The Mockingbird Society Evaluation Plan

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Program Structure and Context

There is a great need to improve the systems serving youth and young adults in Washington State. Nearly 9,000 youth were in out of home placement in Washington in 2017 (Partners for Our Children, 2015). Approximately 28% of youth who age out of foster care will experience homelessness within the first year of their exit from foster care (Ford Shah et al., 2015). In addition, there were over 13,0000 unaccompanied youth and young adults (ages 12-24) experiencing homelessness throughout Washington state (Noble, 2016). Multiple systems changes would benefit children, youth, and young adults who are experiencing the child welfare or homelessness response systems.

The Mockingbird Society is a non-profit advocacy agency in Washington State with a mission to improve the foster care system and end youth homelessness (The Mockingbird Society, 2018a). The Mockingbird Society was founded in 2000 by Jim Theofilis under the philosophy that young people with lived experiences are truly the experts in what needs to change in the child welfare system (The Mockingbird Society, 2018a). Today, Mockingbird's Youth Programs has a dual focus on advocacy and youth development. The programming consists of seven regional chapters across the state including in Seattle, Everett, Tacoma, Olympia, Yakima, Spokane, and the Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) chapter based in Seattle (The Mockingbird Society, 2018a). Each chapter is supported by a partner organization, or host agency. In a collaborative effort host agency staff work with Mockingbird staff to recruit, engage, and support program participants in Mockingbird activities.

The Youth Program's goals are divided into three categories, Connection and Empowerment, Community Education, and Systems Reform. Overall, the programming is designed to help young people feel connected to their peers, improve their communication skills,

and become educated and active participants in state level systems changes. See Appendix A for a complete logic model (The Mockingbird Society, 2018b). In 2017, approximately 400 young people between the ages of 13-25 years old participated in Mockingbird activities through the regional chapters (The Mockingbird Society, n.d.). These activities include attending monthly leadership team and chapter meetings, quarterly State Leadership Council meetings, and annual events including the Youth Leadership Summit and Youth Advocacy Day. In addition, participants submit written articles, poetry, and other art work to a youth authored newspaper, *The Mockingbird Times*, and the Mockingbird Blog. Finally, Mockingbird Network members participate in a variety of speaking engagements. Many of these speaking engagements involve sharing personal stories with various policymakers. To date, Mockingbird participants and allies have helped advocate the passage of over 25 legislative asks (The Mockingbird Society, 2018a).

Description of the Problem

Over the last three years the overall youth and young adult engagement in Mockingbird programming has declined. However, the decrease in program engagement has not been equal across all regions. It is important to understand the factors that may be impacting the various levels of participant engagement. Two aspects of the regional chapter programming that have been previously identified by program leadership as potentially influencing participant engagement are the state of the collaborative relationship with the partner organizations and the various programming staffing models. Mockingbird's Youth Programs partners with local youth serving organizations as host agencies for each regional chapter. In addition, Mockingbird utilizes three separate staffing models to support the program regions. The first staffing model utilizes one full-time staff for one chapter. The second staffing model utilizes one full-time staff to support two nearby chapters, with the staff ideally splitting their time equally between the

chapters. The third staffing model utilizes a combined staff position with the partner organization. These individuals ideally work 20 hours supporting the Mockingbird regional chapter and 20 hours for the partner organization as a case manager or in another youth serving role. There is a need to better understand how the collaboration strength between the partner organization and Mockingbird as well as the various staffing models impact effective program participant engagement.

Purpose of Evaluation and Guiding Questions

The purpose of this evaluation of The Mockingbird Society's Youth Programs will be to determine the ideal staffing model and partner organization collaboration characteristics to effectively engage program participants. The following are the guiding questions for this evaluation.

- What characteristics of partner organization collaboration are most effective for engaging participants in Mockingbird programming?
- What Regional Engagement Coordinator staffing models contribute most to effective participant engagement in Mockingbird programming?

