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Mikva Challenge: Are We Misleading Ourselves?
A Long-Term Evaluation Framework
for an Organization in Transition

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Abstract: Organizations are continually evolving to meet changing demands and expectations on their resources, personnel and programs. In order to continue to be successful, an organization must analyze itself to understand what changes are required and why an organization should make them. This analysis often involves both a short-term and long-term evaluation to great a more complete understanding of an organization, before any changes are implemented. However, organizations often do not have an evaluation plan with which to judge long-term effectiveness of its programs, preferring to concentrate on short-term, cyclical evaluation processes. As a result, in this paper, a detailed foundation for a long-term evaluation framework is provided to help increase Mikva Challenge's Election in Action (EIA) program's long-term viability, effectiveness and efficiency.

Not everything that counts can be counted. And not everything that can be counted, counts.
Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION

Any economist will tell you that a business will either live or die. In a capitalistic world, businesses realize that in order to live, they must understand why they are living and what they must do to keep on living. This evaluative process is essential to any successful business model.

For a for-profit business, this ability to live is primarily based on a business's ability to earn enough profit in order to stay in business. This ability to make a profit is often used by a business to evaluate how successful it is at what it is doing. In the world of not-for-profit organizations, this need to establish a success benchmark is the same, but the terminology and focus are slightly different.

While a for-profit business can use profit as a success indicator, a not-for-profit cannot, by definition, make a profit on their endeavors. So other indicators must be

1

established in order to determine an organization's success. These indicators must then be

evaluated in order to determine if the organization is getting the results that they expect

and want. As Reider Dale puts it "evaluation…[literally] means assessing the value of"

(Dale 11).

He goes further in his analysis by stating

> Evaluations are undertaken in all spheres of life, in informal or formal ways, whenever one wishes to know and understand the consequences of some action or event. The acquired knowledge and understanding are commonly used by the evaluator to perform some activity in a better manner in the future; that is, one tries to learn from one's experiences in order to improve one's performance. (Dale 11).

Yet, while evaluation is a necessity, if done outside of a proper framework, any

results and conclusions are meaningless. It is this desire to properly evaluate, specifically

in the context of a not-for-profit's long-term vision and mission statement, that I wish to

explore in this paper. Using the not-for-profit organization Mikva Challenge as my

subject, I will lay out an initial long-term evaluation framework for the Elections In

Action program that will enable Mikva Challenge to determine the program's compliance

with their overall mission statement.

BACKGROUND

Youth in America have continually been seen as disengaged, lazy, troublemakers

and generally disinterested in issues outside of themselves. It is often assumed, because

of this perceived self-centeredness and apparent lack of "community spirit", that today's

youth have no interest in civic participation or community involvement. <u>Bowling Alone:</u> <u>The Collapse and Revival of American Community</u> echoes this perceived civic engagement crisis by establishing it as a central theme within the book.

As Kristin Gross puts it "not only do today's young adults participate [in civic affairs] less than do older adults, but the younger set also participates far less than did its same-age counterparts 10 or 20 years ago" (Gross 61).

These negative viewpoints have caused a recent rush of research to reexamine the role and participation levels of youth in society. Amazingly, it is this current research, coupled with a reexamination of past studies that has helped to counter the view that youth are worthless, disengaged and helpless. Barry Checkoway promotes this need for a change of perspective when he states that it is important for individuals to view youth as resources, rather than as problems (Checkoway 2). For, despite the loud banging of the current "discourse that frames urban youth as disengaged or troubled, our experiences suggest these youth, if given the opportunity, can become competent citizens, active participants, and powerful agents for social change" (Nygreen 108).

Furthermore, it was found that the concept of youth civics development and its positive effect on increased youth engagement over time in society was not new. Past research showed that "civic engagement has short and long-term benefits for youth and for society" and that "individuals who took part in community service programs at their high schools as youth in [the] 1940s were more likely to demonstrate higher levels of community involvement as adults" (Balsano 188-9).

This is a critical observation in that for any meaningful development and change to occur, it must continue over an extended period of time. Without this long-term

engagement, it's like the old saying 'in one ear, out the other'. If civic engagement was a flash in the pan type of endeavor, then Putnam would be right in his assertion that the decline of civic society and engagement in upon us. However, Balsano does not believe we have gotten their quite yet and points out that "civic engagement represents an avenue for youth to get involved in this process of preservation of their own and their communities' positive development over time" (Balsano 189).

It is within this avenue of long-term positive youth engagement that Mikva Challenge established itself. Mikva Challenge is a not-for-profit organization based in Chicago, Illinois that was founded in 1997 to promote politics to youth and to create the next generation of political leaders. Friends of Abner and Zoe Mikva created Mikva Challenge after Abner Mikva retired as White House Counsel under Bill Clinton. Throughout his election campaigns, he and his wife Zoe always professed a love for the youth who were volunteering on his various campaigns. He loved the enthusiasm, sacrifice and dedication displayed by the youth around him. Therefore, when Abner retired, he and Zoe strove to create an organization that would promote these youth and give them opportunities to engage in politics on a level that could not otherwise be done in the classroom. By creating opportunities for youth, Abner and Zoe hoped to create future leaders who would help to mold the political scene of the future. It is with these ideals, summarized below, that Mikva Challenge was born.

> "Young adults learn civics best when they are actively engaged in democratic activities inside and outside the classroom – volunteering for a political campaign, registering people to vote or voicing their opinions to leaders and the media on policy issues that affect teen-agers, families, and communities. Authentic learning of leadership skills and vices has multiple advantages: it

provides students with practical knowledge, political and professional connections, life skills, and most importantly, a passion for civic participation." (Mikva Website, 04/16/07)

Numerous researchers and authors support this philosophy that political engagement by youth can create change. Michael McDevitt and Spiro Kiousis point out that civic activity outside the classroom promotes skills that are transferable to politics (McDevitt 249).

Additionally, Balsano mentions that

"civically engaged youth tend to have an increased sense of their own competencies, be more internally driven to get involved in prosocial activities, and have higher self-esteem. These youth also were more likely than the youth who were not civically engaged to have a higher internal locus of control and to show a higher level of comfort resolving social and interpersonal issues by getting personally involved in controversies" (Balsano 188).

All of these skills are important life skills and necessary for any future in the political realm. Rosenthal, Feiring and Lewis back this idea of political involvement by stating "more than 70% [of youth] continued to be involved [in political volunteering] as young adults" (Rosenthal et al 483).

With this positive endorsement of youth political involvement and with a commitment to engaging young people in civic life and public decision-making, Mikva Challenge initiated its first program in 1998. This first little pilot project, based in the Chicago Public Schools and involving 25 students from two-area high schools (Bowen on the southside, and Kelvyn Park on the northside), gave students an opportunity to volunteer in an electoral campaign for candidates of their choice. This small program has

now morphed to include over seven distinct programs, involving more than 40 high

schools, 80 teachers and 2000 students (Figure 1).

REASON FOR LONG-TERM EVALUATION

As Mikva Challenge [henceforth known as MC] has expanded, it has constantly

sought ways to improve itself and it programs. MC consistently goes through an

evaluation process that is based on the immediate impact of a program, such as what went

right or wrong and where improvements could be made in order to improve the success

of the project. This short, program cycle centered evaluation is always an important step

in any organization and pays numerous dividends in the near-term. It lets an organization

know where things went wrong, when it lost participation, what aspects were successful

and what things should definitely be reintegrated into the program for the next cycle. This

short-term evaluation process helps the organization do a quick evaluation to determine if

its course of action is working. These short-term evaluations typically involve a standard

set of questions that are given in written or oral form and responses are either short

answer or ranking (i.e. strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree). They often

include such questions as:

- What did you enjoy?

