1

From Needs and Goals to Program Organization

A Nuts–and–Bolts Guide

Joan Franklin Smutny
Cheryl Lind

The first day of a gifted program is, perhaps, the most special for those involved in organizing and administering it. After months of planning and preparation, there is nothing quite like seeing hundreds of eager children clutching their schedules and tugging at the hands of their parents. It is at this moment that one most keenly feels that the time and effort involved in producing the program were worthwhile. The children's faces, full of anticipation, are reminders that a number of these children will be experiencing gifted classes for the first time in their lives.

For most of these students, it is rare to have their unique talents, ideas, and interests validated and encouraged by a master teacher or to share their enthusiasm with children like themselves. In a gifted program, these children can invent science experiments, reconstruct mathematical formulas, create poems and stories, participate in theatrical productions, or track the idiosyncratic sightings of UFOs in South America. The exposure to

innovative ideas and new fields of knowledge enables gifted students to discover talents they didn't know they had.

Depending on the school district, learning options for gifted students can include pullout programs, differentiated instruction in the classroom, grade skipping, and programs outside regular school hours. In designing and administering summer gifted programs for more than 2,000 students a year, we have become keenly aware of the unique contribution that programs beyond the regular classroom can make in the education of high-ability children. Where else but in a gifted program can a child become a poet, an astronomer, or a detective, composing free verse, exploring new galaxies, or examining the clues in a baffling murder case? Where else can students discover new interests and strengths through course offerings that draw from such a wide range of specializations? Where else can they quickly make friends and enjoy the thrill of working on projects with other children as able and enthusiastic as they?

Our own programs, administered through the Center for Gifted at National-Louis University in Evanston, Illinois, are generally scheduled for 5 days a week in 2- to 3-week sessions through the duration of the summer. We also run 5-week programs on Sunday afternoons during the winter. The sessions run in various locations around the greater Chicago area, and a typical program offers around 15 to 20 classes. Depending on the age level served by the program, classes run for either an hour or 90 minutes, and students attend either two or three classes each day of the program.

We have included this chapter specifically for those of you who desire a practical guide for developing gifted programs. It is only a thumbnail sketch of the many details involved in the organization of such a project. Separate chapters in this book examine some of what is covered here (such as content or assessment) in more depth; this chapter should be read in the context of the book as a whole.

This chapter is *not* a recipe for creating gifted programs; it is a list of necessary ingredients. How these ingredients are combined and in what order and priority are elements that should evolve from the unique circumstances and needs of each community. This chapter focuses on insights learned in the organization and administration of Center for Gifted programs, but we believe the ideas here apply to a much wider variety of program contexts. Many different types of programs are needed to serve the gamut of high-ability children, but all programs involve the following tasks:

1. Reckoning needs and goals

2. Selecting a target population

3. Establishing identification methods

4. Designing and implementing curriculum appropriate for the target population

5. Selecting and developing teachers

6. Hiring administration and support staff

7. Evaluating the program

8. Budgeting and funding

9. Developing a marketing and dissemination plan

10. Developing a timeline for the program

11. Finding sites for the program

12. Planning for the first day: class schedules, attendance, and transportation

RECKONING OF NEEDS AND GOALS

Itemizing the needs and goals a program will meet is the first step in development. A list of goals will inform the program's administrators of all the organizational decisions they must make in developing the program.

For example, if a program aims to respond to the need for more creative content or for a much broader range of courses, including the arts, then one of the goals must be to establish identification procedures that draw from criteria besides standardized test scores. There is a full educational literature (see, e.g., Gardner, 1993) defending nontraditional criteria, so there should be no embarrassment in taking advantage of it. Similarly, the goal of developing creativity in children demands that teachers must have the qualifications that enable them not only to impart knowledge at an advanced level but also to stimulate original, creative thought in their students, for it is this thought that climbs the steep but imperative mount of applicability. To this end, formal training and experience in the education of the gifted are highly desirable in teachers, though candidates should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, mentoring by an experienced teacher may proxy for formal training for the purposes of the program. Teachers must also have a sophisticated understanding of their subject in order to respond to the many unexpected ideas and solutions that arise from creative children. This combination of teaching qualifications and subject expertise is rare but invaluable to the success of a program.