To answer these questions a process evaluation will be utilized as process evaluations are used when the evaluator is interested in understanding how well a program is functioning (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). This will be a formative evaluation with the results providing guidance for program improvement. Potential consequences of the evaluation could be changes in staffing models, funding, and partner organization agreements and relationships.

Literature Review

The impacts of two main concepts will be explored in this evaluation plan. The first concept is partner organization collaboration characteristics and strength. Collaborations with

partner organizations as hosts of programming and partners for policy work are essential for The Mockingbird Society to be successful in its endeavors. The second concept is the characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of the three different staffing models utilized to support the regional chapters. One challenge will be to operationalize the characteristics of the ideal collaborative relationship. This is made especially complex considering the various social and environmental contexts in which each partnership exists, including the staffing model utilized.

Collaboration

Collaborations between organizations have become increasingly important over the last few decades across multiple sectors including the nonprofit sector (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). Indeed, collaboration is now seen as essential for organizations to succeed, thrive, and appropriately serve communities and individuals (Gajda, 2004). Funders also see the value in organizational collaborations. As an example, nonprofits that collaborate are more likely to get government funding (Suárez, 2010). However, even as the emphasis on collaboration has increased, managing and evaluating the effectiveness of collaborations remains difficult (Gajda, 2004; Woodland & Hutton, 2012).

Successful collaborations have several key characteristics. The foundation of a successful collaboration is a shared purpose or shared priority (Byrne & Hansberry, 2007; Woodland & Hutton, 2012). Organizations come together when there is a need or a vision that could be better done together. Other characteristics of a successful collaboration include institutional support and political will from those in power, shared and combined resources, and clear expectations of collaboration roles and responsibilities (Byrne & Hansberry, 2007). In addition, organizational characteristics can impact the collaboration strength and the overall program outcomes for non-profits (Arya & Lin, 2007). Collaborations are dynamic and need

ongoing evaluation to maintain high effectiveness (Bryne & Hansberry, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Woodland & Hutton, 2012).

Multiple models for evaluating community collaborations exist. Woodland and Hutton (2012) proposed the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement (CEIF) Framework that describes five phases in the dynamic cycle of creating and maintaining a collaboration. The five phases include: 1- operationalize collaboration, 2 – identify and map communities of practice, 3 - monitor stage(s) of development, 4 – assess levels of integration, and 5 – assess cycles of inquiry (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). The authors suggest different actions and tasks that can be done by the evaluator to determine steps for improvement at each phase. In the first phase, the collaborative effort needs to be operationalized into specific items that can be observed, quantified, and measured (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). While the first phase focuses on what the collaboration will do, the second phase evaluates who will fulfills each role within the collaboration. This is important, not only to help maintain clear expectations, but also to ensure efficient work load balance (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). The third through the fifth stages describe the "how" of the collaboration. The third phase recognizes the cyclical characteristic of collaborations which has been described by Tuckman and Jenson (1977) as form, storm, norm, perform, and adjourn. In this phase evaluators can help determine if there are resources or needs to move the collaboration to the next stage in the cycle (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). The forth phase determines the level of integration the collaboration has, which depending on the goal of collaboration can vary from independent (no integration) to unifying (high integration) (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). Finally, phase five evaluates the quality of the personal interactions within the collaboration. While organizations may enter a strategic alliance, it is the

people who perform the collaboration and this phase introduces strategies to increase effective interprofessional collaborations (Woodland & Hutton, 2012).

The Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement (CEIF) Framework described above guides evaluators on determining the who, what, and how of a collaboration. This framework will be useful in the current evaluation of The Mockingbird Society's Youth Programs collaborations with its partner host agencies throughout the state. It is likely that each of the partnerships will vary in the needs, strengths, and plan for improvement.