- How can we improve the program?

- What program parts did you participate in?

- Would you do it again?

- Do you feel more informed about the candidate?

- Do you feel more informed about the electoral process?

- Do you feel that you are a more informed voter?

However, short-term evaluations have elements of reactionary thinking, because the focus tends to be at the micro level and geared towards making immediate changes before the next program cycle begins. An anonymous author, writing in the magazine Nonprofit World, concurs when he writes:

> With no ability to track social or human change over time, many nonprofits have no choice but to abridge their programs down to short, step – function systems. This connect-the-dots approach merely provides a way to show accomplishment of short-term goals. It also reinforces an already short-term future view. In a medical analogy, it focuses not on the patient's overall well being but on how efficiently the band-aid is placed (40).

As is often the case, the break period between cycles is short and does not allow for a thorough overall macro level program analysis. This macro level analysis requires a longer timeframe and a more concentrated look at the overall program and whether or not it is meeting the overarching mission of the organization. It must be remembered that "most individual and social problems have developed over time. They're not likely to be counteracted by fixes measured at the end of a funding cycle" (Anonymous 40).

A long-term evaluation process is a necessity because it allows the organization to take a closer look at itself and determine if it has been going in one direction, when it should have been going in another. In other words, as the Titanic sank, I wouldn't want to be solely getting data on the functioning of the elevators on the Titanic.

In the case of MC, and the Election In Action program in particular, there is evidence that a long-term evaluation needs to be conducted. First, due to Mikva's rapid expansion over the last ten years (from 3 employees to 10 and from a $100,000 budget to over $1 million), Mikva has physically changed. Second, over the years, different options and tweaks to the organization and programs have occurred. In addition, every year different trainings and events have become commonplace in order to deal with each program. Finally, there is an underlying push toward expansion and making the program as available as possible. With these constant ramp-ups and the overall goal of expansion, there has not been an in-depth analysis of the year-on-year changes or how impactful these changes and add-ons have been when compared to the original vision of the program.

This is evidenced by the fact that while it has been relatively easy to evaluate MC's accomplishments on the 'act, think, live and breathe politics' part of their mission, Mikva is currently not able to concretely determine if it has been able to "develop the next generation of civic leaders, activists and policymakers" (Mikva website 04/16/07).

It is this lack of concrete information that prevents Mikva from accurately acknowledging the full breath of its accomplishments. It also limits its ability to fully address any shortcomings or avenues for opportunity. By evaluating a program over the long-term, Mikva will be able to better address the needs of its 'next generation of leaders' while also promoting a comprehensible vision for Mikva across a wider net of individuals, including staff, board members, program implementers and donor organizations. It is also understood that as MC continues to solicit larger funders, more long-term data will be requested in order to prove that MC is producing long-term and

sustainable social change. It is this long-term evaluation process that I wish to frame and present as a tool to MC in order to help it improve its programs and ensure its long-term viability. While I will focus on the Election In Action program (EIA), the basic concepts and ideas presented will likely transfer to other Mikva programs.

DEFINITION OF "GOOD JOB"

In order to set up a long-term evaluation framework, a determination of the finish line (i.e. goals, purpose, vision) must be made. It has already been established that MC wants to develop the next generation of civic leaders. However, how does Mikva know that it has accomplished this? How does it know that it has done a 'Good Job' at developing these future leaders? In this next section, a 'Good Job' will be defined in order to set up a benchmark with which Mikva can compare its ideals with its reality. Ultimately, this long-term evaluation framework will allow MC to more concretely define what it has done (i.e. accomplishments), determine where it wants to go, and in due course, figure out what still needs to be done in order to fulfill its Mission Statement.

A 'Good Job' will be broken down into a circular five-step evaluation process that has been widely used throughout the world when evaluating an organization and its programs. To begin, it is necessary to concretely **define desired outputs**, goals and expectations of the organization. This gives the dream a concrete vision of what the end result will resemble. Second, there is need to figure out **what inputs the organization possesses**. These inputs can range from tangible assets (i.e. money and staff) to intangible assets (i.e. vision, relationships and name recognition). Third, there is a **hypothesis**

development and testing process. A set of presumed relationships need to be set forth

for subsequent testing. Some relationships cannot be directly tested, as there are not

variations in the inputs – as we will note below. However, even when the relationships

cannot be tested empirically, we will offer them as sources of questions to be raised with

stakeholders to ascertain their impressions of their impact. For instance, while we assume

that the program gains greatly from the patronage over time by Abner and Zoe Mikva, we

cannot test how much that impact has been. We can, of course, see how often those who

are assessing the factors that make the program work mention it. The fourth part of the

evaluation process involves laying out the **data collection and analysis plans** for the

program. This prescribes how a program initiates a process (i.e. evaluation survey) by

which the organization can start to determine which inputs were effective and which were

not, and how important each was in relative terms. Finally, to complete the circle, a **cost**

effective means for utilizing results and impacting inputs needs to be established.

Because no program is ever perfect, updated inputs that have been identified earlier need

to be implemented and the program retested with its updated inputs.

1. OUTPUTS

When dealing with an organization, goals tend to be centered on changes that the

organization hopes to cause (i.e. its programs, staff, dependents). Goals can range from

the very minute to the overarching. For this project, I will utilize MC's overarching goal

that is found within its Mission Statement. This will help to focus the evaluation process

on whether or not the Election In Action (EIA) program is fulfilling MC's broader mission.

As mentioned earlier, Mikva's mission is to "develop the next generation of civic leaders, activists and policymakers by providing a 'hands-on' civic approach that provides people with opportunities to act, think, live and breathe politics" (Mikva website 04/16/07). Furthermore, the focus of this goal is to promote the viewpoint that youth can be progressive actors and a powerful voice in their communities.

Evidence of Civic Activism

MC was created to promote the idea that youth can and should be active participants in the world around them. They should be asked to be decision makers and then given the tools that will enable them take charge of their communities and their futures. Therefore, the primary expectation on the part of MC is that its youth demonstrate civic activism. This can take many forms and Mikva has continually adapted its programs in order to meet an evolving definition of active civic participation. The EIA program in particular places youth in positions where they can observe and participate in the election process. This participation helps to enhance a student's understanding of civics while also giving them an opportunity to make an educated statement through their grassroots participation, leadership skills development and hands-on learning experience. This introduction is expected to have a positive effect on a youth's civic future; including voter turnout, community engagement and the development of future civic leaders.

Additional Stakeholders

Every organization has numerous participants who, in varying degrees, are involved in its operations. Their motivation for involvement varies, but there is a basic need to experience success and therefore, each individual player has a basic criteria or benchmark with which to measure that success. Whenever a not-for-profit organization designs a program, it must lay out all known expectations from all known stakeholders. For MC, there are basically six categories of players. There are the Founders, the Funders, the Mikva Board of Directors, the Staff, the Youth and the Teachers it works with. Each group has their own expectations and must have their confidence maintained in order to insure their continued participation with MC. If that confidence is maintained, then MC can be said to have done a 'Good Job'. What follows is a general breakdown of what defines a 'Good Job' for each of the players, otherwise known as stakeholders. However, it must be remembered that while each stakeholder has an individual vested interest, they all accept and support MC's main goal and mission of promoting active civic participation on the part of youth. It is their "supplementary" or "complementary" concerns that we need to identify as allied goals, in an expanded version of the concept ""Good Job".

