Building an effective tutor/mentor program is simple. Making it work is a bit more difficult. It takes 12 years to help a first grader finish high school. It could take another 5-10 years until he/she is launched in a career.

--Daniel F. Bassill, President of Tutor/Mentor Institute, LLC and the Tutor/Mentor Connection
This essay is a companion essay to one titled “Steps to Start a Tutor/Mentor Program” which you can also find in the Tutor/Mentor Institute Section.

The ideas presented here were the guiding principles in the organization, structure and operations of the volunteer-based tutor/mentor programs which Dan Bassill led in Chicago from 1975 to 2011. They are part of a collection of ideas shared at http://www.tutormentorexchange.net

We recommend that you read that presentation prior to reviewing this one.
At this time, the biggest obstacle to involving more children and caring adults in tutor/mentor programs is the need for more of the programs themselves, as well as the need for a more consistent flow of resources (dollars, volunteers, training, technology, etc.) to existing programs.

See maps like this at http://www.tutormentorprogramlocator.net

Shaded areas have poverty concentrations of 20%-40% and above. Circles are locations of organizations that offer various forms of tutoring, homework help and/or mentoring during non-school hours.
Starting a Program is just the first challenge of mentoring kids to careers.

Recruiting students, volunteers and donors and keeping a program growing from year to year is an even larger challenge.

The biggest challenge may be innovating activities and inspiring youth and volunteers, so that the youth becomes a more engaged learner and the volunteer begins to act like an extra aunt, uncle or parent.
Our goal is that comprehensive, mentor-rich tutor/mentor programs be operating in every poverty neighborhood of the Chicago region.

In the following pages we’ll illustrate planning steps that can help this vision become a reality.
Every successful business includes some of the same fundamentals. Think of your tutor/mentor program as a business.

A Vision

Your vision and mission must be large enough, and far reaching enough, that other people will be willing to join you, contribute their time, and that some will be willing to provide money to pay the bills.

The ideas expressed in this and all other Tutor/Mentor Institute essays focus on long-term programs that connect with youth as early as elementary school and stay connected through high school and beyond.

Not all mentoring strategies are designed with such a long-term purpose.
Commitment to Quality

This information was shared from 1993 to 2011 with all volunteers/staff at the Cabrini Connections Program in Chicago

- While most contributors to a tutor/mentor program’s success are volunteers, with life commitments of higher priority than those normally attached to paid work, Cabrini Connections itself is a business, where a commitment to excellence, and an urgency of purpose, determine how successful it is in achieving its mission.

- It is critical that staff and volunteers understand this commitment and that every member of the organization learn to contribute as much as they can, within this framework. Simply put, once a commitment to perform a task, paid or volunteer, is accepted, it is expected that the task will be performed to a high standard of excellence, as one would expect in any work environment.

- To be successful, in a volunteer-based organization, leaders must work to minimize over commitment and maximize clarity of purpose, communication and expectations, so that few volunteers or staff are ever placed in circumstances where they cannot achieve their commitments, and that failure becomes a cause for disillusionment or departure from the Cabrini Connections organization.

- A second premise behind this philosophy is that the work of Cabrini Connections is long-term and extends far beyond the geographic boundaries of Cabrini-Green. There are millions of young people in America who need the support of mentors and tutors such as intended by the Cabrini Connections program. And in neighborhoods where this need is the greatest, a system of support needs to be constructed that parallels the child’s development from birth to a point where he/she is effectively anchored in mainstream America.

- This means that Cabrini Connections seeks to build a commitment among its students and volunteers to continue the work of the organization for the rest of a lifetime, even beyond the time the person is physically connected to Cabrini Connections. Once a Boy Scout, always a Boy Scout; once a Marine, always a Marine, are the best analogies to represent this goal. When a volunteer joins Cabrini Connections they do so with an unfocused commitment to help a child. Their experience with this organization, no matter how long or short, should not diminish this commitment, but should build it and show means whereby that commitment can be manifested wherever the person travels in a lifetime and through whatever business, civic or family role the person finds him/herself in.