Alternative Staffing Models

Limited literature exists that explores different staffing models. Most of the literature explores alternatives to full-time staffing models such as a shared staffing model (for example, Davidson & Kline, 1979; Duncan, 1983; Wood & Wattus, 1987). A shared staffing model is where one full-time position is completed, or shared, by two separate individuals (Wood & Wattus, 1987). Shared staffing models have been utilized to meet the demand for flexible schedules and reduce layoffs (Davidson & Kline, 1979). Shared staffing can be found extensively in the health and education fields, especially in rural communities (Davidson & Kline, 1979; Wood & Wattus, 1987; Woodhouse, Johnson-De Wit, & Finn, 2013). While proponents of shared staffing models highlight the flexibility in the positions, especially around creating a work and home-life balance, McDonald, Bradly, and Brown (2009) describe potential negative impacts of part-time work. Specifically, part-time employees tend to have less responsibility, less access to higher stakes projects and promotions, and less workplace support while having increased work intensity (McDonald et al., 2009). It is unknown whether staff that maintain two part-time positions that are combined into a full-time position will align more with full-time or part-time employee outcomes.

Data Gathering Techniques

The complete evaluation plan will be conducted in several phases. The first phase of the evaluation plan will aim to operationalize the characteristics of the ideal partner organization collaboration and understand the impact of the various Regional Engagement Coordinator staffing models on the collaboration relationship. The second phase will evaluate each partner organization collaboration strength based on the characteristics identified in the first phase. The third phase will involve methods to explore the relationship between the partner organization collaboration strength and regional program participant engagement.

The following discussion will focus on Phase 1 of the evaluation. Data collection will be through qualitative methods using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. All interviews and focus groups will be conducted by an external evaluator. Data will be collected from program managers from The Mockingbird Society, program managers from each partner organization, Regional Engagement Coordinators, and partner organization program allies. The goal will be to collect information about the experiences and understanding of each partner organization collaboration.

Phase 1 – Operationalize characteristics of ideal collaboration.

Interviews. Interviews will be conducted in person at The Mockingbird Society headquarters, via telephone, or video conferences. All interviews will be completed within a sixweek period in the summer of 2018. The interviews will be semi-structured with specific questions that will be used for prompts with the freedom for respondents to focus on themes they deem important. It is anticipated that each interview will last between 45 – 60 minutes. A total of 22 interviews will be completed consisting of the entire targeted population.

- Program Managers: Program managers from The Mockingbird Society (3
 individuals) and each partner organization (7 individuals) will be interviewed
 about their perceptions of the purpose, resources, and organizational roles in the
 collaboration.
- Regional Engagement Coordinators: Regional Engagement Coordinators (5 individuals) who are the staff in charge of programming in each region will be interviewed about their perceptions of the purpose, resources, and organizational roles in the collaboration. Additional questions will be asked about the impact of the staffing model they work under on their work performance.
- Program Allies: Program allies, who are employees of the partner organization
 and assigned to support the functions of the regional chapter program (7
 individuals) will be interviewed about their perceptions of the purpose, resources,
 and roles in the collaboration.

Focus Groups. Once initial interviews are completed and initial data analysis complete, at least three focus groups will be conducted to elicit feedback on the categories of characteristics of ideal collaboration, including Regional Engagement Coordinator staffing model, that have been identified. The focus groups will be conducted either in person or through telephone or video conferencing. Each focus group is anticipated to last 60-90 minutes and will occur in a four-week period in the fall of 2018.

Mockingbird Youth Program Staff: Program Managers and Regional
 Engagement Coordinators (8 individuals) will participate in an in-person focus
 group during one of the staff trainings at Mockingbird headquarters.

Partner Organization Staff: Program Managers and Program Allies at the host
agencies (14 individuals) will be invited to participate in one of two focus groups.

The focus groups will be held in-person at Mockingbird headquarters or other
partner organization office with optional telephone or video conferencing
capabilities for staff located across the state.