Funder

For a not-for-profit to survive year after year, it must bring in enough money to meet all of its financial obligations. In order to do so, not-for-profits must sell their products, known as projects or services, to the wider community. But unlike most for-profit businesses, which can sell a concrete product directly to its consumer, not-for-profits tend to sell services to individuals that cannot pay for the services directly.

Therefore, not-for-profits need another source of income, and that typically comes from donor organizations that do not necessarily receive a tangible product benefit directly from the not-for-profit organization.

While these donor organizations do not regularly receive a direct tangible benefit from the not-for-profit organization (unlike paying $1 for a Coke, where both players get a concrete benefit), there still has to be a compensation method for the donor. This compensation method is required so that it feels justified in continually "buying" a not-for-profit's product.

In order for the donor organization to feel justified, it needs to feel that the not-for-profit is successfully implementing a project and that the desired positive results are evident. Therefore, the typical not-for-profit has to submit reports at various times stating its progress in meeting a goal. If the donor organization is satisfied with that progress, confidence is maintained and funding continues.

For MC, and the EIA program in particular, funders need to feel that the program is effective with an acceptable cost level, at recruiting students. In addition, these funders must see that these students are continually participating in various political endeavors and are feeling a deeper understanding of politics and want to continue to stay involved. Participation numbers, volunteer hours and feedback/reflection statements typically satisfy these needs.

Founders

Due to the fact that the original founders are still actively involved at MC, their participation and influence must be recognized. Because of their underlying motivation

and attachment, their expectations tend to concentrate on the level of overall program success. What is interesting about the EIA program is that it is considered the "Baby" at Mikva. It was the original idea and the first program implemented by the founders, therefore it holds a particular attachment to the founders and receives more interest and scrutiny than some of the other programs. The founder's hope rests more on seeing the EIA program a) succeed, b) remain a central focus of the organization and c) continue to be a main driving force in meeting its Mission. If others come to define a "Good Job" in terms of major changes to the program, the modified program may well conflict with the needs of founder-stakeholders. Differences in goals are problems many organizations have had to face.

Staff

The EIA program staff has some distinct expectations when implementing its various projects. One of these expectations is that the staff will be given the latitude and resources to implement the EIA program as well as the opportunity to bring to the table new project designs and ideas. Also, it is important that staff feel they are experiencing professional and personal growth with their involvement. They expect to impact youth, and see that impact, as well as experience a certain level happiness, job satisfaction, and professional rewards. This exposure and constant interaction allows for numerous opportunities to utilize questionnaires and surveys to judge staff effectiveness and satisfaction, as well as address any affect staff turnover has had on the program or organization.

Teachers

Teachers are the program implementers and primary youth recruiters for the EIA program. Different teachers at different schools provide varying expectations and goals. However, we assume teachers do share one common expectation: that students are able to relate their out-of-classroom work to their in-classroom studies. They likely expect the knowledge and experiences gained from volunteering in the EIA program will translate into better understandings of civics and other governmental subjects. Finally, they may well expect that participation in the EIA program will positively affect both a student's outside and inside the classroom performance (i.e. behavior, grades and motivation).

Ultimately, teachers need to feel the reward in the classroom and amongst their students is enough to justify the additional time and effort needed to implement the EIA program. The greater they see the connection, the more motivated they are to be involved and thereby strengthen student participation. Additionally, the stronger the connection, the more motivated they are to repeat the program in upcoming years, thereby decreasing teacher turnover and improving student effectiveness.

Students/Youth

When dealing with youth, there are always two sets of expectations: what the youth want and what MC wants. For youth to participate, they need to see that they will benefit in some way from their participation. Money is often a good tangible benefit, but MC does not often offer that as a benefit. For youth in MC, the benefit is intangible and is a greater incentive than an hourly wage could ever provide. Because of a youth's perceived student status and "you do not know anything" role in society, they are told

what to do, where to go and how to act. They are given limited empowerment authority to make their own decisions. Youth often resent this authoritarian mentality, which they see as demeaning. Youth want to be given opportunities to earn respect and trust, as well as be given more responsibility and leadership roles. They want to be given control over something in their lives in order to gain a sense of self worth and self-confidence. These goals of personal empowerment, responsibility and trust need to be observed and acknowledged for the EIA program is to be properly evaluated.

MC's core belief is that it is affecting youth in a positive way. Therefore, it always tries to be aware of how its programs are affecting youth and what benefits youth are gaining from their participation. Because of this, Mikva has pretty clear expectations for all of its programs, especially concerning the EIA program. For it to be a 'Good Job', Mikva expects that it will have an impact on the student's civic attitudes, civic leadership skills and civic knowledge, in that order. Long-term, they want to see that their alumni are voting, becoming political and community leaders and just generally following the political process.

All of these expectations, if realized, would hopefully translate into youth taking on civic responsibilities and leadership roles as they progress into adulthood. This expectation helps Mikva to fulfill the other half of its Mission Statement: "to develop the next generation of civic leaders, activists and policymakers". It is this expectation of future roles in politics and the creation of political leaders that needs to be formally evaluated. So far it has only been informally evaluated through random interactions with program alums.

2. INPUTS

The evaluation process occurs continually through a program's life cycle, hence the need for both short-term and long-term evaluations. In order to evaluate the long-term impact of the EIA program at the MC organization, the inputs into the program need to be specified. This will help to clarify what assets Mikva has in order to better interpret and utilize any evaluation results. It also helps to crystallize underutilized resources that may help in adjusting the program to better meet it goals, along with Mikva's overall mission. For MC and the EIA program, the inputs will include: Vision, Administrative Resources, Financial and Associated Assets, Residual Resources and Linkages. It is important to remember that this list is not exhaustive and that some inputs can easily overlap categories depending on utilization.

VISION

MC has a clear **vision** of how it sees the world and what it wants to affect in that world. Its mission statement is clear and concise. The beliefs of youth empowerment and the need to change things now are evident in everything that Mikva does. The Executive Director espouses the vision and every employee is hired partially because they demonstrate an internal need to aid in that vision. Finally, the vision, and its resulting mission statement have not changed since the organization began. That consistency promotes stability and trust.

Next, there is the input of **culture**, particularly, the one created within MC. At MC, an environment has been established that mirrors the organization's mission and

current direction. This culture starts at the top with the Executive Director's vision and drive. This created culture has been conducive to the socialization within the organization. It creates a desire to stay and work for the mission over a longer period of time. Therefore, through specific hiring practices, which go beyond the typical interview scenario, MC has been able to create a culture of loyalty, dedication and selflessness, which has enabled it to stay relevant and expand its program into additional schools.