In developing a list of needs and goals, it is useful to begin with an introspective reckoning. What need, situation, circumstance, or observation stimulated the idea to start a gifted program? What do gifted children

most need in the community? Do the services currently available for gifted students meet the expectations of the children, parents, administration, and teachers involved? However the idea came about, everyone involved in the program needs a clear sense of a program's rationale. The planning group will only function properly with a common vision to guide it. Faculty members often use a program's mission as a guiding principle for developing curriculum. One of the first things parents want to know when they inquire about a program is the following: What are the goals and priorities of this particular program, and how are they different from programs offered elsewhere?

Gifted programs generally should aim to meet the needs of three populations—children, parents, and teachers. First and foremost, of course, are the children. After the first session of a program, it is not unusual for parents to tell program administrators about their children's enthusiasm. They often say that on the way home from the program, their children describe, in minute detail, the activities of the classes. They describe the teachers and the other students they enjoyed interacting with that day. This is not surprising because bored and apathetic gifted students come to life in a place where they can participate in projects and activities that challenge their talents and provide new direction, insight, and focus for their interests. Conceptualizing high-ability children's needs for a program must always remain within the framework of activating their enthusiasm.

In formalizing the ways a program can activate enthusiasm among students, it is often valuable to specify the needs met by the program. Here, resource books on gifted education (e.g., Colangelo & Davis, 1991; Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994) and practical advice books for gifted children and their parents (e.g., Alvino, 1985; Galbraith, 1983) may be of great help to the practitioner. The list of needs can extend beyond what is listed below and will vary slightly depending on the format and philosophy of the individual program. Most programs offer the following:

- course subjects and activities that challenge students both academically and creatively;
- content that connects to real conditions, situations, or issues in the world;
- opportunities for intensive focus and exploration in a nonpressurized environment where students can test, experiment, and innovate without having to generate final products or solutions prematurely;
- a learning environment where gifted children can feel nurtured and encouraged and where they can develop a stronger sense of belonging and self-worth;
- a wide selection of courses in math, science, law, economics, social science, language arts, visual art, and performing arts that accommodate a diversity of talent, as well as a diverse student body;

- opportunities to interact and work closely with other gifted students—to share ideas, benefit from others' knowledge, and collaborate on subjects of mutual interest;
- highly qualified teachers—experts in their fields—who can translate their knowledge into stimulating activities and project ideas for gifted students;
- teachers who are empathetic to the emotional and intellectual challenges gifted students often have and are able to encourage and nurture their growth in new areas;
- an emphasis on hands-on activities, experimentation, and creativity that provides an alternative focus and method for all subjects and that encourages independent thinking and risk taking.

Overall, programs should target the need for more divergent thinking activities in all subjects and offer many opportunities for invention and creative expression. Students should apply and experiment with knowledge in all subjects and use a variety of media and materials for their work. Gifted students are not only hungry for more intellectual and creative challenge; they need to *do* things! Therefore, all classes should challenge children to use new learning and skills to experiment, produce, and create.

Gifted programs also serve two other populations—parents and teachers. The knowledge parents have about giftedness varies, but most of them are dissatisfied with their children's schooling and are concerned about their academic, creative, and emotional well-being. They often will tell you that their child is bored, stifled by linear assignments, ostracized by the other kids, or denied access to more challenging or stimulating material. It is highly important to address parents' needs in any program for gifted children. If parents do not understand giftedness or fully comprehend the benefits that can accrue to gifted students by participating in a gifted program, they will lose interest and begin to question whether their children even require special services at all. Parents are typically grateful for any opportunities offered to learn more about giftedness, network with other parents, and feel involved—even welcomed—by teachers. A most useful feature of a gifted program is an "open house" at the end of the program, where parents can visit each class and see the progress their children have made.

