

Rockbridge 4-H: The Case of Boxerwood

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of the Problem

I conducted an in-depth exploration of the partnership building process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and identified specific partnership characteristics found within this collaborative relationship. Boxerwood Education Association is a nonprofit 501© (3) organization whose mission is, “to educate and inspire people of all ages toward becoming successful and environmentally responsible stewards of the Earth,” (www.boxerwood.org). The Rockbridge county 4-H program prepares young people to step up to the challenges in their community and their world. Rockbridge youth participate in the hands-on, real world experience necessary for them to become leaders through the delivery of research-based, positive youth development programs.

This topic is significant because the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership illustrates how a simple idea and conversation can build an alliance in achieving goals of mutual interest. In March 2011, a memorandum of understanding between Rockbridge 4-H and Boxerwood was formed. As a partner and primary representative of 4-H, I feel it is of great importance to share the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H collaborative partnership process so that other community-based organizations to see the benefits of a collaborative partnership and to view the collaborative partnership as a potential solution for additional program and organizational support.

A simple inquiry email to the Boxerwood Education Coordinator was the starting point for the partnership. In my email, I offered the use of 4-H curriculum and in-kind services as an instructor as a way to introduce myself to Boxerwood. Significantly, the relationship between

Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H was thoughtfully crafted by both organizations. After multiple meetings, emails, and phone conversations, we drafted an action plan to help formulate our partnership agreement. See Appendix 2: Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H Partnership Agreement Letter.

The Case of Boxerwood became my living work in March 2011. This unique position as a partner and observer has compelled me to share this experience in hopes of providing some helpful guidance and insight for other organizations. The relationship between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H was strategic in design and implementation. During the planning phase, a trusting and mutually beneficial relationship was crafted. The first step in the partnership was to identify critical needs and the potential delivery of services for those needs. Also, both Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H recognized opportunities for sharing resources and developing organizational capacity by making networks and professional contacts available through stakeholder relationships, and by sharing information, expertise, and engaging in mutual learning.

By May 2011, both parties needed to discuss the issue of partnership sustainability. The organizations worked together to increase the efficiency of program delivery by eliminating or combining redundant or overlapping programs, reevaluating budget appropriations, and sharing curriculum materials. The basic structure of the partnership created a path for any professional educator, whether a new 4-H agent or a Boxerwood educator, to have the ability to plug-in and fill the role of partner right away. This instant engagement ensured long-term project and partnership sustainability. The partner relationship between Boxerwood & Rockbridge 4-H strengthened and expanded program efforts within the Lexington-Rockbridge community because of the vision oriented towards youth development.

As partners, Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H aim to continue to have extensive communication about evolving partnership expectations and objectives. Currently, they are examining the possibility of starting a Rockbridge 4-H Junior Master Naturalist club housed at Boxerwood. This 4-H club would target the 4th and 5th grade population and be a platform to initiate 4-H programs in the elementary schools. Rockbridge and Boxerwood hopefully continue to develop interdependence on each and other organizations within the community, thus ensuring long-term project and partnership sustainability.

Project Purpose

Partnerships and collaborations of varying degrees have become key strategies for many nonprofit and or community organizations. Collaborations accomplish a shared vision, achieve positive outcomes, and build a system to address issues and opportunities. It is very common for community groups with aligned missions to work together. Collaboration offers partners a chance to learn from other organizations, gain an improved understanding of the community, and reduce overlaps in services offered.

The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership provides valuable insight into the collaborative partnership building process which could be used to help other community-based organizations with similar concerns. Recognizing the importance of collaborative partnerships to community-based organizations for future sustainability, what are then the key areas of collaboration for Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H? This project's purpose was to examine the partnership process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and determine its key components.

The primary goal of this case study was to examine the partnership processes between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H that make this a successful collaborative partnership. In order to

understand the many parts of the partnership, I have identified major organizing themes that capture the significance of the partnership. These partnership themes will help illustrate the story of collaborative partnership between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H.

Significance of the Project

Partnerships are a way of extending resources and leveraging for public good. They offer opportunities for partners to learn from each other, while building capacity to deliver services and respond to community issues and needs (Coy & Yoshida, 2009). Boxerwood Education Association is a non-profit organization that provides experienced-based, environmental education programs and services to more than 2,000 youth in Rockbridge County. In order for Boxerwood to reach their targeted youth population, the organization relies heavily on their network of volunteers for program delivery and support, which, at times, can be taxing on the network of volunteers. Rockbridge 4-H desired a stronger presence within the local school system and community. To achieve this level of community engagement, Rockbridge 4-H developed and executed a partnership with Boxerwood.

Through this study, it was seen that the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership produced several advantages for collaboration. Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H created a stable and sustainable working relationship by understanding the value of partnerships, being intentional with collaborative efforts, and nurturing the partner relationship through personalized support and guidance. It is important to mention that both organizations are located in Lexington-Rockbridge County area, a community of approximately 20,000 people. Within a small community, the collaborating partners can accomplish work together that would be

difficult or impossible to do alone. This study will attempt to focus on “how” and “why” the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership came to be.

Both organizations viewed this partnership as a significant resource because of its useful response to their mutual concerns. Boxerwood had the basic organizational need of extra staffing and, the partnership allowed the best use of Boxerwood’s volunteers and paid staff to get the job done. For Rockbridge 4-H and Virginia Cooperative Extension, the partnership was the essential first step in reviving the youth development program in Rockbridge County. This is a good opportunity for Rockbridge 4-H because Boxerwood is an established local organization that has many connections within the school system.

Literature Review

Historically, the Smith-Lever Act marked the beginning of partnerships among county officials, state government, land-grant universities, and the federal government in working cooperatively towards the solution of social and economic problems. Extension personnel were provided with funding for disseminating useful and practical information on agriculture, home economics, and related subjects to families within the community. It was then discovered that the most effective way to reach their target audience was through work with their children. The 4-H movement was formed for young people to expose them to agricultural science and technology which demonstrated the value of encouraging young people with incentives to compete (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997).