- This same commitment extends to students who benefit from Cabrini Connections programs. Even while receiving benefit it is the goal of the organization that these children begin to help other students achieve personal growth and success. And once established in mainstream America, it is expected that alumni of Cabrini Connections will serve, with volunteer alumni, in a growing cadre of experienced volunteers, leaders, donors and advocates to help a growing number of children escape the cycle of poverty and hopelessness they are born to.

- Most volunteers begin their participation in program leadership as a member of one or more of the Volunteer Committees which are empowered to spearhead the planning, development and evaluation of each program categories. These committees are given great latitude and responsibility in developing projects, and it is from their efforts that the program maintains a constant high level of creativity, enthusiasm and effectiveness. Volunteers are recruited on a continuous basis to serve on one of these committees.
The “inverted pyramid” is a symbol of a new style of business leadership.

Instead of the CEO or leader being at the TOP of the chain of command, he/she is at the bottom of the leadership pyramid. The organizers of your program must take this role.

The CEO’s role is to communicate a vision that energizes the entire enterprise around a single, long-term goal, while providing resources to help members of the organization use their own time, talent and dedication to achieve that goal.

Think of your tutor/mentor program as a business.
The T/MC seeks to connect everyone in the Chicago region who wants to seek kids in poverty move to careers.

T/MC incorporates concepts of adult-to-youth mentoring into our core strategy because providing greater adult support to youth is a proven way to help kids be more successful in school and life.

After many years of leading a tutor/mentor program (since 1975) while also working for a large retail corporation (1973-1990), we have borrowed ideas of Total Quality Management (TQM) and applied them to the on-going process improvement that is needed in any volunteer-based tutor/mentor program.
A gigantic commitment

“The real key to building a successful tutor/mentor program is the philosophy and the persistence of the staff involved, and their dogged determination to enable and encourage these young people to succeed.”  Quote from the Brandies University evaluation of the Quantum Opportunities Program
Building a Team of Tutor/Mentor Leaders

You cannot do it alone. While one person can, and must, provide the leadership, and often, the vision, it takes a team to build a program that will last long enough to do any good.

You must be able to recruit people and organizations to help, and find ways to share your vision and delegate responsibility. If you recruit from business, colleges, churches and hospitals, your team can be people who have access to the resources you need to succeed.
Implementation of the Operating Philosophy

For each task, assignment and/or responsibility within the tutor/mentor program/organization, the person accepting responsibility must be able to clearly write the

- Goal
- Steps to achieve the goal
- Help needed, if any
- Time frame in which goal is to be accomplished
- How the job/task relates to other jobs/tasks within the organization structure to achieve its overall goals

For instance, the weekly role of Attendance Check-In, relates to

- Personal recognition/self-image - the most important first exposure of any student/volunteer to the organization. A positive reception, with name and status recognition, is the foundation upon all other success
- Communication of weekly strategies to volunteer and student, which builds satisfaction with the organization
- Provides accurate records for program evaluation, planning and fund raising and pr activities
- Provides information for effective follow-up with students, parents, volunteers and/or schools
Good Planning – The Key to Effective Organizations

A commitment to excellence requires a common approach to how members of the organization define needs and propose solutions. At Cabrini Connections, this is intended to become a natural and on-going process, applied to each task/job within the organization, by each member of the organization, from student through CEO.

The planning steps are a continuous process of evaluation, challenge and improvement that seeks always to better the organization and is never satisfied to remain at past performance levels. This requires:

- **Research & Development** - through the T/MC, Cabrini Connections members are given continuous access to examples of successful practices of other tutor/mentor programs in Chicago and nationally. Regular review and comparison of these programs to Cabrini Connections needs/programs, always looking to improve the work being done by ourselves.

