

**BOOST For Kids
National Partnership for Reinventing Government**

Expression of Interest from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II

On behalf of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II Partnership, we urge your consideration of our community as a Boost For Kids partner. Our Resolves II Partnership mission is to forge alliances to better serve our common customers: children, families, and adults who live in disadvantaged communities. The opportunity for greater flexibility to use our resources more productively is exactly what we seek. Sometimes this requires federal and state waivers; other times it requires us to use our resources in non-traditional, but strategic, ways.

Recently, for example, the Social Services Department contracted with the public schools to provide an intensive after-school program of academics to those children performing least well in school, i.e. those receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. This non-traditional use of resources stemmed from the recognition that the schools are pivotal in this community's fight against poverty. If we fail to educate our children, we know that we will see them at our Social Services doorstep and possibly, ultimately, in our prisons.

Here are a few other examples of ways in which we have joined forces creatively on behalf of our children and families:

Readiness to Cut Red Tape

- We are automatically certifying our school children for free and reduced price lunch by providing our Food Stamps tape to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools so that they do not have to send as many individual forms home to be signed by parents.**
- Our Communities in Schools and Success By Six programs are prioritizing TANF families for receipt of services.**
- Our Medicaid Managed Care program, which serves all TANF recipients in Mecklenburg, requires that parenting classes be offered at no charge.**

- Our library system has two storytellers who bring story times to daycare centers and provide small deposit collections of books for young people.

- The Bright Beginnings Pre-Kindergarten Program is serving 2,100 students this year, laying the foundation for early school success. It is a pre-emergent literacy program, emphasizing language and early literacy development. TANF children, and children in foster care, are prioritized for admission.

- The Police and Health, Mental Health and Community Services have joined forces so that when a child experiences violence or has witnessed violence, a mental health therapist is dispatched to assess the child's psychological and emotional status, and to refer to therapy if appropriate.

- Our Family Preservation Program, begun in 1994, includes cross-training police and child welfare workers to improve the process of protecting children. The cross-training enhances communication and understanding, with a goal of decreasing the number of unnecessary child removals from households.

- In a joint effort with the Charlotte Housing Authority and Representative Sue Myrick in Congress, the Mecklenburg Social Services Department fought successfully to align the sanctions in the TANF program with HUD regulations governing Family Self-Sufficiency programs. As a result, persons who fail to comply with TANF requirements, and live in public housing, will have their housing benefits curtailed. Thus, the messages that work is necessary, and assistance is temporary, are being reinforced for our customers.

- A Child's Place, a United Way agency, provides a stable educational setting and support services to homeless children, and social services to their families. It also offers case management and support services at specific school sites to families that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Using Data to Measure Progress and Manage Resources to Improve Child Well-being

- The Homeless Services Network, comprised of representatives of more than 70 nonprofit and government organizations locally, produces an annual continuum of care plan, prioritizes needs, and speaks with one voice to try to meet the needs of homeless families. Together with the Department of

Social Services, the Network is currently involved in a research project to evaluate the effects of changes in cash assistance time limits. The knowledge to be gained is whether or not non-government human services agencies in Mecklenburg County, particularly those who serve the homeless, are experiencing increases in the number of clients served since the initiation of twenty-four month time limits for cash assistance in August, 1996.

- **Through a planning grant from the Knight Foundation, a broad coalition including the police, schools, social services, Mental Health Association, Children's Law Center, Council for Children, United Way, Carolinas HealthCare System and others, are developing a strategic plan to reduce youth violence in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community.**

- **The Child Fatality Task Force, mandated by the State of North Carolina, is comprised of law-enforcement and child-serving agencies in the community. The Task Force investigates all child fatalities and proposes remedies to prevent recurrences.**

- **The North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, funded, in part by the State, reports annually on a multitude of indicators of child well-being across all 100 counties in North Carolina. In Mecklenburg, that data is used by the Social Services Department, among others, to track our progress year to year, and to compare ourselves with other counties. Examples of those measures include rates of substantiated child abuse, number of children in poverty, number of teens not working and not in school.**

- **The United Way, Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte jointly sponsor a Community Needs Survey every three years to find out the major unmet needs in the County. This is a telephone survey, and it is a self-report. Among the questions asked are :**

- **Whether the children are being raised by a single parent**
- **Whether there are problems getting along with others**
- **Whether there are problems with skipping school**
- **Whether there are problems with court or police**
- **Whether the child needs a tutor or mentor**

These results are used for program planning purposes and as supportive data for grant applications.