Many nonprofit organizations form partnerships to reduce administrative costs, improve quality of services, and maximize organizational capacity. Growing numbers of grant makers believe that investing in organizational capacity building helps leverage the impact of their

financial giving resources (Porter & Kramer, 1999). These strategic alliances help develop leadership as well as in-kind services in the form of volunteer hours or office supplies.

Relationship and partnership building are critical because they can help make networks available through stakeholder relationships and share information, expertise, and resources (Halseth & Ryser, 2007).

Partnerships provide expanded services in bringing communities together, both to discuss critical issues and to create an agenda for change. Funding opportunities are increasingly being linked with a partnership requirement for nonprofits (Backer & Norman, 2000). Other forms of partnership arrangements include cooperation and coordination wherein institutions take into account what types of programs and services are being offered by similar groups, and find their own market niches rather than being in direct competition (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999).

Collaborating with local government and other public and private bodies can facilitate the building of partnerships. This is done by sponsoring opportunities for dialogue through public meetings, workshops, community forums, local committees, and advisory councils and by developing policy that encourages collaborative decision-making.

Engaging partners in shared decision-making through innovative and strategic approaches will encourage and foster a trusting relationship. This foundation of trust can be a resource to draw upon in accomplishing goals of mutual interest. Developing trusting relationships may be referred to as bonding social capital since they intensify local ties and strengthen the ability within groups or organizations to work together to solve problems and address needs (Larsen, 2004).

Social capital is a vital component to the partnership process because social networks add value to the total experience. The interaction enables people to build communities, to commit

themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric. This sense of belonging and the development of social networks can bring great benefits to people (Smith, 2000-2009). Using tools such as memoranda of understanding, partnership letters of understanding, and by-laws, organizations can establish a clear and transparent mechanism for open dialogue. Further, by investing the time to clarify expectations and reviewing existing resources, there is no need to re-invent the wheel (Dotterweich, 2006).

Businesses may provide contributions to partnerships through financial resources, technical expertise, management training, volunteer support, board participation, or through their ability to leverage their relationships with other stakeholders (Googins & Rochlin, 2000). With a broader knowledge base, partnering organizations will have higher success in drawing financial resources from public and private donors, grants, and governmental funding.

The path to a carefully aligned collaboration is not easy. Partners must identify key factors that influence and shape collaboration. Building trust and resolving conflicts is done by focusing on the expectations, responsibilities, and benefits, as well as clear communication and decision-making. In addition, partnerships provide valuable insight into what it takes to develop effective community partnership and change. When partners recognize and understand each other's capacity, resources, and limitations, there is a synergistic energy that benefits both organizations (Backer, 2000).

Definitions of Terms

Various words, such as partners, relationship, collaborative partnership, and collaboration are often used interchangeably to define the practice of organizations working together to achieve a common goal. The similar use of these words can be misleading because they can

mean different things to different members involved in a collaborative relationship. Presenting and discussing key terms will develop a definitional basis that will assist in understanding this study.

Partnerships

Partnerships are defined as bringing together two or more agencies, groups, or organizations that have compatible goals which form an agreement to work together in a mutually beneficial manner (Nicholls, 2005). Often these groups are collaborating to accomplish something that might not be possible alone. Effective partnerships create a shared sense of commitment and responsibility throughout the community.

Collaboration

Collaboration can be defined as a problem-solving process and a structure through which programs are implemented. It is first and foremost a communicative process. The goal of collaboration is to bring individuals, organizations, and community members together to solve existing and emerging problems that could not be easily solved by one specific group. Collaboration is the process of participation through which people, groups, and organizations work together to achieve desired results (Bergstrom, 1995).

Capacity-Building

Capacity-building is a conceptual approach that focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit people, governments, and community organizations from realizing their developmental goals while enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results (National Network for Collaboration, n.d.) For partners, capacity building offers learning opportunities for one another. Capacity building is the organization's core contribution to organizational development (Backer, 2000).

Social Capital

Social capital is the network of social connections that exist among people, including their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation. This is an important concept used to examine the successful development of partnerships. Social capital refers to social assets, either with respect to the source of investment or with the goods or services produced (Reimer, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H collaborative partnership was a timely solution for both organizations as they shared similar organizational concerns. Boxerwood had the venue and program elements but was short of staff and expertise and Rockbridge 4-H needed an audience. Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H formulated a plan for partnership. Both organizations wanted to increase program efficiency and community networking, and began work on achieving their partnership goals. This project's purpose was to examine the partnership process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and identify specific partnership characteristics found within the collaborative partnership.

Case Study

The situation of the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership is one case study representing a collaborative partnership. The case study is the most flexible of all research designs, allowing the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This approach is an appropriate method for seeking answers to "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2003).

This study examines the partnership building process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H. Defining the research question is the most important step in a research program, especially since this indicates the type of research to be done (Schell, 1992). I specifically ask: What are then the key areas of collaboration for Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H? And how are

these key areas significant? “How” and “why” questions are more explanatory by nature, and are likely to lead to the use of experiments, histories and case studies. These questions tend to deal with operational links which occur during a span of time, rather than the incidents or phenomena which occur at intervals over time.

Research Design

This study was developed using a qualitative design. Data was collected through respondent interviews. Key respondent interviews were used so that a deeper understanding of the “how” and “why” related to each partner’s experience was captured. This researcher employed a case study method for this study because the goal was to produce a detailed account of the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership building process. The case study provides descriptive accounts and tends to deal with operational links which occur during a span of time.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary source for obtaining data. Respondent interviews were used was to get a deeper sense of the partners’ experiences. The interviews involved a standard, open-ended approach (Jorgensen, 1989). This approach allowed participants to share as much detailed information as they desired and it provided me the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. Using an open-ended question format created a perfect environment for the participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences. The interviews were conducted in person from April 6, 2012 through April 9, 2012. Three key stakeholders were selected because of their involvement with the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, the three respondents were assigned pseudonyms related to their role within the partnership.

