

Alliance of Career Development Nonprofits (ACDN)
Member Overview Information for Start-Up Programs
and
New Program Concept Checklist

The following is an overview of how the majority of our members operate. Note that some of our organizations are approaching 20 years in service to their community. As a program grows, it adds services and referral partners, and new ways to raise money. The following information is meant to simply give you a glimpse of the operations of our members. It is important to remember that all started just by serving one or two small programs in a small space with no paid staff. This should be your focus and we do not want you to be overwhelmed by the information provided.

Business Model Description: The members of The Women's Alliance DBA Alliance of Career Development Nonprofits (ACDN) are independent organizations whose primary missions are to provide interview appropriate attire and related services to low income, less-advantaged, or in-crisis women and men seeking employment.

While the member organizations operate autonomously, we have several characteristics in common:

- Most member organizations are designated 501(c)(3) nonprofits.
- Some members operate as a program of a larger entity or through a fiduciary agent, such as a church, YWCA, Junior League, or other non-profit organization.
- All members collect and distribute interview and/or work appropriate clothing to needy women, men and their families in the community. The clothing is donated free of charge to the end user.
- Most members serve clients using a referral process established through a network of referral partners. Referral partners often include human services providers and social service agencies (battered shelters, homeless shelters, homeless transitional living programs, substance abuse programs, prison re-entry programs), adult job training programs, vocational and secondary schools, and other organizations that provide job training or other services to help women and/or men secure stable employment. New programs should consider starting small, perhaps servicing a few referral agencies to start and add referral partners as your organization becomes more competent in serving clients, accepting donations, and managing inventory.
- Some programs receive fees for their services either through contracts for services through public agencies, or fees paid by the referral partners. All members



distribute their clothing to their clients through a boutique-like facility located inside an office building, church, retail site, or social services center. Some have located in their One-Stop Career Center, which used to known as the unemployment office.

- All member programs rely upon a pool of dependable volunteers to help serve the clients, gather and sort clothing donations, fundraise, serve on committees or the board, facilitate workshops and provide other essential services.
- Most of the member programs are supported by a combination of government or foundation grants, fundraising events, individual & corporate contributions, United Way and Combined Federal Campaign funds. Some also receive fees for their services either through contracts with public agencies or fees paid by referral partners as noted above.
- Many programs have established some type of social enterprise as a way to raise funds.
- Many member programs also provide interview and workplace image workshops and coaching, job search skills, workplace competency skills and personal development training to their clients. Some programs are beginning to look at offering job-placement services to their clients and referral partners.
- Most member programs have volunteer personal shopper(s) for each client customer visiting their boutique for interview or workplace clothing. The personal shopper serves as a mentor for their professional image.

Some members provide one interview suit per client, others may give two suits. Most programs provide workplace clothing once the client has been hired.

New Program Concept Checklist Factors to Consider:

As you and your development team consider your options for establishing a program in your city or community, here are a few key factors to consider:

Is there a genuine need for this type of service in our community? A good starting point is to check with your local Chamber of Commerce and county job and family services agency to determine how many families receive public assistance, the current unemployment rate and the number of existing organizations offering employment-related services. Also contact the One-Stop Employment Center which is your local “Workforce Investment Board”, the organization that receives and administers Workforce Investment Act funds for job training.

Are these services currently available through an existing program or organization?

Community leaders and foundations are reluctant to fund start-up organizations that

duplicate services already available. New organizations may find it difficult to compete for the limited financial support, volunteers, and other resources available within the community. Note that some organizations may tell you that they receive vouchers from Goodwill or Salvation Army, but our services are very different. Our members are programs that provide one-on-one assistance and image consulting in a boutique type atmosphere stocked with high quality interview and workplace clothing.

What legal structure should be adopted? Should you form a new non-profit, establish your program as part of an existing nonprofit, or devote your resources to the expansion of an existing program? These are questions for you to answer based on your personal situation and whether this is something you want to do long term. If you become part of another nonprofit, you and your program will be part of their business and you will answer to them. Some people want to start a program and then leave it to another nonprofit to grow. Others want to be involved as their business because this is their passion. You need to think of this as starting a business; will you be living in this community/city for a long time to grow and sustain the program?

What's involved in establishing a new nonprofit organization? Check with your Secretary of State to find out the rules for your state. Typically, you will need to prepare and file Articles of Incorporation and By-laws. You will also need to apply for a 501(c)(3) nonprofit tax exemption from the IRS. An accountant and lawyer should be able to help with these. Make sure you let them know you are forming a non-profit and would appreciate their donation of services to help you get this formed.

Is there a strong pool of candidates to serve on our board of directors/trustees?

