

## Chapter 7

# Sustaining And Institutionalizing Service-Learning

### Summary

A primary goal of the CalServe Initiative is to promote the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning in California's K-12 schools. This chapter suggests that three overarching factors are important to the sustainability of a partnership's service-learning initiative—articulating a clear vision and plan, balancing program improvement and expansion, and developing strategies to avoid common coordination and implementation problems. The isolation of these factors resulted from analyses of narrative data from 28 Local Evaluation Reports (1999-2000); interview data from partnership coordinators, teachers, administrators, and community members at the seven intensive evaluation CalServe sites; and researcher site visit field notes.

The first suggestion is that *visioning* is important for sustaining service-learning partnerships. Data from this study revealed that few partnerships had a clear, comprehensive vision of what their service-learning partnership might look like in the future. This absence of a long-term vision was frequently related to the following conditions:

- *Lack of Long-Term Funding*: A partnerships' ability to engage in long-term visioning and planning was compromised by an over-reliance on soft money to sustain key elements of the initiative, such as program coordination;
- *Absence of Models of Successful Partnerships*: Partnerships had difficulty visualizing and articulating what a successfully sustained service-learning partnership might look like; and
- *Inadequate Planning*: Partnerships tended to concentrate on current partnership activities (e.g., implementing the activities components of their initiative) and did not have a clearly defined plan for the future.

To strengthen partnerships' ability to create a long-term vision for their partnership, it is recommended that they be encouraged to support key personnel and core program elements with district income, that they be provided with examples of successfully sustained partnerships, and that the development of a strategic plan for the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning be part of the CalServe grants process.

A second suggestion is that partnerships should emphasize not only expanding the *quantity* of their service-learning activities but also ensuring the *quality* of all activities implemented. Many CalServe partnerships in this study tended to focus their efforts and activities on quantity issues, working toward the goal of engaging every student in at least one service-learning experience at each grade span. However, to sustain their efforts over time, partnerships must also focus on building the quality of their service-learning efforts. It is recommended that CalServe encourage the specification of both quality and quantity goals as partnerships develop and articulate their long-term objectives for service-learning.

A third observation of this study was that several coordination and implementation issues often affect a partnership's ability to sustain service-learning. In particular, three features characterized the better sustained partnerships:

- *Continuity*: Partnerships that were successful in maintaining their focus and working toward program improvement were characterized by continuity in their key personnel. Turnover of partnership coordinators, school administrators, participating teachers, and evaluators hindered efforts to sustain and institutionalize service-learning;
- *Connections to Other Education Reforms*: Connecting service-learning to other important educational initiatives in the district helped to leverage support and build a stronger institutional districtwide infrastructure for service-learning;
- *Issue Focus*: Partnerships that focused many of their service-learning activities on a social issue that was relevant and important in their communities tended to have ongoing sustained leadership, substantial administrative support, and strong, collaborative school/community relationships.

To improve and sustain coordination and implementation, a number of recommendations are offered. School districts should be required to provide a financial match to support key positions and activities as part of the granting process. In particular, partnership coordinators should not be dependant on soft money or be placed in positions that have an unmanageable number of responsibilities. Partnerships should be encouraged to use teachers experienced in service-learning to train new teachers. Finally, CalServe grants should be provided to fund the development of formal districtwide strategic plans for sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning.

## **Background**

One of the long-term goals of the CalServe Initiative is to promote the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning in California's K-12 schools. For individual partnerships, the ultimate goal is to institutionalize service-learning districtwide by providing every student with at least one service-learning opportunity at each grade span (K-5, 6-8, 9-12). The CalServe grants are intended to provide seed money that supports the initiation of new service-learning partnerships or the expansion and advancement of existing ones. It is expected that once the initial grant period ends, the partnerships will have built an infrastructure that can sustain and expand service-learning over time.

Even though the 1997-2000 CalServe local evaluation process did not focus directly on investigating the issue of partnerships' sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning, several themes emerged from the local evaluation reports and interview data which shed light on elements that potentially support and hinder partnerships' ability to sustain and institutionalize service-learning. This chapter discusses these themes and provides suggestions for how partnerships' might sustain and ultimately institutionalize their service-learning initiative.

## **Defining Sustainability**

What exactly is meant by the "sustainability" of service-learning? The CalServe grants process requires all partnerships to address the issue of service-learning sustainability from the outset. Specifically, the 1997 CalServe proposal review rubric included components that comprise a set of important elements for sustaining service-learning partnership (See Exhibit 7.1 and Appendix 2-L).