- **Evaluation of current programs/structure and results.** We must find ways to quantify our results in ways that week-to-week, month-to-month and year-to-year comparisons can be made. This allows us to challenge our premises and practices and provides focus on areas which are working well and might to be duplicated and areas not working as well as hoped which need to be improved or restructured.

- **What if.../Proposal of new solutions/programs.** New ideas are encouraged, whether they be for small changes, major overhauls or additions and/or subtractions. However, those which presented in a written format that has been thought through and challenged by the presenter, as if he/she were the organization’s CEO and the person responsible for implementing them, have the best chance of acceptance and implementation. This process also allows that a good idea, that is not immediately accepted, can be stored and shared and perhaps resurrected at a later date when need and/or resources are more favorable to its acceptance.

- **Articulation.** We must be able to clearly state any job/goal/idea within these guides. This is the only way others can be recruited to help achieve the goal.
  - What is our mission?
  - How do we define success?
  - How do we get there, step by step?
  - Define policy, where appropriate, to determine how we get there?

- **Capacity/Resource Building.** An ability and commitment to recruit volunteers from within and outside of the organization will ultimately determine our success. Each individual has limited individual capacity to help the organization meet its goals, defined by time, other responsibilities and financial limitations. Each person who is able to recruit additional people and delegate responsibility will leverage his/her own capacities over and over again.
Good Planning – The Key to Effective Organizations

This information was shared from 1993 to 2011 with all volunteers/staff at the Cabrini Connections Program in Chicago

• R&D/F&L = success. Recruit and delegate. Follow-up and lead. The organization must recruit to its leadership, paid and volunteer, individuals who can succeed in this capacity.

• Since the organization’s policy is to recruit its leaders from within, an ability to recognize and nurture this talent, beginning with entry-level volunteers is critical and should be esteemed.

• Training - of staff and leadership volunteers. The organization cannot assume that its operating philosophy, at the board of directors’ level or at the program level, is one that is automatically understood. The organization must be committed to devote time and resources, plus continued energy, to building an organization-wide understanding and commitment and ability to implement this philosophy.

• Program design/recruitment - As each program and/or project is developed for Cabrini Connections, each of the above steps must be incorporated into the steps of building the program.

• Implementation - While these steps may seem bureaucratic, the actual goal is that Cabrini Connections operate in a fast-paced, non-bureaucratic manner. As the steps become second nature, they become internalized in how members of the organization determine needs, develop solutions, obtain approval, design and implement programs.

• Evaluation - As long as meaningful evaluation is built into each program, task, job, there is little danger of the organization moving quickly into new directions, then becoming handicapped by continuing in directions that clearly do not work or turn out to be inappropriate to the mission of Cabrini Connections. Evaluation, beginning with process and comparison to working models, and continuing with quantifiable measures, will provide the on-going tools from which future growth will develop.

While these are leadership concepts developed by Dan Bassill during 35 years of leading a tutor/mentor program, they are not easily learned by new and constantly changing employees in small non profits. Within the daily on-the job realities there are too many things to do and not enough people to do them.

Tutor/Mentor Institute vision is that these ideas are incorporated into a college program that prepares young people for careers leading volunteer-based organizations.
Committee Organizing Principles

The ability of the tutoring program to develop leadership for each of it’s projects has been the secret of it’s success. However, in no case is the leader of a project expected to be the only worker on that committee. In fact, one of the key responsibilities of leaders is to organize a committee to whom work can be delegated and from whom leadership succession can come.

Each committee has differing functional needs from its members, depending on the nature of the project. However, every committee needs some common traits from it’s members to be successful. Program leaders at CABRINI CONNECTIONS are asked to evaluate their committee membership for these traits and develop recruitment tactics to bring new members into the committee when they see a void.

