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NTTI New Community-Based Professional Development Initiative: Research and Development
Final Report

PREPARED BY

Elizabeth R. Bachrach, Ph.D.
Claire T. Brown, B.A.
Irene F. Goodman, Ed.D.

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NTTI RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), an independent research firm that specializes in the evaluation of educational programs, materials, and services, was contracted by Thirteen/WNET New York's National Teacher Training Institute (NTTI), to evaluate NTTI's plan to develop a new, self-sustaining, community-based professional development initiative.

After 14 years of working primarily with formal education institutions (i.e., public schools), and providing teachers with resources and strategies to integrate technology into their classroom, NTTI seeks to expand its reach. As currently conceived, the new initiative would create partnerships between public television stations, school systems, cultural organizations, and businesses in order to create learning opportunities derived from public television's broadcast and online resources.

In order to obtain feedback on the feasibility of such an initiative from the target audience, GRG conducted a focus group at each of three current NTTI sites: Atlanta, GA, Columbia, SC, and Cleveland, OH. Participants included: (1) formal educators, including local teachers or retired teachers, (2) informal educators, including community organization leaders, and (3) PBS educational staff. During each focus group session, participants were presented with an overview of the current NTTI model and then discussed the proposed community-based NTTI initiative. The groups were designed to assess overall interest in the proposed initiative and to discuss implementation and maintenance considerations.

GRG also conducted a moderated discussion with ten children at a Boys and Girls Club in Columbia, SC in order to examine children's interest as well as the logistical feasibility of conducting NTTI lessons in an after school setting.

This document highlights the major findings and recommendations from this evaluation.

KEY FINDINGS

❑ Across the three NTTI communities visited, formal educators, informal educators, and PBS staff have experience sharing resources and working together in efforts to support the academic achievement of school-aged children. They have served both child and adult audiences in their work, and most have used the TV, VCR, Internet, and other digital technologies with the children they serve.

❑　Most common community partnerships have involved the public schools in some way. Study participants consider partnerships beneficial in that they provide a way to pool resources, get more accomplished, and better serve their audiences.

❑　For a partnership of any kind to be successful, participants believe all participating organizations should benefit in some way, the program should match their own mission, and should reach a population similar to the one they serve. Each partner should commit to the project early in the process. Initial meetings should be attended by all partners and, through discussion, partners should establish what each organization will contribute to the program, identify key contacts, and set clear goals, a timeline, and benchmarks for achievement.

❑　Participants agreed a partnership is considered a success if it is sustainable, if goals are met, and if partners wish to work together again in the future.

❑　Based on their experiences working together in the past, and their belief in the value of community partnerships for the benefit of school aged children, participants were quite receptive to NTTI's proposed community-based professional development initiative. They believed the initiative could involve various members of the community and thus both adults and children in a community could benefit from the trainings and lessons provided.

❑　Most participants believe the current NTTI model can be easily translated to include community organizations and cultural institutions. A few teachers expressed concern that the model is too focused on the formal classroom, while others suggested that the structure provided through NTTI's methods and strategies could be integrated into informal settings with minimal modification.

    o　Lessons were described as including such a level of detail that any adult could read and easily conduct the lesson with children.

    o　Teachers who have created lessons believed that what has been successful for children in the formal education setting would be similarly successful in informal and community education settings. In fact, children who thrive more in informal education settings in particular would benefit from this expanded reach.

❑　Because community-based organizations are already partnering with public schools and already have programs, content, and resources they can offer to children, participants suggested NTTI highlight the value to be added from implementation within communities. NTTI can enhance the content at some organizations, add to the technology used in others, and provide a framework for using existing content and technology at others. The key components are NTTI's methods and teaching strategies, as they can transfer across content areas and across organizational settings.

❑　Participants were particularly interested in the theme-based approach to NTTI lessons. In all three communities, suggestions were made for different

thematic ideas relevant to their communities along with what various community organizations could contribute to each.

❑ Participants did not reach consensus about the logistics for new community-based training institutes. Most agreed that representatives from each partnering organization should attend the institutes. There was disagreement, however, on who should attend together, who should provide the training to whom, and what time of year the trainings should be offered to accommodate the most attendees.

❑ Participants agreed that the training institutes should be enjoyable, should provide an opportunity for various community organizations to present the resources they have to offer, and should include all participating organizations in planning stages of the initiative.