**Exhibit 7.1**  
**CalServe Components For Sustainable Partnerships**  
*(adapted from the CalServe Request for Application, 1997)*

VISION AND RESULTS

- Demonstrated Effectiveness
- Vision
- Systematic Educational Connections
- Community Improvement
- Indicators of Success

CURRICULAR DESIGN AND PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

- Curricular Integration and Meaningful Service
- Comprehensive Professional Development
- Sustained Teacher Involvement
- Recognition

ORGANIZATIONAL AND PARTNERSHIP CAPACITY

- School-Community Partnership
- Coordination Capacity
- Organizational Commitment

PROGRAMMATIC AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

- Demonstrated Sustainability
- Local Policies and Standards
- Demonstrated Reduced Reliance

EVALUATION AND QUALITY CONTROL PLAN

- Assessing Curriculum, Learning, and Civic Responsibility
- School Improvement
- Community Impact
- Program Improvement
- Staffing Coordination

These components provide the foundation on which all CalServe partnerships are built. Proposal reviewers take into account a partnership's potential to sustain its service-learning initiative by considering the ways in which partnerships have incorporated these components in their partnership plan. A similar set of sustainability components, with slight variation, form the basis for the beginning or "developmental" category of partnerships.

In light of these components, the issue of service-learning “sustainability” appears to focus, at the very least, on a partnership’s ability to continue its service-learning implementation and expansion activities beyond the grant period. Implicit in this notion of sustainability is a partnership’s ability to secure long-term funding that will support the future activities of the partnership as well as to garner long-term school and district support for service-learning. In other words, after the CalServe funding ends, a partnership that has “sustained” service-learning will be able to continue to implement those activities that will help make service-learning a part of the district’s regular instructional practice.

In a national report to the Corporation for National Service, Michael Kramer (2000) attempted to define what it means to sustain and ultimately “institutionalize” service-learning in K-12 education. Kramer’s study found that although there are many approaches to sustaining service-learning, all of the approaches are predicated on the existence of three conditions: (1) a legitimization of the practice of service-learning; (2) broad communication of the effectiveness of service-learning; and (3) proof that service-learning has an impact on student performance. Kramer suggests that service-learning can only be sustained when the practice is “routine, widespread, legitimized, expected, supported, permanent, and resilient” (p. 17).

Based on these characteristics, the researchers at SLRDC conducted an analysis of the CalServe local evaluation reports and the intensive evaluation sites’ interview data to identify some of the characteristics that appeared to promote or hinder partnerships’ ability to sustain their service-learning initiative. The issues with which partnerships grappled as they worked to sustain service-learning in their districts were noted. From

this analysis, three interrelated factors were identified that appear to be key to sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning. A better understanding of these factors can help partnerships improve the sustainability of service-learning in their district(s). Each of these factors is discussed below.

### **Factors for Sustaining and Institutionalizing Service-Learning**

The three key factors for sustaining service-learning were derived from an analysis of the following data sources: (1) narrative data from 28 Local Evaluation Reports (1999-2000); (2) interview data from partnership coordinators, teachers, administrators, and community members at the seven intensive evaluation CalServe sites; and (3) researcher field notes collected during site visits of the seven intensive evaluation partnerships. Although the factors are discussed individually, they represent an set of factors that interact with and affect one another. Therefore, to sustain their service-learning initiatives, partnerships need to find an appropriate balance among these three factors. Consideration of the three factors can help partnerships identify the most important activities that need to be implemented in order to maximize their potential for sustaining service-learning districtwide. In addition, the three factors help identify the key areas in which the state's CalServe Initiative can assist and support partnerships as they work towards the long-term advancement of service-learning.

**Visioning.** A review of CalServe partnerships' local evaluations suggested that a key factor for sustaining service-learning might be the establishment of a formal, long-term vision for the service-learning partnership. Few partnerships had established a clear, comprehensive vision of what their service-learning partnerships would look like

when CalServe funding ceased. The absence of long-term vision appears to be tied to a number of conditions including excessive reliance on limited-term grants and fundraising, too few examples of partnerships that have successfully implemented and sustained service-learning, and too little consideration of how implemented activities contribute to the long-term sustainability of service-learning. Each of these conditions is discussed briefly below.

*Funding.* The ways in which partnerships use their funds can influence their ability to carry out their long-term vision for their service-learning initiative. Specifically, the total reliance on soft money such as the CalServe grant to implement the service-learning initiative puts pressure on the partnership to raise funds continuously to keep the program viable. Data suggest that the time and energy needed to secure the program's immediate financial stability takes away from a partnership's ability to plan the long-term future of the initiative.

While no information was collected about the ways partnerships expended their CalServe grant dollars, data from the intensive partnership interviews suggest that the majority of partnerships applied at least a portion of their grant funds to pay for key staff such as the service-learning coordinator. As is described later in this chapter, securing the service-learning coordinator's position is a critical step in ensuring the long-term viability of a partnership. Continuing to use soft money, such as the CalServe grant, to fund positions that are key to the success of the partnership sets up an operational structure that is difficult to sustain. Applying funds in more strategic ways can help partnerships better sustain and ultimately institutionalize their service-learning initiatives after CalServe funding ends.