- **Leader** — Communicates project’s VISION and GOAL. Liaison to other committees.
- **Communicator** — Interacts with other committee members to keep them informed and motivated
- **Recruiter** — Able to bring new volunteers to help meet committee goals
- **Organizer** — Able to sequence events and coordinate work flow to accomplish goal.
- **Scrounger** — Find/gets materials needed to accomplish task….money, donations, facilities, etc.
- **Worker** — Willing to be at a work site for a specific number of hours whenever asked.
- **Writer** — Able to put mission, advertising and other needed communications in written format.
- **Web Developer** – able to tell the organization’s stories on the internet; encourages web-based communications and collaboration
- **Artist** — Provides graphics, where needed, on certain committees
A Results-Orientated Attitude

You are building a business. The business you are building is a learning distribution system. You are distributing knowledge, motivation, love, opportunities along with a variety of other experiences to young people, and your volunteers. For the most part, you are doing this in hours when youth are not in school and when workplace volunteers are more available.

Define measurable goals. Chart and track enrollment, participation, everything you can use to help you understand what works, and what needs improvement. Visit The Center for What Works (http://www.whatworks.org) for ideas on outcome measurement.
A Research & Innovation Capacity

You must learn who else provides similar services, what types of programs are working better than others, what types of methods recruit volunteers and donors better, what strategies attract students more regularly…

Then constantly apply this information to keep your program growing from good to great. Read the book Good to Great & the Social Sector, by Jim Collins.

Learn more about innovation, creativity, etc. Visit the Process Improvement section of the T/MC Links Library at - http://tinyurl.com/TMC-innovation-links
Determine Structure

Look for ways volunteers can build student motivation, study skills, reading, writing, vocabulary and speaking skills, etc. These are habits students can take with them into the classroom, or workplace.

Use the T/MC Links Library, and conferences, to see how other programs provide tutoring, mentoring and learning supports to students. Try to build your programs from “best practices” of other programs.

Use the T/MC Program Locator on-line directory to find contact information for other programs in Chicago. [http://www.tutormentorprogramlocator.net](http://www.tutormentorprogramlocator.net)

Use search engines like [http://www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org) to find youth organizations in other cities. Participate in the November and May T/MC Conferences ([http://www.tutormentorconference.org](http://www.tutormentorconference.org)) to network and learn from other program leaders.
An Ability to Communicate

Your business will succeed or fail, depending on how well you can communicate your vision…to your partners, your funders, your volunteers, and most importantly, to the children and families you work with.

If you don’t have a computer, or know how to use it, find someone who does. One person can run a small business and communicate with the world if he/she has a computer and knows how to use the Internet for learning, networking and collaboration.

Work with other organizations in your area to build visibility for tutoring/mentoring, and to recruit volunteers and increase funding of tutor/mentor programs.

Information on the Chicago area Tutor/Mentor Volunteer Recruitment Campaign can be found at [www.tutormentorexchange.net/chicagoland-volunteer-recruitment](http://www.tutormentorexchange.net/chicagoland-volunteer-recruitment)
Resource Building Capacity

You will need to find a place to hold your tutor/mentor sessions, which is safe enough for children and volunteers to attend on a regular basis. If you can get this space donated to you, your start-up and on-going operational expenses will be much lower.

You will constantly need to find money and materials. As you expand the types of knowledge you deliver to youth and volunteers, you must find people who will bring that knowledge to your program.

Recruiting volunteers or staff who have a talent for finding resources will make your program operate much more effectively.
A Commitment to On-Going Training and Learning

While the goal of your program is to provide learning opportunities (training) to students, you must be able to provide information on an on-going basis to your volunteers and staff.

In a small organization with too many things to do every day, this can be one of your greatest challenges.