As with most not-for-profits, salaries are not high. Therefore, another incentive needs to exist, an internal one, with which to sustain a program and its organization. Subsequently, coupled with the culture that is MC, there is an internal sense of **motivation**. Without it, Mikva would surely not be where it is today. By cultivating a particular employee culture through selective hiring practices, MC has been able to tap into an internal sense of motivation on the part of not only its employees, but also its board members and teachers. However, teacher enthusiasm and participation are not a given and a deeper understanding of teacher motivation is needed. Since most of the EIA teachers are politics and government teachers, they certainly would be expected to have an internal drive to promote democracy and civic education to their students. The EIA program allows for an active civics element in their classroom and that has always been cited as an initial motivating factor for them to participate. Therefore, at the end of the day, MC should look to see how the motivation part of its training program is actually working. To accomplish this, two questions to be asked are: Are there differences in how well employee and teacher motivation might be promoted over time? Or What parts increase and decrease motivation?

Staffing is at the core of any direct input into a program. Without the personnel to create, implement and evaluate a program, the program would flounder. Mikva has ten full-time and several part-time/contract employees who are able to manage programs. Specifically, the EIA program has 2 full-time staff members and at times has accessed two contract employees to help. This access to a dedicated support structure has been invaluable to the past success of the EIA program. While there is some turnover in the organization, due to the annual replacement of several full-time interns, the core organization has seen almost no turnover in the last 2-3 years and the executive director has been with the organization since the beginning. However, it must be emphasized here that while this lack of turnover is assumed to be important and should be a focus for questions, due to the lack of comparably similar periods of turnover, a direct link between low turnover and outcomes cannot immediately be hypothesized.

As with any growing organization, the establishment of an effective **board of directors** is essential. A board of directors is fundamental to maintaining the overall vision of the organization and ensures that the overall goal of the organization does not get lost over time. While intelligence and dedication to the organization's cause are essential inputs, board members are often recruited for two major reasons: their ability to personally augment funding for MC and their connections to other political and financial resources.

Additionally, there is a need to look at the stability of the Board of Directors as a measure of effectiveness, since constant turnover yields constant change (i.e. vision and motivation) and often yield ineffectiveness. A common theory holds that a better, more

motivated board is often associated with better outcomes. However, since there has been relative low board turnover since Mikva's inception and currently there are no term limits with which to force board turnover, a link between low turnover and outcomes cannot be currently hypothesized.

Next, there are the implementers of the EIA program, the **teachers**. Every year, the EIA program recruits teachers in different schools in order to recruit students to volunteer for campaigns or to be election judges. Each of these teachers is given a grant in order to implement the program. Because they are not our employees and therefore we cannot force them to meet recruitment goals, they are not directly accountable to us and some teachers are better than others at implementation. Over the years, the EIA program has been able to continually maintain a core group of teachers that are involved every year and have Mikva's mission tattooed on their heart, so to speak. This core group of teachers are often known in their schools as Mikva teachers and therefore, the notoriety of our program is already evident and in place before we even start recruiting. This long-term commitment on the part of the teachers should be addressed in order to determine if in fact the longer a teacher participates is positively correlated to positive student involvement.

In addition, the majority of EIA teachers are government/civics teachers, particularly at the Advanced Placement levels. Typically, these teachers have greater flexibility with their curriculum development and therefore can afford to push their students to do practical applications on their coursework. This flexibility and opportunity to teach higher academic level students may create a more motivated and outreach-driven student.

Finally, some teachers require participation in the EIA program as part of their grade, others make it extra credit or a club, while others just advertises the opportunities. Because the EIA program is not a high school graduation requirement, the success of the program in the schools really depends on the teacher's ability to motivate. By and large, teachers, as an input, are essential to the success of any EIA program for without them, there would be no program.

FINANCIAL AND ASSOCIATED ASSETS

Having access to **money** is an important part of how the EIA program succeeds. By having access to money, the EIA program is able to spend money on teachers, as well as on various forums and events. Money also enables Mikva to create a standard curriculum for teachers to use and even allows Mikva to print t-shirts for every student participant. It has even helped to pay for campaigning trips to New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Iowa and Washington, D.C. Due tot eh fact that everything costs money, it is an essential consideration when contemplating any EIA program.

Second is the aspect of **service learning hours**. Every Chicago Public School student needs to earn a certain number of Service Learning Hours in order to graduate from high school. These hours typically require a student to volunteer their time on community service projects. MC happens to be one of these authorized community service projects and therefore can award service hours toward a student's graduation. This motivating tool is extremely helpful for our teachers in recruiting reluctant students into participating. It is a great carrot to have in the Election In Action program.

Third, there is Mikva's access to bus fare cards and an on-demand rental car. These **transportation** assets enable the Mikva staff to travel throughout the Chicago area in order to check in on projects as well as bring in materials to the office. In addition, Mikva has a policy that students be given bus fare cards for their travels to and from any MC activity or event. This has enabled more students to participate more frequently in Mikva's around the city.

Fourth, MC has a distinct **office/meeting space**. This asset allows for a clear definition of space and adds legitimacy to the organization. In addition, Mikva's EIA program revolves around bringing together youth from all over Chicago (currently 17 high schools) in order to meet, discuss, volunteer and work. Because of the divergent base and locale of many of its students, a central, non-school based meeting location is necessary. By providing a centralized Office/Meeting Space, Mikva can provide access to its youth while minimizing the costs associated with renting additional spaces in other locations.

Finally, given the fact that Mikva has an office, it needs **equipment and supplies** (i.e. internet, computer, paper, printer, copier, etc.). Without this capital, it would be difficult to successfully conduct and promote the EIA program at Mikva.

RESIDUAL RESOURCES

While some Inputs are tangible, others are less tangible and more indirect. The first big intangible input is the **name** of the organization itself – Mikva Challenge. The name Mikva has a resounding impact in the Chicago area, especially in politics. Because of Abner Mikva's past political career (judge, White House Counsel for Bill Clinton,

Congressman, lawyer, etc). Abner Mikva is well known. Name recognition and accompanying **political** capital are enormous assets for the organization, especially given its relatively small size. Being able to name drop and ride the Mikva coattails has given MC access to areas that are often closed to others. It has been effective in enlisting responses and participation for the EIA program in the past and should be utilized in the future.

A further indirect input is the **history of the program**. Most for-profit businesses go bankrupt within five years of creation. Not-for-profits do not fair much better. The fact that MC has been around for close to ten years is a great accomplishment as well as a positive input. By being around for almost 10 years, Mikva has a proven track record of program implementation and success. This history of success ensures credibility and trust, two qualities that are not given, but earned.

Next, there are the foot soldiers: the **students**. Because we know our teachers and the subsequent track record of those teachers, we know we will have students in the EIA program. However, because we cannot control which students do what, or even how many students will participate, students are classified in the indirect input category. The majority of students come from Advanced Placement classes and come with a resume of participating in extra-curricular activities. This internal motivation to seek experiences outside of the school is extremely beneficial.

Finally, Mikva **alumni** are indirect residual forces. Currently, they are only being brought back into Mikva on a sporadic basis. Examples include volunteering at forums, stopping by the office to chat and coming in to help on a contract basis. This group of alumni is small and limited. Nevertheless, their involvement is greatly appreciated and

noticed by board members and surrounding organizations. This has led to a greater desire by MC to see alums take a more visible role in program activities.

LINKAGES

In development work, linkages are often regarded as the connecting parts of a program. In other words, they are the aspects that help connect and give a sense of commonality and central focus. Its annual **teacher trainings** are one of the primary linkage tools that Mikva uses. For every program, there is teacher training that aims to instruct and focus the upcoming program for all for the teachers that will participate in the program. Due to the very nature of the EIA program (different schools, different schedules, different school requirements, etc.), its implementation is diverse and not centrally located. This lack of central control forces Mikva to train teachers in the core aspects and goals of the program in an attempt to ensure consistent and repeatable program implementation. Generally, the EIA teacher training consists of a one day, four hour training that includes an overview of the election cycle, participation expectation, curriculum review, and activity demonstrations. This training set-up has become successful due to past discussions with teachers, an increased comprehension of EIA student needs and a better understanding of what makes EIA a successful program.