To sustain service-learning fully, long-term permanent funding needs to be identified and secured for key staff positions. From the onset of their first year of

funding, partnerships that plan on using a substantial portion of their CalServe funds to support a partnership coordinator should begin to develop a vision, and ultimately a formal plan, that identifies how they will move the coordinator's position to more secure and long-term funding sources. Consideration should be given to the role the coordinator can play in programs funded by other sources or in the ways more permanent funding can be secured for the district's service-learning initiative. Additional recommendations about leveraging support for the service-learning coordinator are offered later in this chapter.

Partnerships that are genuinely interested in sustaining their service-learning initiative after the CalServe funding ends might want to consider applying their CalServe soft-money funds to non-personnel expenditures, such as professional development activities and informational resources (e.g., curriculum materials), while using school or district hard-money to support key staff members, such as the service-learning coordinator. To encourage this, CalServe might want to consider establishing a requirement that all districts applying for a CalServe grant provide matching funds for at least a half-time service-learning coordinator position or half the cost of a service-learning coordination team. This condition would help ensure school and district commitment to providing in-house financial support for service-learning coordination at the start of the program.

This requirement might also help alleviate some of the current over-reliance on soft-money to support service-learning. As several CalServe partnership coordinators indicated during their interviews, the reliance on and use of soft money to develop and sustain service-learning creates a standard of practice that says service-learning can exist in the district so long as money comes into the district to support it.

The establishment of a funding match requirement can set a precedent in getting districts to commit long-term funding to the partnership. Although this condition may preclude some districts from applying for CalServe funds until they can locate district funds to support service-learning, those districts that do apply for a CalServe grant will have made an important, official commitment to financially and organizationally supporting service-learning. With this support, a partnership will have a more solid foundation on which to build its vision and institutionalization plans for service-learning. And although there are not enough data from the evaluation reports and interviews to ascertain the effect this matching requirement might have on partnerships' ability to sustain their overall service-learning initiative, there is some indication that this hard-funding-match approach can help secure ongoing district support for the partnership coordinator position once CalServe funding ends. By using CalServe funds primarily to support activities that encourage the planning and implementation of longer-term goals, a more strategic and, perhaps, cost-efficient approach to implementing, sustaining, and institutionalizing service-learning might be developed.

*Examples of Successful Partnership Efforts.* In addition to funding issues, there is some evidence that certain partnerships lacked a vision of sustainability and institutionalization because they were not clear about the meaning of these terms. Statements from various partnership coordinators, administrators, and teachers suggested that partnerships visualized the sustainability of service-learning in different ways. Sometimes, various views were held within the same partnership, with interpretations being linked to individuals' positions (e.g., classroom teacher versus district partnership coordinator). In addition, the scope of an individual stakeholder's vision often was limited. For example, a principal at one of the partnership sites saw

the sustainability of service-learning primarily in terms of securing the program's infrastructure. This principal made the following statement:

Maybe I'm not too visionary, like I don't see too far ahead. . . . But probably we'll have a plan—a plan when to request budgets, who the chaperones are going to be, which forms are going to be completed. It's kind of like a binder with all the . . . forms and schedules and timelines. I think we'll have a plan. And we're going to be spreading it to other schools. That's what I see.

The partnership coordinator saw sustainability in terms of securing the buy-in of those who would be facilitating and implementing the program. She stated:

Eventually, even the teacher won't be here. I think it really depends on who's in place. . . . And I think that's the challenge with most programs. You really have to have the buy-in and support of *all* the people involved.

In contrast, a teacher's vision for sustainability focused on ensuring that service-learning was part of the formal overarching goals of the school. She stated:

Some of the valuable parts that we have that was logical was getting it [service-learning] in our strategic plan. It got on the minds of everyone because of that. . . . putting it in writing is important because so many of us come and go. This is a way to keep it here.

Although one should not expect all partnerships to subscribe to the same vision for sustaining service-learning, one should expect that a partnership's key stakeholders have formed a cohesive, long-term vision for their partnership. And regardless of how small or large the service-learning partnership may be, the vision needs to be comprehensive and realistic in order for service-learning to truly be institutionalized (Kramer, 2000).

Providing partnerships with a set of examples of what "districtwide service-learning" might look like might be one way to help partnerships consider various possibilities and develop a vision for their own program. These examples not only would inform partnerships about the broad range of issues that must be considered for sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning districtwide, but they would help

educate developing partnerships about the strategies more experienced partnerships have employed to sustain their service-learning initiatives. The examples could help partnerships understand that sustainability does not happen overnight and that it requires careful long-range planning and well-defined quality controls. Regardless of the examples provided, it should be made clear that no two processes for sustaining service-learning are alike (Kramer, 2000). Therefore, the examples should be viewed only as samples, not as models for replication. In addition, the examples should be viewed from various perspectives that include all constituents of the service-learning partnership, including partnership coordinators, teachers, students, administrators, community members, evaluators, and others.