Interview Participants

The respondent interviews included representatives from each organization that held either a managerial or educational role in their respective organization. The managerial position oversees the day-to-day office activities. Any and all decisions related to the office must receive approval. The educational planner develops and implements environmental educational programs for school-aged children within the Rockbridge community. The instructor helps to deliver the educational message to visitors. The responses received from these individuals were recorded by an audio recorder and then transcribed. To ensure complete confidentiality, the respondents were given pseudonyms names and used throughout the findings section. A thematic framework is presented based on an inductive reasoning. The work is carried out by conducting three in-person standard, open-ended interviews. In addition to the standard, open-ended interviews, I included my Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership process field notes. These notes were my personal recordings as a partner and while experiencing the process first hand. My aim was to produce a detailed account of the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H collaborative partnership process (see Appendix E).

Participant Observation

The aim of participant observation is to gain close and personal knowledge about a given group of individuals (Jorgensen, 1989). It involves participating in a situation, while, at the same time, recording what is being observed. As the researcher, my goal is to learn what the partnership experience was like for the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partners through documenting candid conversations and individual feelings regarding the partnership. My journal entries were logged on a consistent basis from February 2011 through December 2011 and

documented my role as a partner. It is important to capture the language and interaction between partners because this will help illustrate the partnership setting and serve as a check against participant subjective reporting.

Data Analysis

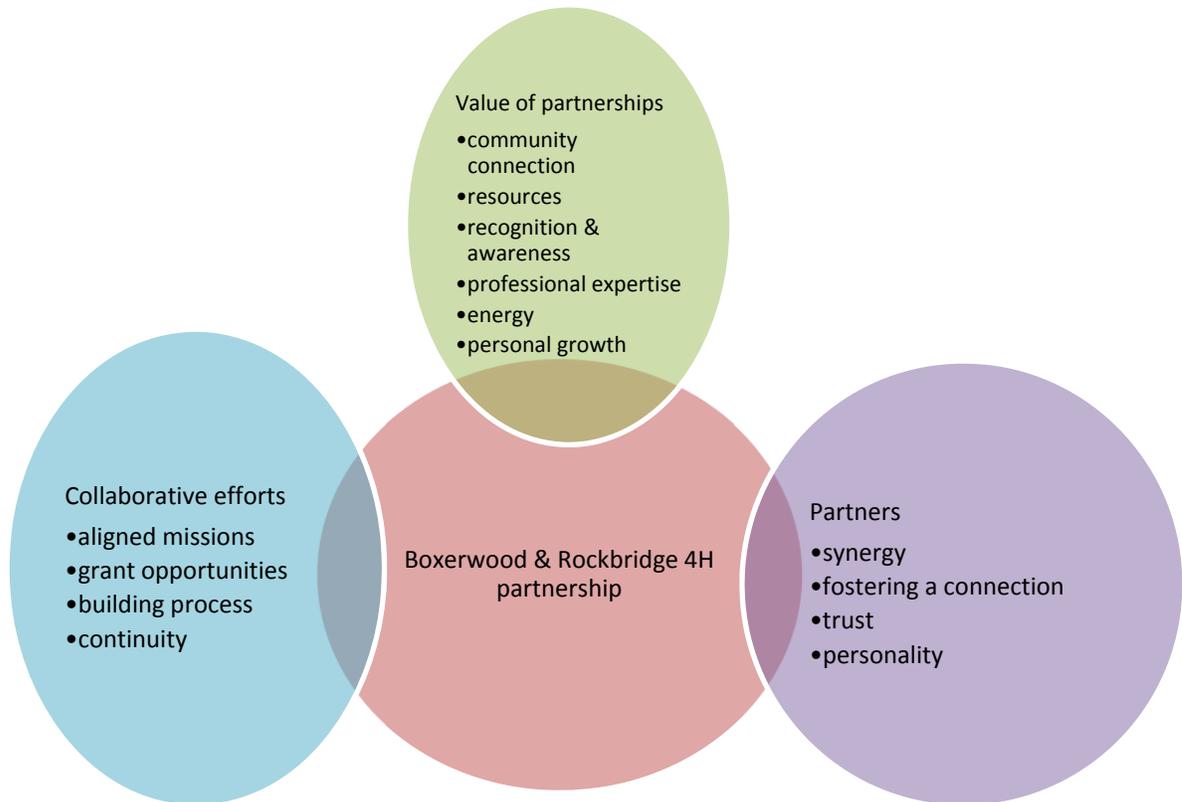
Proponents of the constant comparative method have suggested that similar data are grouped and conceptually labeled during a process called open coding. Then concepts are categorized. Categories are linked and organized by relationship in a process called axial coding. Conditions and dimensions are developed, and finally, through an interpretive process called selective coding, a theory emerges (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To help with the analysis and interpretation of my research data, I selected the Dedoose™ web-based program. The Dedoose™ system provides a quick, easy access to the variety of reports and various controls to understand, organize, and represent my data. Dedoose™ defines and codes data through text-blocking and code-system application. The document viewer action allows the researcher to browse the text line by line and create and code excerpts.

Inductive coding was used to analyze the data. A rigorous and systematic reading and coding of the transcripts allowed major themes to emerge. This process developed a sense of understanding regarding the partnership building relationship, how respondents perceive the partnership, and the nature and types of partnership themes. Also, it created an opportunity to see relationships between themes. Segments of interview text were coded enabling an analysis of interview excerpts on a particular theme. Inductive approaches are intended to aid an understanding of meaning in complex data through the development of summary themes or

categories from the raw data and these approaches are evident in many qualitative data analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Figure 1: Diagram of partnership themes illustrates the themes that have emerged.

Figure 1 Diagram of Partnership themes



Validity

For this qualitative study a verification approach was employed. Verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to establish the rigor of the study (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The data was systematically

organized, focus was maintained, and the fit of the data and the conceptual work analysis and interpretation were closely monitored. Due to the researcher's responsiveness, each critical piece was woven into every stage of the research to produce a solid product. Also, the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership building process maintains supporting documentation of when the collaborative partnership began and produces a clear chain of evidence throughout the process to ensure reliability and validity. According to Yin (1994), researchers have been encouraged to establish a clear chain of evidence in order to allow the reader to reconstruct how the researcher went from the initial research questions to final conclusions.