Most gifted programs recognize the need to serve children and their parents. There is also, however, another population that should be served by programs—teachers. Teachers should find stimulation and solace in a gifted program. Many teachers enjoy working with talented students and feel frustrated by the limited opportunities available to them in the regular school curriculum. They relish the opportunity to design a more challenging and creative curriculum, to develop materials and activities that stimulate original responses in gifted children. Even teachers who come from walks of life outside education (e.g., practicing scientists, artists, actors, authors, etc.) enjoy a break from their professional lives to work

with talented students eager to learn. Gifted students frequently raise interesting questions, pose problems, and bring unique insights that inspire and invigorate teachers.

The program's goals should be communicable in the form of a mission statement or rationale and should be written down on all promotional pieces. The mission statement is the first thing printed on all the flyers the Center for Gifted disseminates. For example, the first paragraph in the flyer for Project—a 3-week intensive summer program for gifted 6th- to 10th-grade students—reads as follows:

> Project 2002 emphasizes creativity and critical thinking while exploring diverse subject matter in a challenging, creative environment, free from the pressure of tests or grades. All activities invite active, hands-on participation, inspire enthusiasm for learning and elicit a desire to expand intellectual and inventive horizons.

Parents and teachers can quickly grasp the program goals and priorities and can see immediately if it matches their interests.

Sometimes simultaneous with the listing of needs and goals is the selection of a target population of gifted students whose needs the program will address.

SELECTING A TARGET POPULATION

A target population may mean students with high ability in particular areas (such as the sciences or arts), or it may refer to geographic, cultural, or socioeconomic factors. In either case, having a clear sense of the target population at the outset of the planning process will guide coordinators' decisions about identification procedures, curriculum development, faculty searches, and assessment. A program focusing on math and science, for example, will use identification measures that may differ from one that includes all subjects or one that attempts to reach underrepresented gifted students (e.g., bilingual, multicultural, urban, and/or rural poor). Smutny (2002) has discussed alternative identification measures for specific student populations in great detail. The Center for Gifted ran a bilingual gifted program that reevaluated selection procedures; hired bilingual consultants to advise on course content, teaching styles, and activities; and developed projects sensitive to the cultural and linguistic differences of this population. It also involved community aides, bilingual teachers to help in classrooms where gifted students needed extra language support, and a system to keep parents involved and informed.

Targeting a student population can be quite exciting. It allows administrators and teachers to support gifted populations in ways that other programs have not. For example, many programs focus on math and science, but very few are specifically designed for gifted girls and young women.

Many recent studies have shown that girls gifted in math and science turn away from these subjects at more advanced levels, either because of cultural biases or because of the girls' own developmental priorities (Smutny, 1998a). Parents of gifted girls will affirm that this is an area of great need. As program developers take steps to design a program for this target group, they need to reevaluate the standard approach to identification, curriculum development, and the selection of faculty. A program organized to support gifted girls in math and science would be inconsistent if it did not expand identification measures, incorporate more women into the faculty, and redesign teaching materials and strategies to accommodate some of the issues and challenges encountered by this population.

ESTABLISHING IDENTIFICATION MEASURES

Whatever gifted group is targeted for the program, the goal of supporting that group will direct most of the program's organization. It is vital that the target population determine the selection process. Test scores can sometimes say little—if anything—about a child's creative ability when the child's framework is not the mainstream. Depending on the program's target population, alternative measures of giftedness may be necessary for evaluation.

While being flexible, program planners do need to develop *specific* criteria for admission. Although federal and state guidelines are helpful, they can also be restrictive among some target populations. For example, most schools use standardized testing as an indicator of ability and school performance to measure achievement. These two factors have their usefulness, but gifted students who test poorly and/or underachieve (Baldwin, 2002) will slip through the cracks if these two indicators carry more weight than other methods. In many cases, teacher checklists of behaviors, peer nomination, self-nomination, parent observations, portfolios of student work (at home as well as school), nominations by community leaders and mentors, and informal interviews give a more complete picture of what a child can do and what he or she desires to achieve.