Next, there is Mikva's access to a **resource library and training materials**. By having and utilizing this resource, Mikva maintains a central area where 'best practice' ideas, techniques and activities are kept and continually utilized by both new and veteran staff. Through the resource library, MC is able to expand its knowledge and capacity

through learning and a continual education of its staff in diverse implementation practices.

A final Linkage input is the aspect of outside **community networks**. In a city the size of Chicago, coupled with its history of political organizing, it is no surprise that MC has engaged with other organizations in order to accomplish some of its goals. In the past, the EIA program has worked with the Chicago Board of Elections, People for the American Way and the Chicago School System.

3. HYPOTHESES

In order to improve a program, an organization must determine what actually makes a program successful. There are always assumptions, or hypotheses, about why something does or does not work. In order for a program to become more effective, these hypotheses must continually be tested, and more importantly, the aspects that create the greatest impact must be determined.

For example, everyone knows that physical activity is central to a healthy lifestyle. But the kind of physical activity that actually works best for one particular individual requires some experimentation and refinement. For instance, does a combination of 3 days a week of weight training and two days of running create better results than 4 days of swimming and 2 days of weight training? These activities must be tested in order to figure out their linkages and affect on the human body. At MC, certain activities are core to the desired outcomes. These core activities likewise must be tested to determine their linkages and area for needed strengthening.

Testing Linkages

In terms of the EIA program, there are some general hypotheses that can be reported. However, some of these are somewhat difficult to test and their effectiveness is often surmised based upon other information. These linkages are General Linkages, which are not directly testable but are nevertheless reportable. This is not to diminish their importance, since many informed observers believe they have a strong and positive significance. Therefore, we treat them more or less as the data for a case study: illustrative of general themes in this instance and suggestive of important and potentially important relationships. While there are other non-testable linkages involved, these are some of the ones that are readily evident for Mikva Challenge.

1. **Impact of Mikva name and Coherence of vision**. It is known that a name can be a very powerful thing, especially in politics. This is especially evident in Chicago, where political families rule certain arenas and pass their positions down to their kindred. However, the effect of a name is not directly testable because its use is extremely fluid (lack of universal homage or commitment) and its impact relies upon numerous other factors: timing, self-interest, political capital and loyalty. Ultimately, it is difficult to completely judge the impact of a name unless you are able to compare the MC programs to other similar programs that do not have the Mikva name.

2.   **Board Effectiveness**. It is a well-established fact that a well functioning and consistent board is critical to an organization's ability to function and prosper. However, while there are certain theories for what components of a board are necessary, every organization functions best with its own unique combination of individuals. But it is understood that board turnover and conflict within the board and between the board and Executive Director can affect an organization. MC has not had a significant amount of board conflict or interference in its daily operations. However, the potential still exists and needs to be addressed as a possible source of conflict.

3.   **Staff Turnover.** Recently, the EIA program has been directed by a revolving door of both fulltime staff and fulltime interns. Over the past two years and continuing into next year, the EIA program will have had five different coordinators who have had to quickly learn about the program, its mission and its teachers. There is also a new Associate Director position being created that will take the Executive Director out of direct supervision of the EIA program. It is important to note that this AD will be an external hire. This constant turnover needs to be explored to determine if the lack of institutional knowledge and stability is having an effect on the program. While it might be hard to test without great cost, examining the issue might offer some clues as to the functioning of the program and overall organization.

4.   **Media.** Media plays such a central role in today's society that its use is paramount to an organization's success. Organizations are continually fighting to get their name into the media in order to gain recognition and therefore gain funding because they appear legitimate. Media is so important because it "help[s] to shape…views by framing topics, raising issues, and taking sides" (Youniss 137). But Mikva has no control over what gets reported about or how the coverage will be slanted. Therefore, while media has an important role in how Mikva gets advertised, it has no direct control and is at the mercy of the media outlets.

There are a number of linkages that can be both tested and reportable. These hypothetical linkages should create the basis for examining the effectiveness of the EIA program and where it can improve. By examining the following hypotheses and adjusting the program implementations accordingly, MC will be able to increase the efficiency and success of its programs, especially the EIA program. While this list is not exhaustive, it is a good place to start.

1.   **Variation in training of teachers and impact.** MC should examine past EIA trainings to determine what worked and did not work. It is assumed that well-trained teachers equal educated and committed students. This needs to involve more than a look at "end of training evaluations". The examination needs to look at some of the following areas: what worked in

the training, what captured the attendees attention, what lost them, what did teachers actually implement in their classroom, what did students find effective and what produced participation results. By adjusting the trainings and Mikva's involvement, a direct linkage can be established that correlates the training adjustment to a change in student behavior and impact. These changes are all directly testable through various mechanisms (i.e. evaluations, direct observation and participation rates).

2. **Duration of teacher's involvement**. Also, Mikva needs to look at whether or not the length of a teacher's participation in the program has any affect on its success. For example, does the hypothesis hold that the longer the person has been involved in MC, the greater the impact on students?

3. **Variation in placement sites**. This hypothesis revolves around the idea that not all campaign locations are the same and that some are better at utilizing and encouraging students than others. An effort should be made to determine a) what campaigns garnered the most positive responses from students, b) what was Mikva's role in those campaigns (i.e. trainings volunteer coordinators) and c) what specific traits within those campaigns encouraged those positives experiences. While the third part will be difficult, some general assumptions can be gathered through observation and questions. Focusing on similar campaigns in the future can further

critique these. One such assumption can be related to the selection of certain placements in that an exciting placement would lead to more activism and participation. Some examples of what has been found to be exciting is canvassing neighborhood, participating in rallies, walking in parades and designing campaign websites.

4. **Amount of time students spend on internship**. There is an assumption that the more time a student spends campaigning, the greater the impact on his life. This is easily testable by encouraging MC to track its students beyond the campaign trail and figure out what their post-campaign activities are and compare them to their pre-Mikva activities and attitudes.

5. **Existence, activism of student networks**. There is a question as to whether the creation of a student network (i.e. alumni network) would help to encourage the development of Mikva students after they have left high school. "IS there an identifiable connection between activism in MC and activism later in life?" "What about a student network would encourage students to be involved in politics?" "What would enhance their ability to impact their communities?" "Why is it necessary to have a student network?" These are just some of the questions that could be laid out and answered through an examination of active student networks. However, as there currently is not a network or enough of an involved alumni base to create one, this is currently not a testable theory.

Nevertheless, as more and more contactable alumni are generated, it would be useful both to support their continuing involvement with the program and to test the impact.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PLANS

Framework Set-up

Central to this paper is an evaluation framework. In order to determine how well the EIA program is helping MC complete its long-term mission of creating future civic leaders, and to test the above hypothesizes, the program and hypotheses must be measured. As there currently is not a concrete long-term evaluation system in place to appraise the EIA program, one needs to be created. This evaluation system must be developed via an evaluation framework that gives the process and conclusions direction, reasoning and validity. Additionally, the evaluation framework must be holistic. While not-for-profit "work is complex, multi-layered, and evolving rapidly…NGOs often look at part of this complex 'elephant,' and not at the whole" (Coates 537).