Limitations

The case study method is a highly labor intensive research strategy. More energy is required at each stage of the research process to ensure all work is done in a systematic way. The researcher has to organize and review a large volume of notes and during the writing stage the researcher must spend much time determining what and how to code, analyzing the data, and determining how to put it all together. Miles (1979) suggests that the added degree of energy required is responsible for generating much researcher stress, something that may be especially pronounced in the case of the lone fieldworker.

Information collected for a case study, especially through personal interviews, may not reflect the situation. A biased response may result from a retrospective view of the case on the part of the individual interviewed (Barkley, 2006). The findings of this study were specific to the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership as seen through a small sample of respondents. To limit the biases in the data, I remained systematic in my data collection and took steps to ensure validity and reliability regardless of size and scope.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

The primary goal of this case study is to examine the partnership process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and identify specific partnership themes found within this collaborative relationship. Collaboration brings individuals, organizations, and community members together to solve existing and emerging problems that could not be easily solved by one specific group. Establishing collaborative partnerships can prepare organizations to enter into strong, true working relationships. When partners reach full collaboration, the benefits include increased use of programs and resources, improved delivery of programming and organizational capability, and improved community image.

In this chapter, I reference interview excerpts and my personal Boxerwood Journal notes to illustrate the partnership themes and the overall meaning of the experience. It is important to recognize that the goal is to build effective, synergistic, working relationships, not simply to establish personal connections. Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H have created a stable and sustainable working relationship by understanding the value of partnerships, being intentional with collaborative efforts, and nurturing the partner relationship through personalized support and guidance.

Value of Partnerships

A well designed partnership building process begins and ends with a successful partnership. For partners, it is good that both parties understand and appreciate the value of the relationship. Collaborating partners will have a unique opportunity in sharing ideas, information, and resources that could lead to new and valuable skills.

Volunteer Resources

In recognizing the value of a collaborative relationship, Boxerwood enthusiastically welcomed volunteer resources to achieve goals of mutual interest. Respondent Ross, stated, “We needed extra volunteer resources. It weighed heavy on my mind. This partnership allowed for the best use of volunteers and paid staff in order to get the job done.” (personal communication April 6, 2012). Respondent Goshen, commented, “We had 4-H for free, 4-H helped us deliver educational programs and it was awesome working together!” (personal communication, April 8, 2012). The professional volunteer resources from Rockbridge 4-H allowed Boxerwood to reach their optimal level of engagement.

Respondent Ross, stated, “A very timely moment for the partnership between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H, it has helped Boxerwood so much.” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). The following excerpt is from Boxerwood Journal entry dated on March 3, 2011, “I had a phone conversation with Boxerwood staff to review partnership letter details. We agreed on a final version and await Virginia Cooperative Extension’s approval. The Education Coordinator is also putting together a final school program schedule. I am looking forward to finally having the opportunity to deliver educational programming to Rockbridge county youth,”

Personal Growth

Through partnerships, an organization or individual has the potential to learn new knowledge or skills. The following excerpt is from Boxerwood Journal entry dated on December 9, 2012:

I attended a volunteer appreciation luncheon hosted by Boxerwood. As I sat at my table, I was reminded about my many hours of service and how much I have

grown in the professional sense. I learned by doing. One memorable conversation I had with the education coordinator was after a very long morning with school groups, the education coordinator said, ‘Think it like this, school programs are like pancakes the first one is never perfect but after a few more tries you have a batch that you will be proud of!’ I give thanks to the Boxerwood staff, for they have encouraged and nurtured my abilities which helped shaped me into a strong and confident educator.

Collaboration offers its partners a chance to learn and gain an improved understanding of one another. This encourages professionalism among partners. Respondent Goshen, stated, “Learning more about Rockbridge 4-H has been great, as partners, we all gain valuable professional experience from each other,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Collaboration offers opportunities for improved public image. Respondent Goshen commented, “It is awesome to be recognized as a partner and with other local organizations seeing our work together; it makes me feel good about it,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Community Connections

Respondent Goshen said, “The connections are priceless and since learning more about Rockbridge 4-H, we definitely want to continue working together in the future. The partnership gave energy to Boxerwood that put forth new program ideas, for example the Commonwealth protector project and the solar energy school program,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012) According to Respondent Ross, “our main connection is how we best support the work we are doing. Positive experiences encourage more opportunities for partnership. Partnerships are

relationships that are worked over time,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). This partnership allowed students to see the connection between the 4-H program and Boxerwood.

Professional Expertise

The professional expertise that Boxerwood brings to the table is an extremely valuable asset to the partnership. Boxerwood professionals trained a 4-H volunteer to deliver environmental education programs. Also, Boxerwood facilitated introductions between Rockbridge 4-H and the Rockbridge County school system. According to Respondent Maury, “The technical expertise as well as the experience with working with young people, allowed us to gain access to the school systems here in Rockbridge,” (personal communication, April 9, 2012).

More significantly, the partnership is allowing the Rockbridge 4-H program to increase the level of engagement and maintain their enrollment numbers. Respondent Maury commented, “Ideally, the youth would have in-school 4-H programs and be involved after- school 4-H clubs. This high level of engagement would keep youth enrolled for years and they would grow with the program,” (personal communication, April 9, 2012,).