❑ Overall, for the new NTTI initiative to be considered a success, partnering organizations must commit to the project and both contribute and benefit in some way. Tracking attendance at community organizations and number of hits on NTTI online lesson plans, as well as formal and informal evaluation were suggested as ways to measure the success of the initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the focus group discussions and our observations of and conversation with children at a Boys and Girls Club, we make the following recommendations to NTTI as they move forward with planning and development of the proposed community-based professional development initiative.

The purpose and intent of the new program must be clarified both internally and when conveyed to potential participants.

In the focus groups, participants brainstormed ideas for implementation and maintenance of the new community-based initiative. However, they often stopped the discussion to ask for clarification about the intent of the new program.

NTTI should make decisions about who will participate in the new initiative, what the terms of full participation will be, and what the desired outcomes will be for each group (including leaders, parents, community members, as well as the school-aged children they serve). Those decisions should be clearly presented in early promotional materials.

For example, NTTI should decide whether the new community-based initiative is meant to add members of the informal learning community on to the current participants (i.e., the formal education community) or whether they intend to treat this as a separate initiative. Based on feedback obtained in this research, we recommend former.

The new initiative should build on the success of the current NTTI model by casting a wider net to include informal education leaders along with the formal

educators already involved. In this way, the initiative will complement a model within communities, where informal and formal educators seek opportunities to work together as they support children's academic needs.

Make long-term plans and expectations known to community participants.

Considering NTTI's ultimate goal that this new initiative will be self-sustaining in each community, we recommend that Thirteen/WNET NTTI staff clearly state these expectations and provide the necessary guidance. NTTI plans to give an implementation grant to participating communities as a catalyst to launch the project. After the first couple of years, the community will be expected to secure their own local funding to sustain the project. Guidance to participants may include suggestions about which organization should take the lead and possible foundations to consider approaching for funding.

Focus on the value added by an expanded NTTI initiative within the community.

In developing the expanded initiative, NTTI staff at Thirteen/WNET should acknowledge the pre-existing partnerships and collaborative efforts within a community and emphasize the added value of NTTI throughout the community. NTTI should highlight the teaching strategies it can provide that can bring new ideas for activities and additional uses for existing technology. The design and method of conducting an NTTI lesson lead to the benefits enjoyed both by leaders and by children.

Promotional materials for the new initiative should highlight the strengths of partnering.

Potential participants and community funders perceive the act of collaborating as enhancing community projects. Through partnerships, more children can be reached and they can be exposed to more diverse resources and learning opportunities. Funders should understand that the initiative is intended to rely heavily on well-established partnerships where each participating organization will have set responsibilities, goals, and services to contribute.

Take advantage of existing spaces as well as existing resources.

If the community-based educational initiative is treated as an extension of the current NTTI model, then NTTI should encourage the use of all possible resources and spaces available within the community, including using the space and resources in schools after school hours.

The venues for NTTI lessons will need to be tailored to the needs and resources of each community. Because Boys and Girls Clubs are often used as an unstructured setting, the NTTI lessons may be better received if delivered to Boys and Girls Club children during a field trip to a community or cultural institution. Similar to schools, children go on field trips from after school programs. The community institutions visited could be an ideal way to integrate and enhance in-school and after school activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVALUATION OF THE PILOT INITIATIVE

Goals of the proposed initiative include expanding upon the current NTTI program to increase the number of trained adults working with school aged children, to broaden the diversity of those trained, and to make the program self-sustaining at the community level.

NTTI's planned next steps include developing a pilot version of the community-based professional development initiative. GRG recommends that NTTI consult with evaluators to discuss and refine specific pilot program goals and objectives, select one or two pilot sites, develop a specific evaluation plan, and move forward with the proposed initiative.

We recommend that NTTI finalize plans for the purpose of the initiative, including who will be involved, and how it will be implemented in the new settings. Based on those specific plans, a clear set of goals and objectives for the new initiative should be set by NTTI.

Feedback from the pilot participants about their successes as well as any challenges they encountered can be incorporated into national promotional materials. Materials should highlight what potential participants can expect to experience and how their community will benefit from involvement. Based on challenges faced by pilot participants, NTTI can provide suggestions to resolve similar potential barriers to participation and/or implementation.

Goodman Research Group, Inc.

929 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 2A
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Tel: (617) 491-7033
Fax: (617) 864-2399

info@grginc.com
www.grginc.com