Students in regular schools may have exceptional gifts, but because they perform at an average level in a couple of subjects, they may not receive any support for their talents. In some cases, as discussed in Gallagher and Bristol (1989), a learning disability may cause a student to struggle in certain activities; in other cases, low self-esteem over a number of years can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of average performance in a talented child (LeVine & Kitano, 1998). There are other reasons why gifted students might not be identified. Students who hear gunshots at night in their neighborhoods or who attend schools where the primary focus is maintaining security or getting students to achieve the minimum requirements for promotion to the next grade are highly underrepresented by traditional identification techniques. These students typically have had no exposure to advanced

instruction and live in situations where giftedness is an unrecognized quality. They often do not appear gifted to those used to identifying children from more affluent and secure environments. Multiple-criteria approaches to identification help to level entrance requirements for these students.

Program planners need to communicate the criteria they are using to determine eligibility, and ideally, they should provide this information in print so that parents can refer to it when they fill out applications for their children. In the Center for Gifted programs, admission demands evidence of ability, in the form of standardized test scores, grades, or other sources. Parents are often helpful in selecting the most accurate measures. We also require a recommendation by a teacher, counselor, or principal and, for younger children, parental observations of talent, including lists of behaviors, abilities, and tendencies that indicate giftedness. On occasion, giftedness has been established in other ways—through conferencing with parents, conducting director and teacher interviews of the child in question, and/or reviewing portfolios of the child's work.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT CURRICULUM APPROPRIATE FOR THE TARGET POPULATION

The list of needs and goals will again be of highest importance in developing and delivering curriculum for the target population. Unlike a regular school curriculum where little divergence is possible, the program's curriculum can focus on subjects rarely explored in the classroom—for example, architecture, archaeology, or poetry. Unmet needs of students, parents, and teachers can be most directly met through curriculum design and implementation.

Teachers must have a clear sense of the needs and goals the program is intended to meet. Then, they can develop the concepts or theories to be communicated and, from that basis, design and implement a series of activities and projects that encourage both critical and creative thinking (i.e., analytical and synthetic thinking in nonlinear, imaginative ways) on Type II and Type III levels (Renzulli & Reis, 1986).

In-class projects should become progressively more complex as students become more adept at tackling advanced concepts. Far from being an unstructured element of curriculum, creativity should be one that provides the most challenge (Torrance, Murdock, & Fletcher, 1996). Creativity demands not only a mastery of subject matter but also flexibility of thought in applying known strategies to new situations. Teachers may find practical subject-specific guidelines to appropriate gifted curriculum development for young children in Smutny, Walker, and Meckstroth (1997); for mathematics in Freeman (2001); and for preteen and teenage students in Drake (1998).

Moving from curricular design to implementation involves creativity and imagination. The following are some useful general guidelines for

curriculum design in gifted programs, along with a sampling of some Center for Gifted courses and descriptions from our catalogue illustrating them. These should give an idea of how implementation should follow from design, although obviously, the courses any program offers will depend on the target population served.

• Select a topic or focus within a field that is conceptually or theoretically interesting to a sizable population of students and one that is narrow enough to thoroughly explore during the duration of the program.

> *The Science of Flight.* Challenge current scientific theories about why things fly. Study, design, and construct a variety of aircraft and try to fly them. Endeavor to defy concepts developed by Venturi, Galileo, von Braun, Bell, Goddard, the Bernoullis, and others as you create helicopters, straw flyers, balloon jets, water rockets, Nerf ball cannons, and tetrahedra kites in pursuit of perfect flight (Grades 6-10).

• Design a series of activities that follow a conceptual, theoretical, or creative progression and lead students from one project/activity to the next.

> *Tall Tales, Small Tales, Fairy Tales.* Imagine, create, and dramatize your way around, through, over, and under wild things and crazy places in literature (Grades K-1).