The obvious question is: What's a good framework to judge a 'Good Job'? In other words: what will get MC the most information in the most cost-effective way in relation to the effectiveness of the EIA program? As the EIA program already collects data on a cyclical election basis, the short-term effectiveness is already being adequately measured. In order to determine a 'Good Job' in relation to the EIA program meeting the other half of MC's Mission Statement, there needs to be an evaluation process that is focused on collecting information over the long-term. The following evaluation

framework is a beginning step in this quest to answer the question: Is the EIA program

doing a 'Good Job'?

The framework to be laid out in this paper consists of a circular four-step process:

Development, Effectiveness, Reevaluation and Reformat. This four-step process will help

to guide MC through its long-term evaluation. Not all of the stages will be fully laid out

because all actions taken at a particular step rely upon the results gathered at the previous

step(s). Therefore, my goal is only to set up the following logical step framework, so that

future EIA program managers are able to take the information gained from Step One and

move onto subsequent steps. This is a long-term evaluation process. Therefore, it will

take several years to fully implement this evaluation framework and process, and will be

addressed by my successors.

Step One involves the **development and set-up** of the evaluation process. This

includes, but is not limited to, development of evaluation materials, suggested timetables,

reasoning for particular methods and avenues for evaluation. In this step, all the

groundwork must be laid out and prepared so that the evaluation process has a coherent

and focused plan. Due to the fact that MC currently does not have a written long-term

evaluation plan, the rest of this paper will focus on creating and documenting this first

step. Without it, there can be no next step.

Step Two is the **effectiveness** stage. In this stage, the program is evaluated.

Utilizing the tools laid out in Step One, the EIA program will be able to determine the

effectiveness of its program in terms of MC's overall mission. At this stage, it is

important to determine the degree of effectiveness of the program as this will help to

determine where changes could be made to increase its effectiveness. It is also at this step

that detrimental issues will become apparent. These issues could include such things as student and teacher matriculation or staff turnover rates. It is helpful to concretely identify these hindrances so that effective countermeasures can be initiated.

Step Three is called the **reevaluation** stage. It is at this point that the EIA program will look to reevaluate how its program is being implemented according to the information that it has gained from Steps One and Two. At this point, the EIA program and MC need to take some time in order to critically examine what is and is not working and how the program is falling short of its overall mission. The need for a self reflection step is important because it forces an organization to take the time necessary to fully reevaluate its program and its effectiveness.

Step Four is the final step in this evaluation process and is in some ways a very good indicator of an organizations ability to recognize its shortfalls and adjust accordingly. This step is called the **reformatting** step. In this step, an organization has already determined what its programs pros and cons are and has attempted to figure out what it needs to do differently in order to improve its results. This stage is all about retooling and expanding the program in order to improve its effectiveness. By reworking the existing program model, an organization is more efficiently and effectively able to understand the actions necessary to improve.

This improvement step leads directly back into Step One and the cycle of program evaluation begins again. By creating this cycle, MC will be better able to critique the EIA program's outcomes and how they relate to the overall Mikva mission. This process will help the EIA program become more responsive to the changing dynamics of students, teachers, board members and funders. It will also create a more sustainable program, as it

will be better able to withstand potential staff turnover, from the program manager to the Executive Director.

Tool Utilization and Analysis

As Coates notes, "a successful campaign is one that takes advantage of new opportunities or responds to new threats as they arise. Therefore, a successful [evaluation] approach must be flexible enough not only to adapt to external events, but to be a tool in reshaping the campaign" (Coates 537).

New Tools Needed

While MC does have some resources from which to gain a vague idea of its success at fulfilling its mission, there is currently no direct information as to the level of success that the EIA program has had in fulfilling the broader MC mission. Therefore, it is necessary to layout some initial ideas and tools that could be used to better determine the level at which the EIA program has been successful. The following ideas and tools are only meant to act as a starting point upon Mikva can begin its analysis of the long-term effect of the EIA program. However, it is important that these ideas and tools be examined and utilized as effectively as possible to ensure that MC is being proactive in its search for answers.

Focus Group with Teachers

The first tool that must be utilized concerns the various teachers that are involved in the EIA program. Currently their role is limited to teaching and implementing the EIA

program. However, because of their long-term commitment to the EIA program over the years, as well as their potential for daily access to Mikva students, they are in a positive position to help the EIA program understand its impact. EIA teachers meet with students everyday, they act as resources for future participants and they are often resources for graduated students who have come back into the area.

Because of their interaction with current, future and past EIA students, and their intimate knowledge of what motivates students, Mikva should attempt to better utilize their access to teachers by creating a Teacher's Focus Group. While various personnel within MC have routinely met with various teachers, these meetings are irregular and based upon what teacher is immediately available. This is good for brainstorming and checking ideas, but because of the teacher's lack of institutional knowledge and limited sense of obligation to MC, there can be a real disconnect between these teachers and MC. Therefore, it is important that MC establish this Teacher's Group, whose goal would be to examine how the EIA program is currently meeting the Mikva mission, what motivation techniques work for teacher and students, set out initiatives that enable Mikva to reach EIA alums, and determine changes to the EIA program based upon their feedback.

External Advisory Group

The second tool should involve an outside set of experts whose focus would be in helping MC better understand how it is fulfilling the 'creating future leaders' part of its mission. These experts would include government and political individuals and others involved in service learning. They could also include academics from area universities,

such as University of Chicago and DePaul University. This group should involve concrete individuals, but the membership's can fluctuate. This panel of experts could help MC understand the knowledge and data that it currently possesses and turn that into a clear picture of how things currently stand. By helping to create a picture of the current situation, MC would be able to have a better understanding of where the EIA program future goals. These experts could then be able to help MC sculpt out a plan for future implementation. At any of the above steps, the Teacher's Group could be involved as a collaborator or implementer, depending on its status and current plans.

Alum Network

In order to truly understand the effectiveness of the EIA program in creating future leaders and activists, MC must locate past program participants and question them about their past MC experiences. This primary source of knowledge is the shortest route to determining how the EIA program is influencing the youth. Therefore, it is important to locate and contact these alums to determine exactly what they are doing and how involved they are in their community and politics.

MC currently has a consolidated list of alums and their contact information. However, this is only a recent event and much of the information is incomplete or inaccurate. Therefore, the full potential of the EIA alums cannot be accurately determined at this point and subsequently, the question of whether or not MC is completing its mission of creating future leaders cannot be answered. Thusly, an effort to work and create a better alumni database is extremely important. In addition to the creation of this database for older alums, an effort must be made to contact outgoing high school seniors

to gain their future contact information and plans so that the MC can continue to track them. Their information must be added to the current database so that they do not become lost and forgotten.

Data

As I have attempted to stress throughout this paper, in order to help improve MC's future, information must be gathered that will help Mikva identify areas of strength as well as areas that need improvement. In other words, if a better picture is to be created as to the effectiveness of the EIA program in helping Mikva reach its goals and mission statement, both quantitative and qualitative data must be collected and analyzed. But it must be remembered that Mikva is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that has limited resources. Therefore, any method or data collection process must be both cost effective (i.e. time, staff, and money) and manageable. It must also be usable, with clear options for change that busy staffers and volunteers can assess and apply. Many fine evaluation products, with detailed and data rich resources, remain on shelves, waiting to be reviewed and adapted for use.