Measurement Instruments

A script will be followed for both the interviews and the focus groups. The interview script questions are modified from the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement (CEIF)

Framework proposed by Woodland and Hutton (2012). Additional questions were added to elicit perceptions around the Regional Engagement Coordinator staffing models. A complete interview script can be found in Appendix B. The focus group questions center on ensuring the categories identified by the evaluator through the data analysis of the interview responses are applicable and relevant. In addition, the questions aim to understand the impact of the collaboration characteristics on engaging participants in Mockingbird programming. See Appendix C for a template focus group discussion script. Questions were formed following guidelines outlined by Barker (2010). Specifically, interview and focus group questions should be open ended and avoid dichotomous, and one-word answers (Barker, 2010). In addition, "why" questions should be avoided (Barker, 2010).

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using a general inductive approach. The procedures outlined by Thomas (2006) will be followed. Briefly, the raw data from the interviews and focused groups will be compiled and formatted. Next, a closed reading of the text will be conducted by the external evaluator followed by the creation of categories or themes. The coded

categories will be cross-checked by the internal evaluator. Then the external and internal evaluators will work together to consolidate the categories to reduce overlapped coding and redundancy. Finally, the evaluators will create a model using three to eight categories. The resulting categories will then be validated by initial stakeholder members for accuracy.

Measurement Reliability and Validity

The evaluation design includes several aspects to increase reliability and validity. In qualitative research reliability and validity are often associated with the "trustworthiness" of the study (Noble &Smith, 2015; Thomas, 2006). One strategy identified by Thomas (2006) that increases trustworthiness is coding consistency checks. The evaluation design includes coding consistency checks through two methods. First, the coding is validated by a second evaluator. The second method is through including respondent validation to the characteristic categories identified, which is done in the follow-up focus groups. Noble and Smith (2015) identified respondent validation as a key strategy to increase trustworthiness. Furthermore, triangulation of data collection can increase reliability (Shenton, 2004). One type of triangulation of data collection is to use a wide range of types of respondents (Shenton, 2004). While the evaluation population is small, it does collect data from a wide perspective of stakeholders including managers and front-line staff on both sides of the collaborative relationship.

The use of an external evaluator to conduct the interviews, focus groups, and data analysis is another strength to the evaluation design. To obtain credible data, evaluation designs need to include methods to ensure respondent honesty (Shenton, 2004). In utilizing an external evaluator, the respondents can be reminded of the neutral position of the evaluator. In addition, the scripts for the both the interviews and focus groups explicitly ask for open and honest answers. Finally, Noble and Smith (2015) argue that acknowledging and working to limit

evaluator bias is important in increasing study trustworthiness. In utilizing an external evaluator, the internal evaluator acknowledges the potential biases they may have on the topic and aims to limit the effects of the bias.

Evaluation Stakeholders

Involvement of various stakeholders will be essential to the successful completion of the evaluation plan. The internal evaluator currently holds a middle management position at The Mockingbird Society and will serve to provide programming information, coordinate data collection, and as a convener of the stakeholders. The following stakeholder groups will be asked to participate at different points of the evaluation and will be informed of the results.

• Mockingbird Staff/Board of Directors

- O Youth Programs Staff Youth Programs staff will be active participants in each phase of the evaluation. In Phase 1, Youth Programs staff will participate in individual interviews and focus groups. In subsequent phases, the staff will be involved in the design and implementation of the evaluation. Critically, Regional Engagement Coordinators will be charged with ensuring data collection for their chapters.
- Other Staff/Upper Management/Board of Directors Mockingbird staff from
 other departments and the Board of Directors will be asked to give feedback on
 the overall direction of the evaluation. They will also participate in disseminating
 the evaluation results to other stakeholder groups.
- Partner Organizations —Partner organization management and staff allies will primarily be involved in Phase 1 of the evaluation. They will be informed of the evaluation results and be impacted by any collaboration or staffing adjustments due to the findings.