*Planning for Sustainability.* Another reason few partnerships established clear comprehensive long-term visions for their partnership was that they did not adequately think through and develop a long-term plan for service-learning. Whether or not this deficiency was related to the ongoing pressures of maintaining the partnership's immediate fiscal stability or to the lack of guiding examples is not clear. What was evident was that few partnerships had a strategic, long-range plan in place for advancing and sustaining service-learning.

Examples and models alone, however, may not be enough to ensure that a long-term vision is developed and ultimately realized. Partnerships need to take the time to develop long-term plans for their service-learning initiative. The establishment by CalServe of a general conceptual model for building and sustaining service-learning districtwide could prove helpful in getting partnerships to take the first step in formalizing the long-term vision for their partnership. For example, Kramer's (2000) framework for service-learning institutionalization, which characterizes it as "routine,

widespread, legitimized, expected, supported, permanent, and resilient,” might provide a set of building blocks to partnerships for forming this vision.

Partnerships that receive “developmental” grants are relatively new to service-learning and therefore should focus their work on implementing activities that build a strong foundation for high quality service-learning. As these partnerships gain experience, they should, at an appropriate point in time, conduct a self-assessment of their service-learning initiative and establish a formal strategic plan for long-term sustainability. This self-assessment and strategic planning process could be incorporated into the CalServe sustainability grant application process. Although implicit in this “sustainable” category of grants is the goal that partnerships will develop a long-term districtwide vision and plan for service-learning, CalServe might want to consider having partnerships use a portion of their grant funds to formalize that plan into a detailed strategic plan that is based on a comprehensive assessment of the current institutionalization level of service-learning in the district. The strategic plan would *explicitly* detail how a partnership plans to achieve each of its long-term goals. The funding would support partnerships’ implementation of well-coordinated and carefully planned core activities that have a direct bearing on the longer-term sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning.

One way to accomplish this self-evaluation and strategic planning might be to have partnerships use the last year of their three-year developmental grant to convene a “Partnership Advisory Committee.” Each partnership’s Advisory Committee would be made up of key service-learning stakeholders that would include site and district administrators, teachers, students, community members, and other important partners (e.g., evaluators, higher education participants, etc.). The goals of the Advisory Committee would be to:

- Conduct a self-assessment of the status of service-learning in the district. (*Where is service-learning happening in the district? Which teachers are interested? What kinds of service-learning activities are taking place? How is service-learning being defined? With which other education reform efforts is service-learning aligned?*)
- Draft a status report on service-learning that will become a baseline report on service-learning participation.
- Develop a five-year strategic plan that details goals, objectives, and action steps for advancing and institutionalizing high quality service-learning districtwide, based on the results of the self-assessment.

The plan would be used to assess partnerships' readiness for a sustainable grant.

The first two years of the sustainable grant would be devoted to implementing the activities of the strategic plan. Near the end of the sustainable grant cycle, a partnership's Advisory Committee would conduct another self-assessment, measure the advances of the initiative against its initial status report, and then revise its five-year strategic plan accordingly.

This process shifts the use of the sustainability category funds from *activities*, staffing, and implementation to *institutionalization* planning and implementation. It also makes program evaluation and improvement an important, inherent, and ongoing part of the partnership development and institutionalization process. If the ultimate goal is to sustain and institutionalize service-learning districtwide, then a written formal strategic plan would create a clear districtwide plan of how service-learning fits in with the overall goals of the district. It would also promote the idea that sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning is a collaborative process of shared responsibility and is not the primary or sole responsibility of the partnership coordinator. Perhaps, most

importantly, if the partnership coordinator or key service-learning teachers should leave (see Continuity section below), the plan would be able to maintain the district's momentum and guide any new personnel who arrive in the district.

Another benefit of the strategic plan and collaborative self-assessment approach is that it would involve the active participation of school and district administrators. As many have suggested (e.g., Kramer, 2000; Melchior et al. , 1998), the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning is not likely to occur without the genuine, ongoing support and buy-in of school, district, and state administrators. The 1999-2000 CalServe partnerships' evaluation reports and the intensive site interviews conducted by SLRDC staff suggested that some administrators (especially school site administrators) are very active in their school or district's service-learning initiative. However, the data also suggested that some other administrators do not have a full understanding of their school or district's service-learning initiative or long-range plans. This is evidenced by the fact that, when interviewed by UC Berkeley's research team about their school or district's service-learning initiative, a substantial number of site and district administrators were unable to articulate clearly what service-learning was or identify the major aspects of service-learning in their school or district. Moreover, some of these partnerships were in their fifth or sixth year of CalServe funding. An official districtwide strategic plan for service-learning would be one way to educate and more fully involve such administrators about service-learning. It would also provide an official document for the administrator to use as a reference when discussing the district's plan for service-learning.