Seek to create a learning culture, where youth, volunteers and leaders draw from Internet libraries, and create a collective intelligence for your organization.
Commitment to Customer Service

…the bottom line is that you have three customers whom you must serve equally well, at all times. At the Cabrini Connections program we took pride on compliments such as “this is well organized”. That means we have succeed in removing obstacles to a volunteer or student succeeding with our program. It means we have given them less reason to stop coming each week. Your customers are:

-Your students, who are volunteers and must be motivated to attend each week, for multiple years, even when it is cold, or rainy, or when they might want to just hang with their friends;
-Your volunteers, who will leave your program, or not contribute as much help as you need, if they are not satisfied with their experience or the level of support they receive;
-Your donors, whom you depend on for funds as your program grows from year to year.
Process Improvement

Once your program is started, your job is to sustain and nurture it from year to year, so that it is able to serve children on a continuous basis, for the number of years it takes for students to grow to be productive adults. This involves continuous critical review of your process, your results and your programs, with on-going incremental additions, revisions and deletions, based on your own results, and what you are learning from other tutor/mentor programs throughout the country (and the world).

Each year your review should lead to your plan for the next year’s growth. If you do this you will surprise yourself in a few years as you look back from where you and a small group of people began your program and see the great progress you have accomplished – and the many lives you have affected.

Use the [http://www.tutormentorconnection.org](http://www.tutormentorconnection.org) web site as a regular resource in this process.
According to Mark Cohen, a professor at Vanderbilt University’s Owen Graduate School of Management, “High risk youths who are kept out of trouble through intervention programs could save society as much as $2 million a youth per lifetime”.

Review similar research and articles in the No Child Left Behind section of the LINKS LIBRARY at - http://tinyurl.com/TMLibrary-research
Summary

Every child who is helped by a volunteer-based tutor/mentor program to become a tax-paying adult represents a savings and an investment. We are offered with the choice of a 12 to 16-year investment as a child becomes an adult and becomes a taxpayer, vs the potential lifetime costs of public services associated with children who live adult lives that are a drain on social resources, and who raise future children who re-enter the cycle of poverty.

Volunteer-based tutoring/mentoring programs can not-only help individual inner-city children have a wider range of possibilities for long-term personal fulfillment, but they can also engage adults who don’t live in poverty, and educate them to become more personally involved as they build their bonds with the kids they connect with in tutor/mentor programs.

These programs enrich the lives of the volunteers, as much as they support the growth of youth skills and aspirations.
Summary

Children can’t realize personal goals without the necessary skills. They cannot secure rewarding jobs and personal happiness without self-esteem, a good education and good learning habits. They can’t reach their full potential without a network of positive role models who demonstrate these skills, and who expand the experiences and learning opportunities for kids living in areas of highly concentrated poverty.

Tutoring/mentoring programs are infused with these types of role models and learning opportunities. It is up to each of us to provide the leadership and resources needed to build and sustain such programs.

Daniel F. Bassill, President, CEO, Tutor/Mentor Institute, LLC, Tutor/Mentor Connection
Operating Principles: A mentoring-to-career strategy of the Tutor/Mentor Connection

More youth stay in school, are safe in non-school hours, graduate, and move to careers

Commitment to Customer Service

On-Going Training and Learning

Resource Building Capacity

An Ability to Communicate

A Research & Innovation Capacity

A Results-Orientated Attitude

Building a Team

Commitment

Vision

This type of organization is not achieved in one or two years.

It will never be achieved without the work done at the base of this pyramid each year.
Once the fundamentals are in place, you are ready for success. You must build a commitment to these principles into your operating philosophy and organizational culture.

Next you must consider the **PLANNING CYCLE**

As you organize a new program there are a sequence of steps that can help you:

**STEPS TO START A PROGRAM**
Learn more about Starting and Sustaining a Tutor/Mentor Program

Visit the Tutor/Mentor Institute at:
http://www.tutormentorexchange.net

Participate in Tutor/Mentor Conferences
http://www.tutormentorconference.org

Read the Tutor/Mentor Blog
http://tutormentor.blogspot.com

email tutormentor2@earthlink.net
You may use this for planning and training. If you find the material valuable to you, please consider sending a donation or a letter of appreciation.

If you would like to have Dan Bassill come speak at your organization, be part of a conference, or explain the purpose of this and other ideas of the Tutor/Mentor Institute, LLC email tutormentor2@earthlink.net to discuss fees.
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