Nonprofit organizations are governed by a volunteer board. The board should represent a diverse cross section of women and men in your community who are committed to the cause and are willing to commit a significant amount of time to the development of your program. Board members are expected to be highly engaged in raising funds to support the program. In addition, board members should bring essential skills, contacts and other resources that will help your program succeed.

How will our program be staffed? Most, if not all, programs start out staffed entirely by volunteers. As your organization grows, this may be increasingly difficult to maintain. You need to plan ahead for the possibility that you may need to hire paid staff and manage the all human resource functions. Some founders become the paid Executive Director, or may remain on the board and hire an Executive Director.

How do we raise money for our program? The purpose of fundraising is two-fold: to raise money and to build community awareness. Funding sources may include public funds, foundation grants, fundraising events, individual and corporate contributions, product sales, United Way and Combined Federal Campaign funds and social business enterprises. Our members have many exciting fundraisers that have become signature events in their communities.

What technology needs should we plan for? When you first start out, your cell phone

and personal computer will suffice. But as your program grows, your technology needs to become more sophisticated. Most organizations need a two-line telephone system with voicemail capabilities. You will want to track data on clients, volunteers, and donors, and will need to manage fundraising and marketing activities through your computer. Affordable software is available to 501(c)(3)'s through Tech Soup (www.techsoup.org).

What are some typical operating expenses? Automobile mileage, bank fees, rent, utilities, telephone service, postage, insurance, Director's and Officer's Liability insurance, office supplies, printing and copying, salaries and benefits, accounting and legal services, volunteer recognition. You may have some costs with setting up your space such as painting, carpet, dressing rooms, etc.

What should we consider when looking for a facility? Your facility will need to accommodate the unique needs of this type of organization. Some things to consider include safety and convenience for clients and volunteers, access to public transportation, and adequate space for the boutique and daily operations of receiving clothing donations, storage for inventory, seasonal storage (such as winter weights), large donations. You will also want to make sure your facility is handicap accessible, can accommodate dressing rooms (at least 1 or 2 to start), and is in a non-smoking facility. You may be able to find donated or reduced rental space in your community, such as a church. Many inner city churches have declining congregations and may have extra space for such a program and would welcome this as a community outreach. Their donation could also include utilities. Most of the time their insurance will cover programs such as this under their roof.

Where can we get equipment, fixtures and supplies? Check with the facilities managers at malls and shopping centers, fixtures are often left behind. Watch for going out of business sales. Many upscale boutiques often update their fixtures every 3 or 4 years. You will need heavy duty rolling racks (available at Target for sale that collapse), free-standing clothing fixtures and/or wall systems, hangers, and other storage needs for shoes, makeup, jewelry and scarves. Call on the community to donate in-kind goods such as fax machines, computer, office furniture, maybe a small refrigerator and microwave for volunteer use. Check Craigslist and your local newspaper, local recycling center or United Way for programs that accept office equipment and furniture for donation to local non-profits. Contact colleges for interns or students who need special projects or volunteer hours and volunteer groups to help with painting or setup of your space, etc.

How do we get clothing? Be aware! You need to have your space designated, racks set up, volunteers available for receiving and sorting before you begin soliciting clothing. You have probably already received donations of clothing just talking about starting this program! Once you begin asking for clothing, it will come! And come. Ironically, not everyone has great success with a call for clothing on a specific day, but clothes will continue to appear at that site long after the clothing drive. Let businesses have clothing drives among their employees, or ask churches to set up a rack in a common area of the church, and designate a volunteer to drop off clothing on a weekly, bi-weekly or

monthly basis. Advertised community wide clothing drives definitely get the word out about your program, and you will have many donors from these many months after the event. If you can set up some kind of a drop-off site, these also work nicely for on-going clothing donation drop-offs from individuals. Some retailers, shopping centers or drycleaners will welcome the opportunity for free publicity that your clothing drive PSA's will bring.

How do we get publicity for our program? Most reporters for television, radio, newspapers, local magazines will love your story. Establish a relationship with them. Send a press release about your new program to them. They will probably call for pictures or to have you for an interview. Don't forget about social media: Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. for advertising your new program and events.

How can we offer educational programs? A natural fit for our programs is to offer professional dress workshops including interview appearance and workplace appearance to your referring agencies. This accomplishes several goals: educating the job-seekers about employers expectations with regard to interview and workplace appearance, funders like to fund educational programs, your client customers will know what to expect when they visit your professional dress boutique, and employers will also want to support you because you are educating their prospective employees and addressing their concerns and expectations. These workshops can be taught by one of your volunteers that likes to do training; they may be a business professional, an image consultant, or yourself.