## **Balancing Quality and Quantity**

The second factor that emerged regarding partnerships' efforts to sustain service-learning was the balance that partnerships tried to strike between working to increase the number (*quantity*) of teachers using service-learning and working to optimize the *quality* of service-learning activities. The need to balance these two efforts appears to be prompted by two competing objectives that partnerships believe they must achieve to be successful. The first objective is rooted in the overarching CalServe goal that partnerships sustain service-learning districtwide. Specifically, partnerships sought to expand service-learning opportunities throughout their district(s) in order to make service-learning a part of every student's educational experience at least once at each grade span. The pursuit of this end inherently focused partnerships' attention on the quantity of service-learning activities. As a result, a large portion of partnerships' implementation efforts were focused on recruiting more teachers to use service-learning, expanding opportunities for more students to engage in service-learning activities, finding ways to encourage more school administrators to support service-learning, and developing and fostering more school/community partnerships.

The second partnership objective centered on ensuring that service-learning activities were high quality experiences and were aligned with the federal definition of service-learning. The rationale for concentrating on enhancing the quality of service-learning is well supported. Studies by Weiler et al. (1998), Melchior (1998), and others have found that the outcomes of service-learning were most frequent and positive for students when service-learning activities were of high quality.

The quest for high quality activities was also driven by external pressures on the partnerships from both the state (as the funding agent) and district (as fiscal agent).

Specifically, data from partnership interviews and evaluation reports in this study revealed that a strong sense of accountability permeated the work of the partnerships. Some partnership coordinators, teachers, and sometimes administrators admitted feeling pressure to show that service-learning is an effective and legitimate practice and that it has positive education impacts on student performance. As one administrator stated:

Basically, to make this work, we want some hard data that show the kids are learning because of this. It's got to be linked to the curriculum and we've got to show that students are learning. With standards and all, the pressure is on.

Another administrator during her interview stated:

We have the U. C. 'a-f' requirements. . .it's the tail that wags the dog. . .Our school [sic] will not approve courses that allotted this service-learning type of thing. So that's a kind of subtle message. . .We frantically scour around trying to get something in there, but whether that actually is an effective service-learning approach needs to be evaluated.

As is often found with new educational initiatives, proving the merits of service-learning is an issue that appears often in K-12 efforts to sustain service-learning.

Kramer (2000) suggests that the desire to prove the effectiveness of service-learning is usually driven by external skepticism that service-learning is a legitimate educational pursuit. Therefore, service-learning partnerships ultimately feel accountable to their school, community, and district, as well as to the state, to uphold high standards of quality for service-learning. The influence of this sense of accountability can be quite strong.

As partnerships work on expanding the quantity of service-learning while attempting to enhance its quality, where should they place their energies to maximize efforts to sustain service-learning in their district(s), given their limited resources? Should partnerships focus on expanding the quantity of service-learning activities in order that service-learning can be spread districtwide? Or, is it best to encourage

partnerships to work on implementing high quality programs that produce the greatest impact on students' educational success to override skepticism about service-learning?

Evidence from the CalServe partnership reports and the intensive site interviews suggests that, during this funding cycle, the majority of partnerships tended to emphasize the expansion of quantity rather than the enhancement of quality. This is not to say that partnerships were not concerned with quality. But rather, when thinking about how best to sustain service-learning, the emphasis appeared to be on getting more teachers and administrators to become involved in and support service-learning. And, as the statements below suggest, the emphasis on growing and expanding the amount of service-learning was driven by the emphasis on the districtwide implementation of service-learning. In some cases, partnerships seemed to think that "districtwide" meant that "every teacher" or "every school" had to employ service-learning. As one site administrator stated:

I would like to apply for the sustainability and continue the process and do a better job. . . .We'll have a good model here, so it'll be easy to start at new schools. . . .Our commitment is to try to get all the schools within five years. . . .What I would like to see is, number one, that *all* the teachers will really realize that. . .service-learning is really gonna help the students academically.

A partnership coordinator stated:

I think that between last year and this year, there has been quite a bit of. . .there's been a lot more movement in service-learning. More teachers are now doing it and we hope to get more teachers to do it. This way, we can make sure it stays in our district.

Getting more teachers to understand and use service-learning appears to be the predominant approach partnerships used to move closer towards service-learning sustainability. There seemed to be an assumption that if more teachers bought into service-learning, it would be more likely to be recognized and supported by the district. In contrast, scant attention was paid to enhancing the quality of the service-learning

activities that were implemented. This is evidenced by the fact that there was little mention in partnerships' evaluation reports of issues pertaining directly to quality enhancement.

To sustain service-learning beyond their CalServe funding, partnerships cannot take either the quantity or quality issue for granted. Having many service-learning activities in every school that are not of high quality could actually prevent service-learning from becoming part of the district culture over time. And having just a handful of high quality service-learning activities that operate in just a few classrooms might not meet the goal of engaging every student in at least one service-learning opportunity at every grade span and would also be more seriously impacted by teacher turnover. Therefore, to ensure the sustainability of service-learning, partnerships must work towards *simultaneously* maximizing the quantity of service-learning opportunities and optimizing the quality of these opportunities.

