Sample Needs Assessment

STEM in Your Community: Hosting an Exciting and Educational Event

Tuesday, June 11, 2013 10:15 – 11:45

Want to have a STEM event that yields success at every level? Performing a needs assessment is critical before planning any event. Answering these few questions will allow you to gather vital information about many aspects of holding the event and help you formulate an implementation plan.

Capacity

What factors contribute significantly to your ability to effectively carry out the program? Are there local AAUW branches that could be volunteers or contribute in other ways? Have the organizer's planned and implemented other projects or programs? How much experience do they have? How many volunteers and leaders will work on the event? Do they all have the time and energy to make the event a success and follow through on their responsibilities?

Demand for Programming

Determine the demand for STEM programming for girls in your local community. Are there other similar STEM events in your local area? (Such as science fairs, mathletes, FIRST Robotics, MathCounts, Design Challenge, Girls Excelling in Math and Science (GEMS) clubs, etc.) If so, what are the age/sex of participants? Who is hosting and where? (Local colleges, universities, and community colleges, high/middle schools, local businesses and community centers) Is there a fee for attendance? The big question to ask is why does your community need this program? How would your community benefit from this type of STEM event?

Type of Event, Target Group and Content

What type of event would work best in your community? Are there any underserved groups who could really use a targeted STEM program? Who is your target group? What will be the event content? Will there be speakers, hands-on activities, or something entirely different? Who will prepare the content and how will it be evaluated?

Location

Where will you hold the event? (Local colleges, universities, and community colleges, high/middle schools, local businesses and community centers) How will this location be an asset to the event? Are there any unique or specialized facilities the location offers? (Such as laboratory or research facilities) Are there any requirements or restrictions on outside groups using these facilities? Be particularly cautious in that some venues might be free but require that you use their catering facilities…often a very costly prospect!

Coalition Building

The community should be involved in the STEM event with an intention to form long-lasting ties and sustainable support for the program. Make a list of the coalition that could be built to support the project. Why would this coalition be helpful and what roles will it play? Are there local professional, educational, nonprofit, or association community groups that would be an asset? (Such as chapters of

the Society for Women Engineers, the Association for Women in Science, local PTA/PTO, Key Club, Honor Society, or corporate women's affinity groups?) Who are they and what components would they assist with? (Such as providing speakers or reaching out to parents and student counselors)

What AAUW entities/members could support the event?
Check the AAUW website at https://svc.aauw.org/about/branches.cfm to find AAUW branches nearest to you.

Marketing, Advertising and Outreach
Describe plans for promoting the event in your community. Include details about marketing or advertising to local parents and college student groups and how tools such as newspaper advertisements, flyers, press releases, or university websites will be used. Also think about how to reach out to local schools and students. Think about who would benefit from this event and that is usually a good partner in helping spread the word!

Timeline
A realistic timeline is necessary to effectively plan an event. Begin with the end in mind and work backwards from the date of the event. Make sure the event date does not conflict with other major events going on at the location where it will be held, including other groups using the space. Allow enough time to receive responses from speakers, order printed materials, market the event, etc. If part of your event will be held outside, consider the weather in your area as well. Space can be cheaper to obtain in the winter, but will you run the risk of a cancellation due to snow?

Budget
How much will it cost to hold this event? Estimate the cost of space usage, food, flyers or other handouts such as programs, speaker travel and gifts, t-shirts, tote bags, etc. Consider what can be donated and how much money may need to be raised.

Small Business and Corporate Support
Two excellent sources of funding are local corporations and businesses in the community. Include a plan to promote the program and solicit any other forms of in-kind donations, such as supplies. Research any corporations in your area that have large STEM workforces, and describe how to perform outreach to them. Do you know anyone that works there? Do you have any other connection to the business?   Also, think about organizations trying to project a "good" image to the community. Local banks, cable companies, and others are vying for business. They can reach out to a large part of your community by sponsoring your event. And, don't overlook "in-kind" donations. You'll need pens, materials, bags, etc. Companies are happy to donate this type of item in exchange for the publicity.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important component of any event. Before creating an evaluation, ask what does success look like and how can it be evaluated? What are the goals for the event and how can you build this into your evaluation? A survey, interviews or focus group can gauge whether the event accomplished what the organizers set out to do and how well it was done.

Some best practices for evaluation, collaboration, and engaging girls can be found at
http://www.ngcproject.org/exemplary-practices-overview