- **The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County co-sponsor a Quality of Life Index every three years, which measures neighborhood conditions over time. Among the indicators in that document are:**

- **% Children ready for first grade**

- % Children passing school competency exams
- % Births to adolescents
- % Students who drop out of school
- The Juvenile Crime Rate

- The North Carolina Division of Social Services, the Mecklenburg Social Services Department, the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have an ongoing partnership to share data on dropout rates, absences, suspensions end of grade and of course scores for children receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The purpose is to examine the impacts of welfare reform and to target additional resources where necessary to break the vicious cycle of poverty and poor academic performance.

- Through our Healthy Carolinians initiative we are tracking the pregnancy rate among adolescents, and devising cooperative strategies to bring that rate as low as possible. The pregnancy rate among adolescents aged 15 –19 fell 6.8% in 1997 to 76.2 pregnancies per 1000 females aged 15 – 19. Pregnancy rates for girls 10-14 years of age also dropped from 3.0 to 2.1 in 1997, a decrease of almost 30% to the lowest rate since 1990.

Commitment to Long-Term Goals and a Sustained Effort

- Several years ago, when private grant funding ended for the Success by Six effort, designed to prepare children for success in school by age six, a number of other entities came forward to replace those funds. The County agreed to pay for several of the community development worker positions, and the Junior League and Urban League teamed up to provide job-readiness services to the parents of these youngsters.

- There has been a multi-year State and local partnership to improve the quality of child day care in this community. Through Smart Start funds (State dollars), additional training has been provided to day care teachers, and bonuses have been paid to those who have completed additional training and stayed at the same day care center. A local board has made the decisions about how to allocate those funds.

- When funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for substance abuse demand reduction came to an end, Mecklenburg County provided local dollars for the most effective pieces of those community-based strategies. The pieces that reach out to youth were included in the County’s funding.

- When funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for outreach and case management services to homeless persons who are mentally ill came to an end, Mecklenburg County, again, provided those dollars.

These are but a few examples of the ways in which this community has forged creative linkages to serve its children, has demonstrated a commitment to plan together and measure results, and has demonstrated a long-term commitment to sustain those initiatives that are effective.

Potential Impact of Proposed Partnership

If we are fortunate enough to become a BOOST Partner, we anticipate that we will be able to focus more holistically on families, which, ultimately, is the best way to improve the quality of life for children in this community. For example, in planning for a family's self-sufficiency, we would like to be able to work with all of the individuals who actually contribute financially and emotionally—whether they are defined as part of the household or not, by HHS, USDA, HUD, the Department of Education, etc. If the parents of a child receiving Free and Reduced Price Lunch, for example, are in need of some vocational training to improve their earning potential, we would like to be able to counsel those parents and offer assistance with the tuition, if necessary. We do not want to ignore the needs of those individuals who have the greatest impact on the quality of life for the child.

We would like to do some truly practical things that may seem unorthodox. For example, if a mother has five young children, the purchase of a washer and dryer may make a tremendous difference in the time she has available to pursue her GED, or, for a person seeking employment, local phone service can make a big difference. For children in TANF families, a clothing allowance could mean the difference between their wanting to attend school and being ashamed to attend school. We want to prevent these students from dropping out—not just work with them after the damage has been done.

In short, we are seeking:

- more flexibility in how we spend funds,
- simplification of eligibility processes, and
- Evaluation on the basis of results.

It is our contention that the time we save by simplifying eligibility would be well spent talking with our customers about their needs and how

best to meet them. This approach to service delivery is part and parcel of the philosophy that undergirds Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II.

Below is a brief description of our history, our members, and our mutual commitments. We believe it demonstrates why our community should be selected as a BOOST partner.

History

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II was organized in August 1994 to explore opportunities for collaboration among the six largest governmental institutions in Charlotte (Mecklenburg County), North Carolina.