One possible way to move partnerships toward balancing the quantity and quality of service-learning might be to have them articulate goals for both components as early as possible in the development of their partnership. Specifically, when developing their vision and long-term goals for service-learning, partnerships should be asked to consider how they plan both to expand their service-learning initiative districtwide *and* how they plan to ensure that all the service-learning activities implemented meet a high standard of quality. Focusing simultaneously on these dual purposes might prompt some partnerships to institute a self-assessment and continuous improvement process that both tracks the growth and monitors the quality of service-learning activities. By establishing clear and realistic standards of success for both the quantity and quality of service-learning activities, partnerships can focus their energies

and resources on a balanced set of activities that can better sustain and institutionalize their partnership over time.

To assist this balancing of focus, the CalServe Office might present developing partnerships with a set of examples of the journeys different advanced partnerships have taken and the strategies they have employed to make service-learning part of the districtwide culture. The examples would also show partnerships that service-learning need not occur in every classroom in order to be sustainable. If anything, these examples might serve as inspiration to developing partnerships that service-learning can become part of the culture with a careful balance between quantity expansion and quality enhancement.

### **Coordination and Implementation**

The third factor that emerged from the evaluation regarding partnerships' work in sustaining service-learning concerned a set of coordination and implementation issues. The data suggested that program continuity, strong coordination, well-developed service activities, and structured training are essential components in ensuring the long-term institutionalization of service-learning. Each of these components is discussed below.

**Continuity.** Continuity (or the lack of it) is a factor that affects many different levels and aspects of a partnership—community relationships, partnership coordination, district leadership, articulation of service-learning experiences through the grades and between school sites, and so on. Data from the partnerships evaluation reports and intensive site interviews suggested that the lack of continuity due to turnover of partnership coordinators, school administrators, teachers who use service-

learning, evaluators, among others, seriously affected partnerships' efforts to sustain and ultimately institutionalize service-learning. The quotes below illustrate the way personnel turnover in a partnership can impact the advancement of a partnership's service-learning initiative.

In describing the primary challenges of their partnership effort, one partnership reported the following in its evaluation report:

The primary challenge this year was the high turnover among teachers between the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years.

The partnership described having to spend considerable time retraining its new staff on service-learning in order to keep its service-learning initiative going. In another large partnership, a coordinator described how a change in the administration affected his role as coordinator of service-learning,

Ever since [name of administrator] arrived, it's been up and down. It's hard to know where she stands on service-learning. . . .I've tried to give her information and let her know what our partnership is all about, but I'm being given new assignments. . . .Unfortunately, she doesn't get it.

Various data from partnerships reports and the intensive interviews suggested that turnover among partnership coordinators was due primarily to insufficient funding for current service-learning activities and implementation, lack of identified long-term secured funding for service-learning, excess of responsibilities for the partnership coordinator, and lack of *genuine* administrative support for service-learning. In contrast, the reasons for turnover among participating teachers often had nothing to do with service-learning or the partnership itself but resulted from factors such as a teacher's plans to return to school for a graduate degree or to transfer to another district, his/her dissatisfaction with a teaching assignment, or family relocation to another city (see Chapter 3 for additional discussion). Often when teachers, partnership coordinators, site administrators, or community agency representatives

were asked about problematic issues, they voiced concern over their school or district's capacity to keep the service-learning initiative going if one or more key individuals left the district. Overall, the data suggest that, if districts are serious about sustaining service-learning, then consideration needs to be given to securing the retention of the key personnel who are responsible for moving the partnership's service-learning initiative forward.

The issue of continuity may be most critical when it comes to the partnership coordinator. Most partnerships viewed the coordinator as the key individual responsible for implementing the activities of the grant and advancing the partnership's service-learning effort. One site administrator described the value of their coordinator's position in the following way:

We have been able to sustain the program because the school has maintained the partnership coordinator. That's what will make the program sustainable. But we need to be able to keep [name of coordinator] if we want to keep the program as successful as it has been.

Others who were interviewed for this study gave accounts of the time and effort that were devoted in the final year of the CalServe grant cycle to securing administrative support and funding for the continuation of the coordinator's position. As was pointed out earlier, decisions about how the coordinator position is funded (i.e., with district funds or grant money) affect the continuity of the partnership. It is unlikely that the efforts of partnerships who used CalServe funding to pay for the coordinator can be fully sustained and advanced beyond the CalServe grant if there are no funds to support the coordinator position.

In addition to the problem of securing stable financial backing for this key position, dependence on one person for leadership, technical assistance, funding, networking, and informational resources itself can be problematic for both

implementation and institutionalization, since it is sometimes difficult to find one person to perform all these different functions well and since the future of the partnership then depends on that one person continuing for the long term. The effectiveness and longevity of the coordinator to advance service-learning in the district surely has a bearing on how well a partnership's initiative moves forward and is ultimately institutionalized.

