garden with handicap accessible beds• Food pantry infrastructure and supplemental food support• Community food drive |
| Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• County-wide wellness fair• Farmers' Market Infrastructure• Personal products and purses for victims of domestic violence |

Project Highlight: Stuff the Truck

- Used initial mini-grant funds for advertising and silent auction items
- Now in its third year, Step-Up grads have networked with area businesses
- Each year, graduates have raised over 1,000 pounds of food and over \$1,000 for donation to the community food bank



Discussion – Implications for Practice

- Participant driven initiative is imperative for low-income graduates of a CLD program
- Seed money allowed graduates to grow leadership skills through community engagement
- Community leadership development with mini-grant funding opportunities is not a complementary strategy in the promotion of community engagement in resource limited communities: it is the central one⁵



Certificate of Completion
Janae Miller

References

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