Community Recognition & Awareness

Because of increased community recognition and awareness, the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership has developed a trustworthy, positive, and credible image within the Rockbridge community. Respondent Ross said, “I wanted more community recognition and awareness. I want to help Rockbridge 4-H to get into the school system,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). Community recognition and awareness is a critical piece within

partnership process. Respondent Goshen stated, “The community recognizes us in a good way, this is a win-win situation for both organizations,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012). The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership is perceived within the community as reliable and capable of accomplishing set goals and objectives. Respondent Goshen commented, “More and more people know about the partnership within the Rockbridge area because of how hard we worked,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Energy

Collaborations have a unique way of energizing and empowering partners. This powerful energy helps not only with day-to-day physical needs but it helps rejuvenate tired souls as well. Respondent Goshen stated, “I feel like our partnership, especially the people, is so enthused about what we are doing. This energy keeps me going,” (personal communication, April 8 2012). It is important to nurture personal morale between partners in order to foster a firm commitment to the project. Respondent Goshen commented, “Good positive energy among partners will keep the missions aligned and a sustainable future for the partnership,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Partners

Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H planted mutual respect, understanding, and trust deep within the foundation of the partnership to produce a solid, collaborative relationship. Partners share a stake in both the process and the outcomes of their collaborative partnership. Both organizations believe that they will benefit from this partnership and share the same vision of success.

Trust

Partners in collaborative relationships share an understanding of trust and respect for each other. Respondent Goshen said, “The community saw the partners together in a trusting relationship and as a result good works and services were provided. You trust the process and look for more opportunities for partnership,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012). By establishing a personal rapport, partners will produce a better, more informed, and cohesive working relationship. Respondent Ross said, “We shared program responsibilities but also developed a wonderful friendship,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

Fostering a Connection

The sustainable partnership is made possible by fostering the connection among partners and the community. Respondent Maury stated, “It is fostering that connection within the community. One of the tasks of the Virginia Cooperative Extension is to deliver and foster information to the community. We ultimately need partnerships between government and non-government organizations to make the lives of Virginia citizens better,” (personal communication, April 9, 2012). Collaborations allow partners to gain an improved understanding of the community. Respondent Goshen commented, “This partnership has helped us learn together about community needs which has allowed us to create tighter and more efficient programs,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Synergy

When partners share a stake in both the process and the outcome, it creates a sense of ownership. According to Respondent Ross, “As a partner, I could see first-hand all the pieces falling into place, even more so once we started brain storming about potential grants,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). Synergy strengthens the collaborative partnership relationship and in turn a better product is made. According to Respondent Goshen, “The wheels are spinning perfectly so well in fact that we want more collaborative projects together,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Personality

Respondent Goshen, stated, “It feels great to have such a successful partnership. Boxerwood uses the motto go with the flow, it will always work out. Our personalities just clicked and that is the best of all,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012). The ability to compromise is a critical piece of the collaborative partnership, since many decisions within the partnership cannot make all partners happy every time. Respondent Ross commented, “Personality will always play a role in the success of a partnership,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

Collaborative Efforts

Collaboration as a strategy creates opportunities for organizations to establish a coordinated approach aiming to make a positive impact on their community. Such an approach allows partners to clearly identify their specific needs that perhaps would be unattainable with

one organization. Meaningful collaboration allows partners to ensure that partnership outcomes are based on mutually beneficial goals and objectives.

Building Process

Collaborative effort is about building relationships. Partners can develop leadership; build networks through areas of interest, and share information. According to the Respondent Goshen, “The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership building process has solidified the value and importance of collaborative partnerships,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012). Moreover, with the continuing rise of uncertainty in the nonprofit world, the importance of building collaborative partnerships for sustainability can no longer be ignored. Respondent Ross stated, “Uncertainty is the nature of a nonprofit, we were looking for a way to grow and evolve. I want to continue as a collaborative partner with Rockbridge 4-H,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

Continuity

Particular circumstances within the Rockbridge 4-H program caused some high turnover in the 4-H position. This situation compromised the perception of the 4-H position within the community and local government. Respondent Maury stated, “It was an essential first step in reviving the youth development program, a good opportunity or good incubator for our own 4-H program because Boxerwood is an established local organization within the community that has a lot of connections within the school systems,” (personal communication, April 9, 2012). Rockbridge 4-H increased continuity within Boxerwood’s programming by supplying a volunteer educator twice a week. According to Respondent Goshen, “It was incredibly helpful to

us to have 4-H as a volunteer. We didn't have to worry about you as a volunteer or the quality of programs 4-H presented," (personal communication, April 8, 2012).

Grant Opportunities

Many collaborative partnerships are developed in order to qualify for funding programs. Funders increasingly require evidence that projects they fund have created partnerships to support them. According to Respondent Goshen, "Our grantors want us to have more pre- and post-visits to Boxerwood and in the classroom. This partnership will allow us to meet those requirements," (personal communication, April 8, 2012). With the increasing eagerness from funding sources to support joint efforts in the community, many organizations are creating their own funding opportunities. Respondent Ross stated, "My ideal situation would be that we (Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H) would add on to the Dominion Grant, and we would work together in future grants," (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

Aligned Missions

Aligned missions make partnerships much easier. A common programmatic background creates more opportunities for partner engagement. The following excerpt is from Boxerwood Journal entry dated on April 4, 2011, "I received an email from the Boxerwood Education Coordinator on scheduling a meeting to work out some strategic plans together for the upcoming school year. They are excited about how much our organizations' missions and interests align and complement each other; especially in regard to youth development and natural resource education,"

According to Respondent Maury, “Collaborative efforts within the local community just make sense, especially when both organizations complement each other so well,” (personal communication, April 9, 2012). Respondent Goshen stated, “It is very common practice, especially with aligned missions. It seems in a small town it is better to work together than against one another,” (personal communication, April 8, 2012). The limiting of overlap in services and the coordination of existing services is a great advantage for partners with aligned missions. This was certainly the case for Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H. According to the Respondent Ross, “we continue to benefit from aligned missions and mutual goals,” (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

Through this case study I gained new understanding about the collaborative partnership building process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and identified areas of organizational importance specific to Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H. For the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership, full collaboration equates to understanding the value of partnerships, partners, and collaborative efforts.

