

Ten Tips for a Successful Project

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SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS, INC.

1. Prepare Ahead of Time

Preparation is the key to implementing a successful local project. Make sure facilitators read through the sessions several times before the event and practice reading aloud the script portions. Consider conducting one or two practice sessions with your Girls Advisory Group. Facilitators should try to think about their own responses to some of the questions posed to participants and come ready with personal examples to offer in case of silence. Facilitators can even test out some of the activities on their own, such as making a dream collage to share with participants.

2. Devote Energy to Building Trust

At the start of the conference or sessions, allow time for the lead facilitator to introduce herself beyond sharing her name and career. Provide an opportunity for participants to understand who the lead facilitator is, what she does, and what she values. Sharing will allow participants to build trust in and respect for the facilitator. When participants are asked to share their own experiences throughout *Dream It, Be It*, participants will know they aren't being asked to do anything facilitators aren't willing to do.

3. Adjust Accordingly

The *Dream It, Be It* curriculum is useful as a starting point, but some of the issues addressed might not be as relevant to your location or the girls with whom you are working. Make sure to adjust the focus or structure of the sessions according to the input of volunteers, community partners, and your Girls Advisory Group. By asking for support from your advisory group, you can more effectively identify the needs of girls in your community and meet those needs through your *Dream It, Be it* project.

4. Be Sensitive

Some of the topics introduced, particularly those in Sessions 4 and 5, might be difficult for participants to talk about. Some participants may have firsthand experience with painful setbacks, or know someone close to them who has dealt with the addressed obstacles. In these cases, make sure to provide an introduction or "trigger warning" for potentially sensitive issues. Try to maintain awareness of the group dynamic and offer the option for participants to leave the room or take a short break if they feel very emotionally affected by a discussion. Follow up with these participants individually after the session to give them support and possibly refer them to outside resources.

5. Be Consistent

These girls may experience a lot of instability in their family or school life, so it is important to be a consistent presence to help the girls create a new and important routine with people who they can trust are committed to them. If fewer participants than expected show up to the conference or meeting, don't cancel it. You may need to adjust your plans, but don't send the girls home. Let those who come know they're just as important as those who don't. In any individual sessions, too, try not to cancel last minute or change meeting dates and times drastically.

6. Take a Different Perspective

In preparing and facilitating the project, try to envision the experience from the girls' point of view. For instance, if participants seem disinterested or uncommunicative, they might just be shy or distrustful of adults. If you encounter frustration or resistance from the participants, it is useful to think about the physical, emotional, or social difficulties of adolescence that might make them act in this way. Shifting your perspective will help you stay patient and understanding through any challenges that may arise throughout your project. To shift your perspective, first recognize that other perspectives exist and our opinions often differ from others'. Then, ask questions in a respectful phrasing and tone, so participants are more likely to give clearer answers than if you challenge them to defend their opinion against yours. Finally, resist the urge to debate. Consider paraphrasing and repeating back what you heard so participants can confirm whether or not you understood their points the way they intended.

7. Celebrate Success

Celebrate success, no matter how small. Making a big deal when things go right can have a tremendous effect on self-esteem and can motivate everyone involved to do even more. Many girls may have had tough beginnings in life and may feel they have experienced many setbacks, so celebrating progress and great results keeps their motivation and interest on track. Thank the girls for showing up to sessions. At the end of each session, acknowledge their effort and participation.

8. Try Social Media

If you have gotten permission from parents and participants, take pictures of the girls in action during sessions. Display the pictures in the space during future sessions, or post them in an album on Facebook and tag the participants. Have girls create fun captions for them. Consider setting up a group text for the participants using the apps "Group Me" or "Viber." Sending a group text would be helpful to remind girls of upcoming sessions, any homework your group has assigned, or anything else girls should bring with them to the next session. Using technology participants are familiar with helps them engage with the project in a comfortable, meaningful way. It also helps garner positive public awareness and attract future participants to your project.

9. Follow Up

Let the girls know you care about them. If you see or hear something that seems a little "off" to you, or if any participants seem to be having a difficult time within any of the sessions, check in with them afterwards to express concern and care about their well-being. Consider if follow up to a social service, counseling, or other community agency is appropriate. Following up will help to maintain girls' trust and will help girls to stay engaged if they are considering dropping out.

It is also challenging but important to stay in contact with participants after they have finished *Dream It, Be It*. In order to sustain the relationships initiated during your project, encourage facilitators to follow up with participants they were matched with for the Career Guidance Session at least once a month after the project ends. At the end of *Dream It, Be It*, provide girls with contact information for all facilitators and a tangible community connection such as a volunteer opportunity, an internship, or an informational interview. Finally, hold events for past *Dream It, Be It* participants, like a reunion pizza party or a movie night.

10. Stay Positive

Implementing a brand new project is not an easy task, and you might run into unforeseen challenges along the way. Throughout the process, it's important to recognize that your project will not be perfect so try to stay positive no matter what happens. By looking at every challenge as an opportunity for learning and growth, you will be able to notice and target aspects of *Dream It, Be It* to improve upon for next year. Tracking your setbacks and mistakes will help you build a very successful and effective project over time.