- Mockingbird Network Participants: Program participants will be involved in the later
 phases of the evaluation. They will be informed of the results of the evaluation and
 impacted by any collaboration or staffing adjustments due to the findings.
- External Audiences Organizations and other community members that request
 Mockingbird youth presentations will be asked to participate in later phases of the
 evaluation.
- Funders Funders will be informed of the results of the evaluation, especially
 highlighting the strengths identified and the adjustments made due to the evaluation
 results.

Resources Needed

Several resources will be needed to complete this evaluation. The first and most important resources is staff time. Dedicated meeting space will also be needed. Additionally, remote conference capabilities will be needed to conduct the interviews and focus groups for the staff and program managers from the external regions. Ideally this will be through an online video conferencing application such as GoToMeetingTM or SkypeTM. In addition, to ensure complete data collection, a recording device will be needed for each of the interviews and focus groups. Finally, an external facilitator will be required to ensure an unbiased and neutral environment for the data collection.

Barriers to Completion

The largest barrier to completion is the allocation of appropriate resources. Importantly, staff will need to be given the time and capacity to fully participate in the evaluation.

Stakeholder support will be needed at The Mockingbird Society and each of the seven host agencies to ensure staff are available for participation. In addition, funding for the external

evaluator will be critical. The use of an external evaluator adds credibility, reliability, and validity to the evaluation design. Without appropriate funding for the external evaluator, the evaluation trustworthiness diminishes, and the evaluation implementation is at risk.

Conclusion

It is necessary for The Mockingbird Society's Youth Programs to explore the factors that are impacting the inconsistent participant engagement decline across the regional chapters. A critical part of this exploration will be the evaluation of the several partner organization collaborative relationships as well as the optimal Regional Engagement Coordinator staffing model described above. The results of the complete evaluation will serve to inform program and organizational leadership to optimize collaboration agreements and regional chapter staffing.

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Appendix A: The Mockingbird Society Youth Program's Logic Model

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INPUTS	PROGRAM GOALS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES
Youth Programs Chapter Structure	 Youth learn leadership and self-advocacy skills Youth feel: Accepted by their peers and Mockingbird staff Positively connected to the foster care and youth homelessness community Empowered to improve systems that affect them Community Education Youth learn effective communication skills with a focus on writing and public speaking Youth develop more interest and confidence in effectively and purposefully sharing their personal story Youth help educate the public about issues related to foster care and youth homelessness, and increase public will to act Systems Reform Youth will learn how Washington state is governed Provide youth with opportunities to organize, develop relationships with policymakers, and become civically engaged Engage youth in policy development and systems advocacy to bring about lasting improvements to foster care and homeless youth serving systems 	 Monthly Chapter Meetings Monthly Leadership Team Meetings Individual Development Activities Community Education The Mockingbird Times – 4 issues per year Digital Stories & Blogs Speakers' Bureau Activities Public Speaking Trainings: Storytelling for Advocacy Community Trainings: Culture of Foster Care Stories of Youth Homelessness Custom Trainings Systems Reform. Systems Reform Trainings: Legislative Advocacy, Voice Development, and The Power of Voting Issue Development → Advocacy Agenda Issue research and strategic relationship building meetings State Leadership Council Youth Leadership Summit Youth Advocacy Day Direct Advocacy/Testimony Participation on Work Groups Representation on Coalitions 	Connection & Empowerment Youth Benefit: Increased Connectedness – youth develop a sense of community and peer connections Feeling of Empowerment – awareness of rights, voice, and an ability to create change Increased Sense of Normalcy – feelings that participants are not so different than others Develop advocacy & leadership skills Develop group skills, including problem solving, conflict resolution, facilitation, etc. Basic work readiness and job skills Community Benefit: Youth are seen as leaders and contributors High-risk behaviors are reduced Community Education Youth Benefit: Youth learn to share their personal stories in a safe and effective manner Increase in public speaking, writing, and communications skills Community Benefit: Improved perceptions of youth who have experienced foster care and homelessness Increased awareness of issues and desire to act Systems Reform Youth Benefit: Youth understand democratic process and build strategic relationships with decision makers Active in policy decisions/development Youth are heard and understood Community Benefit: Policymakers hear directly from systems consumers Improved laws and policies, and right-sized budgets, to address systems gaps Long-term costs savings for society