• Include projects that actively draw from the skills, concepts, discoveries, innovations, discussions, and research undertaken by the students and the teacher.

> *Defying Laws of Physics.* Challenge traditional theorems (after all, they're only *assumed* to be true!) as you forge into the facts and fables of sound, pressure, light, heat, and electricity (Grades 5-6).

• Incorporate creativity, imagination, innovation, and invention (consider how critical and creative thinking can be integrated with more interesting results and how the subject at hand can be presented to allow for greater variations in approach and execution).

> *Becoming an Architect.* Perform daring feats of engineering as you explore the art and science of building design and construction; probe the structural equipoise of strength, practicality, and aesthetics; draft scale drawings; and build your own creative models (Grades 4-7).

• Develop the class sessions to allow for differences in education, experience, and ability.

The Artist's Studio. Explore various methods and muses, including sculpture, weaving, batik, and printmaking; then create your own masterpieces in this multimedia workshop (Grades 4-7).

• Provide a bounty of materials for classroom use. The catalysts (initial activities, supplies, media, magazines, books, computer programs, audio and visual sources, etc.) play a crucial role in stimulating original thought.

Filmmaking. Explore scientific mechanisms of the projector and camera. Critique short films and create your own camera-less film using original media. Discover the Bolex camera, light meter, and projector; build sets; write scripts; and invent, create, and manipulate characters to produce your own animated film (Grades 6-10).

Involving faculty in the development of curriculum for the program is often a useful tactic. Once newly hired teachers understand the objectives of the program, they typically have their own ideas about topics that might be integrated into the curriculum. Consult often with program teachers to ensure that the activities provide the conceptual and practical challenges gifted students need. Of course, this type of teacher-administration interaction is best when faculty have been selected with care to meet the needs and goals of the program.

SELECTING AND DEVELOPING TEACHERS

A gifted program is only as good as its faculty. Ideally, instructors should have not only expertise in their subject but also an ability to translate it into activities where students can express their understanding in creative, original applications. Teachers should be selected based on criteria that include the following:

- Advanced knowledge of theory and application in a subject
- Ability to translate sophisticated material into stimulating and challenging projects for gifted students of different levels
- Ability to provide a variety of hands-on, experimental activities
- Specific training in theories of different learning styles and an ability to modify curricula and activities to suit the preferred learning styles of individual children
- Warm disposition, empathy for the feelings and experiences of gifted children, and an ability to respond sensitively to their unique emotional and cognitive needs
- Understanding of giftedness and an ability to establish an open and nurturing classroom atmosphere conducive to bold experiments and risk-taking endeavors

One should not necessarily turn away prospective teachers with little classroom experience if they have other important qualifications (such as expertise in their field and an understanding of application, theory, and concept) and if they have inspired ideas about what they want to accomplish with gifted students. Instead, it may be possible to arrange for them to visit a program already running or, if this is not possible, to provide them with special assistance and support during their initial meetings with the children. They may also benefit from "on-the-job training" or mentoring, working with an experienced teacher to learn ways of communicating their knowledge to students. The Center for Gifted has had as many professional nonteachers in our programs as regular classroom or private school teachers, and both have provided exceptional instruction for gifted students.

Preparing teachers for a program is critical. A new teacher needs to understand the philosophy and goals of the program, the level and type of ability they will most likely find among gifted students at the grade level they are teaching, the unique problems and issues gifted children in the target population face, and the importance of integrating different learning styles into projects and activities.

Once program administrators have hired the faculty, they also need to provide ongoing support and assistance. This ensures that all the teachers understand the aims of the program while still allowing latitude for individual teaching styles and approaches to course content. One way to accomplish this is by beginning each program with a faculty meeting and then having regular follow-up sessions so that teachers can ask questions and network with each other on issues relating to the target population, parents, and administrators. The director and administrators should also keep track of how students are responding to the activities and assignments provided by teachers and make themselves available to the instructors for additional advice if they so desire. It is critical to support teachers, some of whom, if they have not had a great deal of experience in working with gifted students, may find working with them more difficult than they imagined. When they feel free to express their concerns or frustrations, they can find solutions to their teaching problems.