This pioneering body began under the leadership of the six chief executive officers (CEOs) and staffs from the following institutions:

- ◆ Carolinas HealthCare System
- ◆ Central Piedmont Community College
- ◆ Charlotte Housing Authority
- ◆ Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System
- ◆ City of Charlotte
- ◆ Mecklenburg County

In the summer of 1997, these additional partners were added:

- ◆ Charlotte Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ NC DSS Child Support Enforcement
- ◆ NC Employment Security Commission
- ◆ Mecklenburg Ministries
- ◆ Novant Health, Inc./Presbyterian Healthcare
- ◆ United Way

The mission of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II is to forge alliances while striving to serve their same customers: the children, families, and adults who live in disadvantaged communities.

The namesake for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II is the Mecklenburg Resolves document, written in 1775 by the hardy colonists who banded together for a common cause: their intent to live by their own rules and not those of the King of England. The purpose of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II is not to secede from the present structure of government, but to rally resources around the needs of their common customers.

Historically, these institutions were accustomed to functioning independently of each other. They often found themselves pitted against each other as increasing demands for services grew. As each new fiscal year approached, competition for the same funding from local, state and federal pocketbooks resulted in turfism. Over the years, as state and federal money has continued to dwindle, these branches of government have expected local entities to pick up the slack - to do more with less. The CEOs realized it was critical for institutions to work together to solve common problems.

However, solving funding problems was not the only objective of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II. For the CEOs, working together meant participating in open and honest dialogue about their need to know and understand each other. They agreed to learn more about each other's organizations and the internal struggles inherent in managing huge bureaucracies, providing mandated services, and surviving economic and political pressures. Their conversations also covered new territory resulting in an important discovery: they each shared the same desire to improve the quality of life for children, families, adults and neighborhoods. This desire led them to identify areas where common threads could be found within their institutions. Turfism was being set aside.

For example, in the funding arena, the financial officers of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II agreed to share information about existing revenue and potential funding opportunities. This has produced good stewardship of dollars and the enhancement of programs for families, children and adults across systems. Automation is another area where organizations have worked in a vacuum. Each was intent on building its own system where information input and output was for internal use only. Data managers from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II learned that by sharing information across systems, customers could be served in a more timely and humane fashion. Again, the result has been the erosion of bureaucratic red tape and streamlining of service delivery to avoid duplication.

People who work in organizations, especially those where human services are provided, now find themselves intensely involved in the process of Welfare Reform. The emphasis on moving people from dependence to independence and to a higher standard of living demands the integration of community resources. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Resolves II is working with other organizations such as the Faith Community to provide "wrap-around" support in order to assist people to make the transition. For people and communities who are disadvantaged, wrapping services around them means focusing on employment and the work ethic, child care,

transportation, preschool education, community based education for adults, social supports, prevention and intervention, medical care, and affordable housing in safe areas.

A Systems Approach to Wiping Out Poverty in Mecklenburg County

Moving people from welfare to the workforce is the goal of North Carolina's Work First program. New rules now enforce sanctions for those receiving welfare benefits who do not comply with time limits and other criteria established in each individual's Personal Responsibility Contract.

Although virtually everyone agrees that the welfare system needed overhauling, several barriers continue to exist that often prevent people moving from welfare to the workforce. These barriers include welfare recipients' lack of job readiness skills, substance abuse problems and poor work ethic. Systematic, institutional barriers also exist within communities. These barriers involve fragmentation of community partners that should be working cooperatively to reduce poverty and to develop self-sufficiency among welfare recipients.

Customer Fusion Decagon

The Customer Fusion Decagon is a model designed to integrate a system of community resources to create a "synergistic effect". This synergy of resources applied to the challenge of Work First has produced a result greater than that of any one component applied alone.

The Customer Fusion Decagon has been created in Charlotte-Mecklenburg to support Work First participants. These "customers" of the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services become the hub of the decagon, as they embark on their journey towards self-sufficiency.

The systems serving as the links of the decagon are the Resolves II partners noted above in the History section.