The value of partnerships, in the eyes of Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H, goes well beyond the exchange of information and sharing of resources. This collaborative partnership brings new creative energy programmatically because of aligned goals, missions, and objectives. Through this new-found energy, Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H developed new educational programs and grant opportunities. More concretely, the collaborative partnership filled a need within the 4-H program by introducing and connecting school administrators to 4-H personnel.

It is essential for partners to clearly define terms at the beginning of the relationship. Boxerwood and Rockbridge used an open and frequent dialogue to ensure a stable and sustainable working relationship. All partnership expectations were discussed at length and put in writing to avoid confusion. For Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H, their partnership letter stated that Boxerwood will provide training and material resources and share professional and organizational contacts. Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H will explore grant funding opportunities together and Rockbridge 4-H will provide volunteer and curriculum resources. By being clear and concise, the partners establish specific roles, responsibilities, and a well-designed infrastructure for performing tasks, solving problems, and mediating conflict.

Another critical component of the partner relationship is fostering a connection among partners so that a firm personal commitment is developed. Both Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H considered professionalism and educational experience a critical and necessary piece to their partnership agreement. This gave confidence and creditability to Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H. By establishing mutual respect, understanding, and trust within their relationship, Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H had the ability to work at their fullest potential.

It is good to work together in support of similar goals and objectives. The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership is a successful solution in addressing problems of mutual interest. Both organizations identified the need for increased organizational resources and community networking, and took on the responsibility of making this new working relationship into a collaborative partnership.

Implications

One of the most challenging aspects of building a collaborative partnership is the nature of collaboration and partnership itself, the blending of two or more individuals and organizations towards a common goal. It takes personal effort to shift beliefs and organizational practices. Given a well-designed collaborative partnership, and a willingness to compromise and to take risks within reason, the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership demonstrated that there is great value in building a collaborative partnership.

From this study, several implications for current and future partnership building can be made regarding the Boxerwood and Rockbridge project:

- Full collaboration encompasses understanding the value of partnerships, partners, and collaborative efforts. The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partners were intentional and specific about their partnership to ensure a future together.
- The partnership building process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge offered partners learning opportunities that improved understanding of each other's critical needs. Specifically, the partners addressed Boxerwood's need for additional volunteer resources and Rockbridge 4-H's need to have more opportunities to cultivate community contacts and networking.
- True collaboration is a long-term process that involves mutual respect, understanding, and trust. It is important to take the time required to nurture personal relationships and make sure personalities click. Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H excelled in open communication and compromise. It was easily seen that both organizations genuinely liked and respected each other.
- Aligned and well-documented partnership understandings and expectations were established between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H. The partnership agreement letter between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H clearly explained all partnership expectations and objectives.
- The Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership allowed sharing of both tangible and information-based resources. This was done by sharing media coverage, training opportunities, and curriculum resources.
- Respondents stated that partnerships foster a connection within the community and help produce collaborative efforts among organizations. The Rockbridge County community

perceives the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership as a sound and reliable approach in meeting the needs of the youth population for educational programming.

- Both organizations acknowledged the value and see the benefits of the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership. In an effort to maximize partnership outcomes, the partners enthusiastically voiced their confidence for the partnership with their shared sense of commitment and vision.
- Respondents stated that it just makes sense to develop collaborative partnerships when living in a small community. This is especially true for organizations that complement each other so well. Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H improve upon on overall efficiency by removing duplicative programs.

Recommendations for Successful Partnership Building

Building partnerships requires a clear, shared vision for the partnership and the capacity to work closely with partners. Successful collaborative partnerships are able to find the balance between partners that creates the ability to forge a path that everyone can support. Below are recommendations for successful partnership development.

First, enlist the support of key stakeholders. Boxerwood and Rockbridge need to identify more well-connected supporters who can help them with their partnership goals and objectives. This can be achieved through the recruitment of key stakeholders found within the Rockbridge community. These stakeholders can provide access to networks and contacts that may not otherwise be available or even known to the partners individually.

Second, find creative ways to acknowledge and nurture the partnership relationship. As in many relationships, the art of communication needs to be remembered. Both partners need to

foster open and honest communication. By supporting each other, it will reinforce their sense of commitment and connection towards their partnership.

Third, develop a system to track and evaluate the partnership. Use evaluation findings identify areas for program growth and improvement. By obtaining feedback, the partners can package a true reading of their collaborative efforts and combine these findings to reveal the successes and demonstrate the partnership's impact.

Fourth, focus on partnership visibility within the community. Work with community business leaders and media outlets to assist in promoting the partnership. This will help get the word out in a small community. More partnership press releases, photos, and news articles need to be seen in the local newspaper.

Finally, renew or rewrite the partnership letter of understanding as needed. Reviewing the document will ensure that both organizations are working together for shared aims and those missions, objectives, and goals are still organizationally aligned.

Further Research Needs

This project provides a foundation for examining the partnership building process between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and for identifying areas of organizational importance specific to Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H. However, more research is needed to understand the relationship that may be emerging between Rockbridge County schools and Rockbridge 4-H in part because of the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership. Such research may help to answer why the in-school 4-H program was cut in the first place and how to address any critical needs identified by the school system. Further research is needed to understand the challenges

faced in maintaining the partnership between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H as Rockbridge 4-H looks to grow their program.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension of Rockbridge County Unit office is a product of cooperation between local and state governments support from local government is vital to the success of 4-H and this partnership. More research is needed on how the Rockbridge County boards of supervisors view the collaborative partnership between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H and if they understand the reasons and benefits behind the partnership. One of the most important reasons for the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership is to assist in cultivating relationships with the local school systems and produce a bridge for deepening in-school and after-school programming. The Boxerwood and Rockbridge partnership was created for program support, not for funding. The County of Rockbridge provides funding support to the 4-H program, and that funding needs to remain in their budget. Without local funding support, the 4-H program will be severely compromised as state support vacillates.

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APPENDIX A
Grant Proposal

The Common Wealth Protectors project will focus on Virginia natural resources in a year-long series of activities to plan and carry-out related stewardship actions at school, at home, and in the community. In order to achieve the objectives for the Common Wealth Protectors project, Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H will implement an inquiry-based approach, all activities focused on the question, “How well are we protecting our “Commonwealth resources?”