Finding creative teachers with expertise in a variety of fields can be challenging. It is worthwhile to consider schools for the gifted and private schools, where faculty are experienced in gifted education; universities; master's degree programs in gifted education; technology firms and science institutes that are invested in helping talented students; and art, dance, and theater studios. Many of the best teachers will come from referrals by parents and other teachers, so it is worthwhile to involve these groups in the faculty selection process. Signs in university departments, student lounges of education colleges where gifted specialists may be, public libraries, and art studios can also bring in good applicants.

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Gifted programs need some form of outreach to parents in order to create a foundation that lasts. Parents have a critical role to play in the development and success of gifted programs. They have a mine of information about their children's abilities—the different projects the children have done in school and at home, their hobbies and tastes, and the many behaviors parents have observed firsthand since their children were born. Teachers should write an introductory letter to parents at the beginning of the program that describes the class and the kinds of projects the children will undertake.

Some teachers go farther and ask parents for specific information on the children's strengths, abilities, and learning preferences. They may also ask for parent participation. This could include helping to make costumes, providing materials for a writing class, doing a short presentation in a law class, lending a video that applies to an entomology class, and so on. Not all instructors need go this far, but they should always make themselves available to those parents who have questions or concerns about their children.

Parents who bring their children to gifted programs will usually take advantage of all the resources available. At the Center for Gifted, parent workshops are given while children are in classes. Speakers at the workshops focus on a variety of issues of interest to the gifted community, providing sources and materials for parents to take home and creating a forum for them to network with each other. These seminars have proven effective in helping parents understand the importance of special education for gifted students and of parent advocacy as a means of creating more opportunity for their children. Through the seminars, parents meet others facing similar problems and gain new insights and knowledge they can use with their own children.

Another opportunity for parent outreach, mentioned earlier, is an "open house" during or after the last session of a program. Performance classes often have productions to showcase; art students can display their sculptures, paintings, or collages; writing students can share their poems and stories; science students can demonstrate their experiments or inventions; and math students can display geometric structures they have constructed or explain formulas they have learned in a variety of contexts. Open-house sessions are culminating experiences for both parents and children to see how far they have progressed during the course of the program. They help parents and students recognize the value of the program and encourage them to return.

HIRING ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT STAFF

Most programs cannot afford to hire a great number of administrators, but it is possible for a few dedicated individuals to wear several hats. Basic and necessary administrative and staff positions include the following:

- Program director/codirectors
- Budget director (administering payroll, expenses, reimbursements for supplies, etc.)
- Site coordinators if more than one program is operating simultaneously (these tend to be temporary positions)
- Administrative assistants to handle marketing (working with directors to design flyers, generating school lists for dissemination of flyers, keeping track of students enrolled in previous programs), process student applications, locate and rent space for classrooms, schedule students into classes, respond to parent inquiries and concerns, and send assessment forms to parents and teachers

There is no way to predict precisely how many staff members will be needed in advance. Estimates of staff requirements depend on the size of the program, the availability of funding, and the multitasking talents (giftedness!) of potential staff members. Due to funding difficulties, most programs begin with very few staff members, though these are typically foot soldiers for the gifted education movement who are willing to contribute extra time and effort to make the program run.