To ensure the continuity of the coordinator position, new and innovative leadership strategies should be explored. For example, hiring co-coordinators or utilizing the expertise of school-to-career or curriculum coordinators might be ways to promote districtwide continuity and the sustainability of service-learning. To retain effective service-learning partnership coordinators, schools and districts must ensure that the partnership coordinator is well-supported professionally, personally, and financially. Among the suggestions for this support are:

- ensure the partnership coordinator position is not reliant solely on soft-money, but to back up the commitment of the District to service-learning by designating funds to support this position;
- acknowledge formally the hard work of the partnership coordinator; and
- identify programmatic mechanisms (release time, office space, program funds, resource materials, and the like) that can support the work of the partnership coordinator.

Among some of the factors that determine the type of and extent to which each of these support systems needs to be put in place are the size of the service-learning partnership and school district(s), the experience of the partnership coordinators, and the purview of the partnership coordinator's job responsibilities.

A second recommendation for helping to prevent the turnover of partnership coordinators is to make sure that the workload of the coordinator position is kept at a manageable level. Being “overburdened” and “burnt out” were the most common complaints among partnership coordinators, especially among those who also had other responsibilities, such as coordinating other educational programs or teaching in the classroom full or part-time. For example, one partnership coordinator described her position as “overwhelming” stating:

I’ve got to get more teachers on board and get them trained to do good service-learning. . . .When you have one coordinator and you’re trying to get out to 21 schools, it’s impossible to get the word out to everybody.

Whatever the configuration of the partnership coordinator’s position might be, the job responsibilities need to be commensurate with the individual’s experience and size of the partnership, and they should take into account the individual’s other professional duties.

One way districts have tried to establish more secure positions for service-learning partnership coordinators has been to create administrative positions in which the service-learning coordinator is also responsible for one or more other programs, such as school-to-career. Doing this can, in some cases, create full-time positions for coordinators and ensure that a well-qualified person occupies the position. It can also help tie service-learning to other important educational initiatives in the district. Both of these rationales can help put service-learning on a promising trajectory for institutionalization. However, the jury is still out as to whether this strategy works. Partnership coordinators who participated in the intensive evaluation interviews and who held such positions expressed their concerns over the enormous demands on their time and their inability to fulfill all of their responsibilities. In essence, they reported that the combining of these positions meant that their attention to the advancement of

service-learning was diluted because they also had to attend to the implementation and advancement of other district initiatives. To be successful, district administrators and the coordinator involved need to work collaboratively to balance the responsibilities and demands of service-learning and the other assigned initiatives.

As was mentioned earlier, the partnership coordinator is typically the person who holds the primary responsibility for carrying out the service-learning initiative. However, there are always other stakeholders involved in a partnership's structure who assume some of the responsibility for key activities. Allowing various members of the partnership to have substantial responsibilities should encourage stronger buy-in from them, which might ultimately lead to their longer-term participation. By having a structure in which responsibilities are shared, the partnership will be in better shape to continue to operate fully in the event it loses one or more of its key members.

There is less information from the data collected about how exactly to address the issue of *teacher* and *evaluator* turnover, although this issue was acknowledged by various partnerships to be a problem for sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning. (See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the impact of evaluator turnover on a partnership's local evaluation process). There does appear to be an effort underway to groom "up and coming" teachers to become service-learning leaders. Specifically, there were descriptions of more experienced teachers mentoring and nurturing teachers who were new to service-learning, providing them with tips on how to get started, and assisting with the identification of service and reflection activities. In these ways they were opening the door and creating a safe space for new teachers to explore service-learning.

Cultivating this new generation of partnership teachers can be an effective way to ensure that the initial energy and excitement about service-learning is continued and

sustained within a school or district. By thinking ahead and grooming new teachers, coordinators, and evaluators before the experienced practitioners leave, service-learning can be put on a more secure path to become sustainable over time. In this regard, partnerships might want to think about the establishment of a service-learning mentorship program in which advanced practitioners and coordinators would serve as recruiters who identify and mentor individuals who show potential as future service-learning leaders for the district.

**Connections to Other Education Reforms.** A second implementation and coordination issue affecting service-learning program sustainability and institutionalization centers on the connections service-learning has to other educational initiatives in the district or school. As mentioned earlier, some partnership coordinator's positions are being tied to other educational reforms to strengthen the role of service-learning in the district and to sustain service-learning over time. The rationale behind this approach is that by tying service-learning to other reforms that are well-integrated and well-established in the district, service-learning can become less peripheral and more central to the district's overall educational program. The ties between service-learning and other educational reforms do not have to be formed strictly around staff positions, as was implied above. Such ties can be formed around issues relating to academic programs, student assessment, staff development, and program evaluation.