Objective 1: To increase water and energy conservation by 5th grade classrooms in hands-on investigative activities.

Methods:

- Fifth graders will integrate classroom-based learning with field investigations and related stewardship projects.
- Each class will have a follow up classroom visit with Rockbridge 4-H to plan their stewardship project. In the spring, students will participate in a second field-based program to implement their stewardship project.
- The focus of their investigation will be learning and implementing scientific protocols for assessing the health of our natural resource, water.
- In the winter phase of the program, these pilot classrooms will also carry a conservation assessment activity, then plan and implement a related stewardship project.

Objective 2: To further environmental stewardship activities throughout the local community.

Methods:

- With the help of Boxerwood and 4-H, each class will plan and implement a related conservation project.
- Projects will differ per school and teacher depending on curriculum needs and scheduling but will include direct stewardship.
- The focus will be related to water, soil, or energy conservation

Objective 3: To maintain a carefully aligned partnership between Boxerwood Education Association and Rockbridge 4-H that will strengthen and expand program efforts within the Lexington-Rockbridge community.

Methods:

- Extensive communication about partnership expectations, objectives, and goals will occur as needed to ensure long-term project and partnership sustainability.
- Boxerwood and 4-H will build and develop organizational capacity by making available networks and professional contacts through stakeholder relationships, as well as share information, expertise, and resources.

The Common Wealth Protectors project will produce the following outcome to provide up to 200 fifth graders meaningful hands-on watershed conservation projects, as developed within the framework of the Four Strands of Science. There will be at least 12 classroom-sponsored stewardship projects, with documented improvements in energy conservation, recycling rates, and watershed protection as a result of specific projects, as well as broad community and school-based conservation education. A carefully aligned partnership between Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H will be designed to ensure long-term project sustainability after the pilot year. There will be ample communication about project goals and sponsors. The Rockbridge

community will be informed about Dominion's Partnership through project-related flyers, student-generated communications, Boxerwood press releases, school websites, and school board presentations.

Evaluation:

- This project will be evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- Quantitatively we will measure the number of unique field programs provided, number of participating students, teachers, schools, and classrooms, total hands-on instructional hours in the field, number of school-based follow-up classroom-based visits, number and type of stewardship projects. Also, the number and content of Boxerwood and 4-H generated fliers and student generated public education materials distributed to families and the community will be measured. Qualitatively we will assess the program's effectiveness after each field program through analysis of student performance in their field journals and observation of student ability to organize, collect, analyze, and discuss data results. We will assess the affective as well as cognitive impact of Commonwealth protectors by pre-and post-surveys, given to students and teachers at the beginning and end of the project. For students we will measure change in environmental literacy and stewardship motivation. For teachers we will measure change in skill and motivation to teach science using environment-based inquiry and service learning methodologies.

APPENDIX B

Letter of Understanding

Boxerwood and 4-H in Partnership: A Letter of Understanding
March 8, 2011 DRAFT

Boxerwood Education Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is “to educate and inspire people of all ages toward becoming successful and environmentally responsible stewards of the Earth.” As part of this mission, each year we provide hands-on environmental education program for about 2,000 individual schoolchildren (representing more than 80 local classrooms) from Rockbridge, Buena Vista, and Lexington. These children receive more than 11,000 instructional hours of in-field programming annually. To achieve this level of engagement, Boxerwood relies on a small part-time instructional staff supplemented by a robust corps of trained adult volunteers and pro-bono resource professionals. We are delighted to partner with Rockbridge 4-H as well and enthusiastically welcome a pro bono alliance to achieving goals of mutual interest.

Specifically, Boxerwood welcomes Jessica Hastings as a pro bono instructor with our SOL-correlated environmental education programming for grades 3 and up. As partner, we will train Jessica in all aspects of outdoor education and give her the materials and lesson plans necessary to successfully implement hour-long lessons which are already a part of our environmental education curriculum. We will also facilitate introductions between Jessica and classroom teachers, and set aside time for Jessica to introduce her organization to participants. Further, for each program in which Jessica participates we will share basic contact data with 4-H, including number of children, age of children, gender, and race/ethnicity as we know this information is important for 4-H purposes. We invite Jessica to take photographs of and make presentations about of her activities at Boxerwood as well, in accordance with school privacy guidelines, with acknowledgment of our organization as appropriate. Likewise, we will acknowledge 4-H’s partnership with Boxerwood in the take-home fliers we distribute to every child, and in our newsletter and in press releases as appropriate. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the value of 4-H’s partnership with us as part of pro-bono match for grant proposals and reports, and will keep track of the hours Jessica spends with us in pursuit of our shared interests. We also welcome Jessica’s role in other matters of shared interest, including research in starting a junior chapter of Rockbridge Master Naturalists, which requires as state agency sponsorship.

In these lean economic times, it is good to work together in support of shared aims: again, we’re delighted to welcome 4-H’s participation with Boxerwood in the endeavors described above, and look forward to finding additional paths of collaboration as our partnership evolves.

Elise Sheffield
Director of Education

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic (McNamara, 1999). I will be using the Standardized, open-ended interview method in this study. This approach will use the same open-ended questions to all interviewees. It facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared. I will explain fully the purpose for the qualitative interview, address terms of confidentiality, explain the format of the interview, indicate how long the interview will take, and how the data will be gathered.

Procedure of the Interview: First, questions will be asked one at a time. I will attempt to remain as neutral as possible throughout the interviews. I will encourage participant responses. When I am taking notes, I will be mindful about my appearance. Lastly, I will provide transition between major topics.

Participants: I have selected participants who are willing to openly and honestly share information. Those individuals are: the VCE Rockbridge Unit Coordinator, Boxerwood Education Coordinator, and a Boxerwood Educator. I will be conducting the interviews within a comfortable environment. This will be agreed upon prior to conducting the interviews.