Appendix B: Interview Script

Opening

Thank you for participating in this discussion today. The Mockingbird Society relies on community collaborations to effectively work in each program region. We would like to know about your understanding of the host agency collaborations. For our purposes, the host agency is the organization that partners with The Mockingbird Society in each of the regions. The information you provide will be used in a larger evaluation of Mockingbird program implementation. Please speak honestly and openly. The session will be recorded so that we can ensure all ideas are captured in the report.

Questions

- 1. What is your understanding of the Mockingbird and host agency collaboration's purpose?

 Potential Follow-Up How does the collaboration purpose align with the host agency program mission?
- Key members of the collaboration include Regional Engagement Coordinators, Program Allies, and Program Managers.
 - a. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Regional Engagement Coordinator?
 - b. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Program Allies?
 - c. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Mockingbird Program Managers?
 - d. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the host agency Program Managers?

- 3. How do these different members work together to engage participants in Mockingbird programming?
- 4. What benefits and costs does Mockingbird and the host agency accrue because of the collaboration?
- 5. How are requirements for additional or different resources identified and communicated?
- 6. What strengths do you see in the current collaboration?
- 7. What weaknesses do you see in the current collaboration?
- 8. What benefits and disadvantages do you see in the Regional Engagement Coordinator staffing model utilized in your region?

Question for Regional Engagement Coordinators Only

- a. What do you like about the structure of your position?
- b. What aspects of the structure of your position do you struggle with?
- 9. Are there any other comments or concerns you would like to share about the collaboration relationship?

Closing

Again, thank you for sharing this information. You will be invited to participate in a follow-up focus group about the collaboration characteristics identified in the interviews conducted.

Appendix C: Focus Group Template Script

Opening

Thank you for participating in this discussion today. The Mockingbird Society relies on community collaborations to effectively work in each program region. Each of you participated in an interview concerning the collaboration between The Mockingbird Society and the host agency partners. Today we will discuss the key characteristics that were identified in the initial interviews. The goal for today is to obtain feedback on these characteristics and whether they seem applicable to your situation. The information you provide will be used in a larger evaluation of Mockingbird program implementation. Please speak honestly and openly. The session will be recorded so that we can ensure all ideas are captured in the report.

Introduce characteristic #1

- 1. How is this characteristic applicable or not applicable to your work with Mockingbird?
- 2. How does this characteristic impact the collaboration relationship?
- 3. In what ways does this characteristic affect the ability to engage participants in Mockingbird programming?

Introduce characteristic #2

- 1. How is this characteristic applicable or not applicable to your work with Mockingbird?
- 2. How does this characteristic impact the collaboration relationship?
- 3. In what ways does this characteristic affect the ability to engage participants in Mockingbird programming?

Introduce characteristic #3

- 1. How is this characteristic applicable or not applicable to your work with Mockingbird?
- 2. How does this characteristic impact the collaboration relationship?

3. In what ways does this characteristic affect the ability to engage participants in Mockingbird programming?

Introduce characteristic #4

- 1. How is this characteristic applicable or not applicable to your work with Mockingbird?
- 2. How does this characteristic impact the collaboration relationship?
- 3. In what ways does this characteristic affect the ability to engage participants in Mockingbird programming?

Introduce characteristic #5

- 1. How is this characteristic applicable or not applicable to your work with Mockingbird?
- 2. How does this characteristic impact the collaboration relationship?
- 3. In what ways does this characteristic affect the ability to engage participants in Mockingbird programming?

Closing Question

Is there any characteristic that is missing from this list that you believe is critical for the collaboration relationship?

Closing

Thank you for your time and feedback today. The information gathered today will play a valuable role in the current evaluation. You will receive a copy of the final evaluation report once it is completed.