Those who contribute their time and money to these systems, which include Mecklenburg County taxpayers, expect a high return on their investment. The outcome they expect is a safer, healthy, livable, prosperous, unified and well-governed community. Their expectations are made into public policy by elected officials. In Mecklenburg County, Priority 2000 is the set of goals developed by the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners to ensure by the year 2000 that Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a safe, healthy, livable, prosperous, unified and well-governed community. To attain these goals, it is critical that fusion occurs among the ten systems, on behalf of DSS customers.

How Fusion Works

People in systems generate fusion by supporting each other to reach common goals. For example, 50% of those living in Charlotte public housing receive cash assistance. The Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services and the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) recently formalized an agreement to share data for eligibility purposes, jointly investigate residents suspected of welfare fraud, and jointly provide better case management services to residents participating in Work First and the Family Self-Sufficiency program with the CHA. All of these efforts contribute to the goal of people having a safe, prosperous and livable environment.

The City of Charlotte has a large role in ensuring a safe community in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In a first of its kind initiative, cross-training and co-location have occurred between Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officers and child welfare workers to improve the process of protecting children. The City is also taking part in a five-year plan to improve public transportation services to help people have better access to employment opportunities, which will help Work First participants. In many other ways, the City of Charlotte is a partner of Mecklenburg County in working towards a safe, healthy, livable, prosperous, unified and well-governed community.

The State of North Carolina plays a vital role in how Mecklenburg DSS relates to Work First participants through the Child Support Enforcement program, employment services and issuance of benefits. When necessary, absent parent are brought before the courts to pay for the support of their children. The state's criminal justice system also is a key part of the system dedicated to reducing crime, and creating a safe community.

In another unique effort, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services have entered into a contract where the Chamber markets Work First to the business community. The Chamber also is involved in developing businesses in fragile and threatened parts of the inner city of Charlotte, called City-Within-A-City. Within this area, a 40-acre business park will bring employment to inner-city residents. The Chamber supports the goals of Priority 2000 by working towards a livable and prosperous community.

The Faith Community in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which includes churches, synagogues, and mosques, has been encouraged by Mecklenburg DSS to provide a network of social supports for people who are moving from welfare to work. Houses of worship are not only preaching the value of work as a way to

minister to this population, they also are offering mentoring, day care and job opportunities. Thus, the faith community contributes to making this community livable and unified.

Mecklenburg County is responsible for providing all of the basic human support services to its citizens. The Economic Services Division of Mecklenburg DSS promotes the concept of self-sufficiency to its customers. The Mecklenburg Park and Recreation Department provides recreational facilities to ensure that people of all ages have safe places to participate in activities that enhance their quality of life. The Department also targets programs for at-risk youths and inner-city families, offering positive activities and experiences to build self-esteem and confidence. The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County is dedicated to literacy education and cultural enrichment opportunities. Mecklenburg's mental health services assist people in moving from addiction to recovery, which is a barrier to employment. All of these services contribute to the well-being of this community.

Health care is being provided for Mecklenburg DSS customers who receive Medicaid through Health Maintenance Organizations. Until recently, this population has had limited access to preventive health care and education. The easier accessibility of health care will have a positive effect on our customers' ability to stay employed, and thus contribute to the County's goal of a healthy, prosperous, and unified community.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) provide the foundation for learning so students can develop job-readiness skills and learn the value of work. Mecklenburg DSS is a strong advocate of the preschool program that was launched in order to help children develop the fundamental skills that prepare them for future learning. Without such early education, children -- particularly those born into poverty -- rarely if ever catch up with their peers in school. Mecklenburg DSS has an ongoing relationship with CMS regarding services to DSS customers and their children. The community benefits from CMS' dedication to ensuring a good start for its children.

Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) provides community-based educational opportunities, and is an important component in the system of developing work-force-ready students and enhancing the skills of those already in the work force. CPCC is on the front lines for attaining the goals of a livable and prosperous community.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg community features a number of non-profit organizations that provide cultural enrichment opportunities, prevention, education, and social support groups. All of these services are important to

connect customers who have been disenfranchised from the rest of the community.

Poverty is the fundamental barrier to obtaining the kind of community we want for our children and families. These ten systems fused together create the opportunity for a focused, cooperative, community-wide attack on poverty. Our membership in BOOST will enhance the effectiveness of our arsenal.