Privacy and confidentiality: I will provide information about how I will safeguard the data once recorded. I will seek written informed consent by all participants. I will elaborate on the

informed consent process for my participants and clearly explain ethical dilemmas that might arise.

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

- What is your role/position in the organizations? (e.g., Boxerwood Gardens or Rockbridge 4-H?)
- What was your role in the partnership?
- How, if at all, has this partnership helped your organization?
- Looking back at the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership, how do/did you value your experience?
- What about the community partnership is appealing to you?
- How common is the collaborative partnership in Rockbridge County? For example, what other partnerships have you been involved with?
- Will you consider another community partnership if the opportunity presents itself?
- How, if at all, has the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership changed your view on the significance of community partnerships?
- How do you envision the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership evolving?
- In other words, what is the current sustainability plan for the Boxerwood and Rockbridge 4-H partnership?
- How has this experience influenced decisions for future programming efforts?
- What have you learned and or experienced personally because of the partnership?
- If you could add anything to your experience what would it be?

APPENDIX E

Boxerwood Journal Notes

2/18/11- I left a message for the Boxerwood education coordinator to offer 4-H curriculum and services.

2/22/11- I had a phone conversation with the Boxerwood education coordinator and discussed possible areas of collaboration between Boxerwood and 4-H. I emailed my current curriculum listing.

2/23/11- I met with the Boxerwood education coordinator to continue the discussion on identifying areas of collaboration. We agreed to draft a partnership letter that defines the Boxerwood & 4-H partnership. I prepared a to-do-list to complete before our next meeting.

1. Approval from my supervisor
2. Create a calendar for Boxerwood and 4-H School programs
3. Research Junior Master Naturalist program
4. 4-H and Boxerwood resources- what do we bring to the partnership?

3/3/11-I had a phone conversation with the Boxerwood education coordinator to review partnership letter details. We agreed on a final version and await Rockbridge unit coordinator's approval. The Boxerwood education coordinator is also putting together a final school program schedule.

3/17/11- I assisted with a school program, Habitat Investigators from 9-1 pm., which I reviewed the subject of map making. With a group of ten students, we created and labeled a Boxerwood wetlands map.

3/18/11- I assisted with a school program, the Good Earth, by exploring the role of decomposers and the living soil. With a group of seven students from Central Elementary, my third graders and I went on a decomposer hunt and used a graph to organize the data.

3/31/11-I assisted with a school program, the Good Earth, by exploring the role of decomposers and the living soil. With a group of 10 students, we went on a decomposer hunt and used a graph to organize our data.

4/4/11- I assisted with a school program, Water Trackers, by examining the water quality at Boxerwood Gardens. With a group of 15 students from Enderly Heights Elementary, we performed four tests (turbidity, PH, dissolved oxygen, and Nitrogen) to find out how healthy the water is for aquatic life.

4/5/11- I assisted with a school program, Water Trackers, by examining the water quality at Boxerwood Gardens. With a group of 18 students from Enderly Heights Elementary, we performed four tests (turbidity, PH, dissolved oxygen, and Nitrogen) to find out how healthy the water is for aquatic life.

4/14/11- I assisted with the Fairfield Elementary river program at Mallard Duck Pond Campground on the South River. 4th graders were asked to investigate the health of the South River. The 4th graders were divided into four groups of 14. There were four rotations: Macro-invertebrates, Aquatic chemistry, Haiku, and Spear points. Each rotation had a time limit of 55 minutes. I led the Aquatic chemistry investigation.

4/16/11- I received an email from the Boxerwood education coordinator on scheduling a meeting to work out some strategic plans together for the upcoming school year. She is excited on how much our organization' missions and interests align and complement each other, especially in regard to youth development and natural resource education.

4/19/11- I assisted with a school program, Go with the Flow, by leading a frog and turtle observation walk. With a group of seven 3rd graders from Enderly Heights, we identified green frogs, bull frogs, painted turtles, and snapping turtles at two different pond locations on Boxerwood's property. After our walk, we drew Venn Diagrams that explained ways that frogs and turtles are similar and different.

5/3/11- I assisted with the 5th grade Parry McCluer river program at Glen Maury Park on the Maury River. 5th graders were asked to investigate the health of the Maury River. The students were divided into four groups of 7. There were four rotations: Macro-invertebrates, Aquatic chemistry, Haiku, and Spear points. Each rotation had a time limit of 55 minutes. I led the Aquatic chemistry investigation.

6/20/11- I assisted with a Boxerwood Geo-caching activity with Maury River Middle School summer camp campers. The caches were hidden along the Woods Creek Trail. Each camper used a hand held g.p.s. device.

9/27/11- I assisted with the 5th grade Central Elementary river program at Glen Maury Park on the Maury River. 5th graders were asked to investigate the health of the Maury River. The students were divided into four groups of 12. There were four rotations: Macro-invertebrates, Aquatic chemistry, Haiku, and Spear points. Each rotation had a time limit of 55 minutes. I led the Aquatic chemistry investigation.

10/4/11- I assisted with a school program, Exploring Habitats from 9-1 pm., which I reviewed the subject of map making. There were a total of three program rotations: Habitat scientists, Shelters, and Wetland Explorers. With a group of 18 3rd graders from Central Elementary, the group was divided into three groups of nine. The wetland explorers created and labeled a Boxerwood wetland map.

10/17/11- I assisted with the 6th grade LDMS river program at Jordan's Point on the Maury River. 6th graders were asked to investigate the health of the Maury River. The students were divided into four groups of 16. There were four rotations: Macro-invertebrates, Pollution Solution, Nature Painting, and Batteau Races. I let the Batteau Race activity. This exercise focused on the timing of floating objects to calculate stream velocity.

12/9/11- I attended a volunteer appreciation luncheon hosted by Boxerwood. As I sat at my table, I was reminded about my many hours of service and how much I have grown in the professional sense. Boxerwood encouraged and nurtured my abilities and has shaped me into a strong and confident educator. My experience as a Boxerwood volunteer educator was awesome!