Being strategic in tying service-learning to important academic and curricular initiatives in the district can help make service-learning an important part of the district's work. A key strategy is not to portray service-learning as a self-contained initiative, but rather to use service-learning as a vehicle for accomplishing other established goals for the district. For example, in at least two partnerships, service-

learning was used to help advance the district's school-to-career efforts. In another partnership, it was tied to widely-used project-based learning strategies. If a district embraces a particular initiative as being important, its connection to service-learning can help district officials see the added value of service-learning. Such coordination also helps districts see service-learning as a teaching strategy that is integral to accomplishing educational goals rather than an intervention program that is an adjunct to students' regular classroom experience.

Although the connection of service-learning to other educational reform efforts in a district can help advancement and institutionalization, there can be some disadvantages to this approach, as was mentioned earlier. According to some evaluation reports and interview data from this study, tying service-learning to other educational reforms can sometimes divert attention away from service-learning. As a result, the identity of service-learning may become lost. For example, if service-learning is connected to a new social studies curriculum that emphasizes students' civic development, then service-learning might be viewed strictly as a strategy for teaching social studies. How service-learning is identified and viewed by a district has the potential to impact the ways it will be advanced and promoted in the school and the district. Although linkages between service-learning and other initiatives should continue to be encouraged, clarification should be provided throughout the process about what service-learning is and is not.

Partnerships should consider carefully the other educational reforms to which service-learning is tied. Connecting service-learning to a particular reform can advance service-learning so long as the other reform effort stays alive in the district. If that reform approach is abandoned, the use of service-learning could also end, especially if service-learning is not fully understood by the district. In planning and developing a

service-learning initiative, partnerships should consider which reforms have stood the test of time in the district. This can help them decide which educational alliances might be best for ensuring the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning.

**Issue Focused Partnerships.** A final implementation and coordination issue that helps partnerships sustain and institutionalize their service-learning initiatives has to do with the service focus of the partnership activities. In examining service-learning partnerships that had been sustained for at least five years, there were a number of common programmatic issues that emerged. First of all, longlasting partnerships tended to have had one effective coordinator providing ongoing leadership over several years. Secondly, those partnerships had substantial administrative support, including, in some cases, formal district and board policies that guided the service-learning initiative. And third, those efforts featured strong, collaborative, and ongoing partnerships with the community.

In analyzing the types of school/community partnerships that were formed, many appear to have been nurtured and sustained by a focus on an “issue” area in which most of the students’ service-learning activities occurred. For example, at one site, almost all of the service-learning activities were centered on a local creek. Depending on the grade level, the activities were integrated with students’ science, math, art, or English curriculum. Students conducted creek water testing, creek cleanup, environmental forecasting, and other activities that were focused on the role of the creek in the community. Over the years, the district built relationships with a set of local governmental and environmental agencies to ensure that students were exposed to a broad range of creek activities. These agencies became the core service-learning partnership members. At this site, service-learning was sustained by the creek projects and a cadre of community partners who got involved with the school each year.

Similarly, other sites sustained their service-learning activities through single community agency partnerships that provided teachers with full pre-set curriculum guides and service-learning coordination assistance. In pursuing such a strategy, care should be taken to ensure that the issue on which the partnership is focused has a broad enough appeal to maximize the involvement of the key stakeholders in the district and the community as well as to ensure that service-learning opportunities are maximized for students.

## **Conclusion**

The overall findings from the data summarized here suggest that there are at least three factors that influence the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning. First of all, an articulated vision and a formal long-range plan can assist partnerships in their journey to advance and institutionalize service-learning in their district(s). As a district's service-learning initiative expands and grows, careful attention needs to be paid to ensure the implementation of high quality service-learning activities and programs. And finally, in their effort to sustain service-learning, partnerships must take into account a series of important implementation and coordination issues that secure the continuity of participation of key stakeholders, the connection of service-learning to other important education reforms in the district, and the development of a partnership that focuses on service issues that maximize service-learning opportunities for students.

Rather than discrete components, the three factors for service-learning sustainability that emerged from this study are quite interdependent. The weakness of one factor is likely to affect the strength of the other factors. For example, if there is no clear, long-term vision for where the partnership is headed, it will be difficult to

implement and improve the quality of activities that will contribute to the partnership's sustainability.

Although these emerging sustainability factors appear to have relevance to a broad range of service-learning partnerships, the processes for sustaining service-learning will surely vary from partnership to partnership. As was mentioned in the introduction, the issue of service-learning sustainability and institutionalization was not an initial focus of the CalServe profile study. However, the issues around service-learning sustainability and institutionalization that emerged from this study suggest that this topic warrants further investigation. Future studies of service-learning in California should explore the sustainability and institutionalization processes more directly and intensively. The investigation might include questions such as:

- What are the critical elements for sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning?
- What are the best strategies for implementing these elements?
- Are there differences in the way various types of partnerships (large/small; urban/suburban/rural; etc.) institutionalize service-learning?
- In what ways does the institutionalization of service-learning change as the educational emphases of a district evolve over time?

By answering these questions, clearer insights can be gained about the sustainability and institutionalization process and about ways to make high quality service-learning part of the culture of every district in the state.

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