Some of the more popular collection techniques include surveys, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and the collection of published and demographic data. Each of the numerous data collection techniques will help to varying degrees depending on the associated costs and the hypothesis to be tested.

Fortunately, Mikva's EIA program already has a good data collection process in place, relying on several of these techniques. The EIA program already collects surveys from students and teachers at the end of every program cycle. It continually solicits

feedback from campaigns throughout the program implementation. Mikva also goes through an annual staff evaluation process to determine how the staff feels toward the program and organization in general and what rewards/incentives should be in place to promote outstanding job performance. To improve this data collection process, Mikva could involve surveys and individual discussions with various stakeholders (i.e. board members, teachers, school board liaisons, funders, and donors) that would examine how well management support and trainings are being received, internalized and implemented.

In addition to the above data collection, a much wider net needs to be cast in order to gain a better understanding of the EIA program's impact on students. For example, Mikva's focus has always been gauging the long-term impact of its students as political and community leaders. In order to do this, hypotheses need to be tested and a baseline has to be established from which one can judge any future program adjustments. Because the focus is on Mikva's impact with youth, a more concerted effort to collect data from MC alums could be made. One methodical way would be to establish an alumni network. A functioning alumni network would include various methods such as surveys, focus groups, year-on-year tracking, face-to-face discussions and self-assessments and would be carried out on a standard basis (years 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, etc.) in order to help determine Mikva's long-term impact on students lives after they have left the program.

These assessments need not be complicated nor implemented all at once. For instance, a set of expectations could be added for each successive class. Alumni are the greatest source of information on Mikva's long-term impact and therefore need to be brought into the process.

On another side are the teachers who are the implementers of the EIA programs and therefore are critical to its success or failure. Therefore, this wider net must include them. Consequently, an expanded examination of their roles must be undertaken to test such hypotheses as "more educated and senior teachers have better success at getting sustained student community involvement". Additional areas to examine could include such things as a teacher's background (degrees, past careers, years teaching, special certifications, etc.), their past Mikva involvement, levels of participation over the years, and teaching level (AP, remedial, etc.). Supporting and comparative evidence can be gained from areas like teacher-to-student impact assessments, student participation rates and pre-candidate forum knowledge surveys

Over time, with the above information as a base, the EIA program could conduct focus groups and surveys to measure how the various trainings are pertinent to the program's implementation and where teachers need extra help. Additional information could be gathered from these focus groups to determine relative and accurate training elements and those that need adjustment. Additionally, surveys would also be helpful in determining the links that produce an effective training. MC could survey and assess which Mikva written curriculum elements teachers implemented, which they did not, what modifications to the curriculum did teachers make, what did they feel comfortable implementing and how did the students respond to the curriculum.

Surveys and focus groups could also be used to possibly clarify some untestable elements, such as those related to the board of directors. A simple survey of the board of directors could help determine how productive they feel the EIA program was and what

kind of goals do they vision for the future. This survey is a simple way to look to see what levels of consensus exist on the board.

These are just a few examples of how different data collection methods can be useful in testing the various hypotheses mentioned earlier. The opportunities to use these methods should not be limited to what is mentioned above, but rather used as an introduction to more extensive possibilities are available. No method is exclusive, but can easily be combined with others in order to get the most comprehensive vision of the EIA program. It must be remembered that data collection is so important that Board members need to see it, staff members have to see it, and funders want to see it. Without collection and analysis of data, no clear idea of where the program stands, let alone progress, can ever be ascertained.

5. MEANS FOR UTILIZING RESULTS, IMPACTING INPUTS

So, how does MC take all of the new information and use it? What good is all of this data if there is not anyone who is in charge of analyzing and adjusting the EIA program? Therefore, there needs to be mechanisms in place to take all of the information that comes in and translate it into concrete actions. Below is a list of mechanisms that could be used in order to properly utilize the results and turn them into ways to impact the EIA program's inputs.

External Advisory Group

The Mini Network mentioned in the "Data Collection and Analysis Plans" section would be utilized at this time to review information and determine if any progress has

been made. Much like a board of directors, which looks at the overall organization, this Mini Network would examine the overall progress within EIA program specifically. They would meet regularly to examine how the EIA program is impacting its inputs and how recent changes in linkages have affected those inputs. They would then be able to put forth changes that they feel would better impact the EIA program's inputs. In forming this Advisory Board, certain groups should be targeted.

On the one side, there are the youth. No one knows more about how youth operate than themselves. Therefore, it is imperative that they be involved in any improvement analysis and improvements. Students would be able to look at different linkage results, examine the resultant impact on inputs and determine solutions. They would be able to examine suggested linkage adjustments and determine their potential effectiveness. Their involvement also has the added effect of empowering youth to take an active role in their own development and that of future generations.

On the other side, there are the teachers, area leaders and politicians. MC pushes students to become involved in politics and their community, so it is only appropriate that certain insiders be invited to participate. Due to their expert knowledge and the whys and hows of involvement, they are in a great place to offer insight and analysis. Their intimate understanding enables MC to better understand how a student might become involved and maintain this involvement over the long-term.

Staff Training

In light of evaluation results, certain deficiencies will become apparent. Several of these deficiencies will be readily traceable to personnel issues. At this point, new staff trainings would be advisable in order to address new realities and the newly adjusted

inputs. By improving the staff through trainings, new linkages can continually be tested with an updated staff that is prepared, knowledgeable and competent.

Teacher Training

As primary implementers of the EIA program, teachers are at the forefront of the EIA program. If they are not effective at communicating our program to students, then the EIA program becomes futile and useless. By analyzing teachers' involvement, Mikva is able to better understand what approaches elicit more positive long-term student involvement. Trainings could be tailored to meet specific needs for certain teachers. For instance, new teachers may have a harder time understanding where and how the EIA program can fit into their lesson planning and therefore need a more in depth training that is more geared toward their needs. Or, due to the fact that some elections are more local than others, some teachers may be more effective during certain elections than others. A training to address their implementation strategies might be needed.

On a final note, Mikva currently works with mostly high school students and so it makes perfect sense to install our programs directly into the school system and monitor for academic and personal improvement. However, currently Mikva does not have the ungarnered access, implementation authority or resources to take on such an endeavor. Nevertheless, it is definitely something to keep in mind for the future.

IDEAS AND OPINIONS

First there is the Teacher's Focus Group. As with organizing any group, the individuals involved must be motivated to continually show up and participate. Because of our earlier selection criteria of a teacher's demonstrated commitment to students and

Mikva, these teachers will already possess an internal sense of motivation to participate. However, due to the fact that we are requiring time and energy from these teachers, other motivating factors such as recognition, implementation roles, election trip involvement or money may need to be considered in order to ensure continual participation and commitment.

In order to sustain this group's involvement, several factors must be in place. First, in the initial stages, MC must be the leader in terms of scheduling meetings, developing agendas and setting goals. This will help to ensure that this Teacher's Group has a clear idea of expectations while limiting their initial administrative tasks. As this is an 'ask' of the teachers, MC needs to do a lot of the initial groundwork. Second, MC needs to be clear in its goal of determining how effective it has been in creating future political leaders. This will help to focus the Teacher's Group in their efforts to help find information in order to either support or refute that goal. Third, the Teacher's Group must understand its need, whether it is to be used as a sounding board or will it be more actively engaged in program development and research. This will help to determine which teachers may be better suited to be in the Teacher's Group as well as to let the teachers know what is expected of them. Next, there is the issue of resource allocation. For the Teacher's Group to be fully utilized, it must have access to resources (i.e. money, meeting space, etc.). In addition, depending on the focus and ultimate recommendations of the group, resources may be needed in order implement these potential suggestions. Mikva must be aware of this potential resource allocation and be willing to accommodate. Finally, the Teacher's Group member must be committed to the betterment of the EIA program and its fulfillment of the overall MC goal. New members

must be added quickly in order to replace non-committed members in order to ensure momentum and continual commitment.

To establish this focus group, MC will need to seek out an initial set of teachers, between 4-7, who are a) committed to staying in Chicago to teach, b) show continued commitment to MC, and c) have shown great rapport with and commitment to students. These teachers would meet on a semi-regular basis in order to discuss issues facing the EIA program, upcoming election cycles and outreach to future and past students. This is also a great opportunity to discuss curriculum updates and improved implementation strategies that better correspond with Mikva's overall mission. This group of individuals would hopefully meet over the course of several years in order to ensure that direction and focus are maintained.

Next, there is the Mini-Network. In order to set-up this Mini-Network of experts, Mikva should seek out individuals, educators, politicos and network partners that might be willing to collaborate. This grouping could be as informal as desired, but it would be beneficial if it met on a regular basis in order to discuss issues facing the EIA program. This group's first task would be to help MC determine what it has accomplished in terms of creating future leaders and activists. This could involve numerous activities and initiatives (i.e. survey development, data interpretation, etc.) centered on the idea of figuring out where to get information, how to get it and how to interpret it. Due to their various backgrounds, these Mini-Network experts would be able to help MC be more efficient and effective at analyzing the EIA program over the long-term. Due to MC's history, connections and program outreach, it currently has an extensive network of connections that should be tapped for the implementation of this Mini-Network.

The big question, after determining who will be in the Mini-Network, is 'how does MC motivate these experts to participate?' To participate in this endeavor, these individuals will need to meet a set of internal and external factors. For educators, that may mean working with youth or dealing with civics and improving classroom dynamics and curriculum. For college professors, it may be a desire to work with the next generation of youth activists or testing out a theory. For politicos, it may mean access to Mikva or a desire to help create the next generation of political leaders. Whatever the need, Mikva should attempt to meet that need without expending financial resources in the initial stages. While a paid analysis of the EIA may be in order in the future, Mikva does not yet have the resources or heightened need to venture there. Therefore, these experts hopefully will be motivated by other things than money and Mikva will need to ensure that these participants are getting their other needs met. While minimal compensation may be necessary to ensure the proper motivation, it should not be the primary motivation.

In order to sustain the External Advisory Group, several factors need to be in place and consistently applied. First, there is a need for the core of the network to be available for in-person meetings or via telephone. Because of Mikva's focus on the Chicago area, and the need for availability, experts should come from the Chicagoland area, though this is not a requirement. Second, a participant's internal and external motivating needs have to be continually met. While these needs may change over time, MC must attempt to meet those changes. If not, then other experts must be brought in as a replacement. This is why I suggested that while the core group is consistent, the group size does not have to concrete. This allows for participants to be replaced without

affecting the overall movement of the group. However, the core should be selected to ensure continual participation, at least in the startup phase of the External Advisory Group. MC itself must maintain its desire to work with the group in order to determine answers to the overall question of creating future leaders. Finally, if it determines that the current make-up or direction of the External Advisory Group is not working, then it must work with the group to correct it.

Finally, there is the Alumni Network. The easiest, most cost-effective way to gain information from these alums is via e-mail. This e-mail contact list has already been set-up and is currently being utilized to inform alums about upcoming events. This e-mail list could also be used to ask alums what they are doing and how Mikva potentially influenced their current situation. Determining the extent to which an alumnus is a leader and actively involved in community activism or politics is a judgment call that lies with Mikva and its interpretation of a 'Good Job'.

Once contact is made, an effort should be made to bring these alumni back into the MC environment. By bringing them back in, MC will be able to better understand their current lives and how the EIA program has possibly influenced, or did not influence their lives. By proactively engaging those alumni, MC will have an opportunity to better understand what it is doing right and, conversely, what it is not doing effectively in creating future community leaders and activists.

Once we have their names and numbers, how do we get them to comeback to Mikva and participate? MC has always tried to enlist the help of current and recent alumni in fundraising and kick-off events. However, there is currently no event exclusively for the alumni to get together. I propose an Alumni Day where alumni are

invited back to participate in a days worth of activities. This could include trainings, talking, discussion groups or even a gaming process where alum are given a pool of grant money to spend on projects that is decides upon in one day. By bringing alumni in and giving them a purpose to reengage in community activism, MC will have an opportunity to further meet its mission.

In addition, by making a concrete effort to pull alum together, Mikva will have an excellent opportunity to survey them on their current activities. This data will be tremendously helpful in documenting Mikva's movement and success at completing its mission. This valuable information may even reveal so called 'glory stories' that funders and board members love to encounter.

In order to be sustainable, this event needs several elements. First, it needs a staff member who is in charge of ensuring updated alumni records are kept and new alumni information is gathered and inputted. Second, updates on events and program progress must be sent out to help alumni feel included. They should not feel that the only time that Mikva is concerned about them is when they need something. Next, a staff member needs to be in charge of planning the Alumni Day. Furthermore, MC must begin to see that involvement of their alumni and Mikva's access to them is just as important to Mikva's survival as any of their current programs. Finally, eventually it will be important for some alumni to take the lead in organizing and maintaining contact with other alums. For ultimate sustainability and effectiveness, some aspect of the alumni base must take a central role with MC assuming a more supportive position.

CONCLUSION

Overall, MC has a strong organizational and program base from which to operate. In addition, due to the fact that the EIA program was the basis for the creation of the MC, it has a solid historical foundation and support. However, there has not been an extensive look at the long-term impact of the EIA program, and as such, its true effectiveness is not understood. Therefore, I have lain out a long-term evaluation framework, with an accompanying implementation process, that should help MC better understand the true impact of the EIA program. This will also enable MC to better determine how effective it is being in fulfilling its mission statement.

While this evaluation process can begin at any point, it is important to try and implement it now, as there is an upcoming lull in election cycles. This is an excellent opportunity to lay the groundwork that will enable MC to establish the evaluation framework. While it is understandable that the entire framework will not be able to be fully established in 2007 (staff turnover, budget, etc.), the important thing is to get started. There will always be things to delay implementation at Mikva, but it is important to make this evaluation process a priority. Its implementation can only have positive results, enable the EIA program to continually improve and expand, give sustenance to grant applications and assure funders that their involvement will leave a legacy, and it will demonstrate Mikva's proactive commitment of acting Now, not Tomorrow.

MC needs to have mechanisms in place that will enable it to have sustainable growth. By utilizing tools to continually evaluate itself, MC is ensuring that the EIA program is improving and expanding. To continually grow and expand without an idea of the underlying reasons why is to build a glass house. This house looks nice and shiny from the outside, but it is hollow with no support or strength. One nick can cause the

glass to shatter and weaken the entire structure. Mikva Challenge's success has been centered on its continual need for program improvement. Hopefully it will remember that principal when it comes to its future.

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