The most practical way to go about staffing is to determine all the areas that need managing and then to consider which areas are already covered and which require additional staff. If the program belongs to an institute, university, or school, new positions will be proposed formally. Having a job description available and a clear rationale for the creation of the new position will often streamline this process. If funding for additional staff is not available, consider the recruitment of parent volunteers. In our programs and others we have observed, parents who have extra time and those with areas of special expertise are often quite willing to devote time to a cause that directly benefits their children. Contracting with the parent for help with the program in exchange for reduced tuition will eliminate the need to pay some staff directly out of pocket.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

Evaluation is something almost everyone would like to avoid. For some, it seems like a cumbersome process of gathering assessments from different constituencies, all of whom have something to criticize. Far from being a compendium of complaints, however, evaluation can actually be a powerful catalyst for growth. Without it, a program would move blindly into the future without any sense of how it is benefiting students and without any impetus for growth and expansion. Gifted programs without any form of evaluation put themselves at risk. As Dettmer (1985) observed, "Because gifted programs are not popular and probably never will be, they must be defended and promoted by solid evidence of gifted student growth, cost

effectiveness of the program and positive ripple effects for all students throughout the school system" (p. 146).

Before designing a structure for evaluation, program founders need to ask themselves, Who needs to know what (Clark, 1988)? That is, what do parents, students, researchers, program administrators, and school districts need to know about the performance of the program? Parents, for example, will want to know more about the kinds of activities their children did in an advanced math class, and they will likely want to know this *before* the program is over. A program director will want to know exactly which classes and activities worked and didn't work for the participating children. A teacher will want to know which projects the students found most challenging and why. To determine how a program is performing, all participants need an opportunity to express themselves at the end of the program. A comprehensive evaluation should assess students' academic and creative progress, social growth, decision-making skills, and leadership abilities, as well as program and teacher effectiveness.

Student Evaluations. Teachers should evaluate each student individually at the end of the program. Parents of gifted children want to know more than the number or letter grades they are used to getting from the schools. Each teacher may be allowed to create his or her own form for evaluation, but it should include the following components:

- introductory paragraphs about the activities in class and the teacher's impressions about how the students responded and grew over the length of the program;
- a grid to rank student performance on general areas of intellectual and/or creative ability as well as attitude and application;
- follow-up comments that specifically address the child's particular talents, growth, and progress; and
- areas where the teacher sees a need for more work.

The evaluation may then go both to the student's home for the parents to see and to the child's school. In this way, parents gain insight from the teacher's perspective about their child's ability to do high-level work, and the school also has a record on file. This is critical evidence of talent, particularly in cases when the gifted student attends a school where no gifted education exists or when the student has been underestimated or ignored.

Program Evaluations. Parents and their children should receive an evaluation form at the end of the program on which they can confer and respond to key questions about the classes and program performance. These forms can also be mailed to parents when the student evaluations are sent out. With help from their children, parents can describe which classes their

children preferred and why, which activities they found most interesting and challenging, and what aspects of the program they liked best. Did the children feel affirmed, encouraged to try new things, and excited about what they were learning? They should also be allowed to identify what did *not* work—which classes proved disappointing and why; aspects of the curriculum that seemed redundant, obscure, or confusing; and problems that persisted through the length of the program. This information is extremely important both for the teachers and for administrators who must hold themselves responsible for the program's effectiveness. It is common for some students to discover that they do not like particular courses after all—or for a particular teacher and student to be ill matched. But when many students complain about the same class, administrators need to inquire more deeply, confer with the teacher, and take concrete steps to rectify the situation. In some cases, this may mean finding a new instructor for that particular class.

Evaluation should be ongoing, not merely confined to the end of the program. The more administrators know about the program *as it is in progress,* the more they can head off potential problems before they become significant. There are some simple ways to do this. One is for administrators to take time during the program to unobtrusively observe classes. Another is for administrators to make themselves available to teachers for assistance and support on a daily basis. All of this must be done sensitively, though. From the first meeting with teachers, it is best to create an open and nurturing environment for them—an atmosphere where they feel free to share how their classes are progressing. This is vital to the process of ongoing evaluation. If teachers feel nervous about their performance and cover up the areas where they feel unsure of their work, they will keep their thoughts to themselves and not seek the support they need. Also, classroom observation of fearful teachers will become unwelcome and may interfere with the normal teacher-student interaction.

The other dimension of ongoing evaluation we have found particularly helpful is regular staff meetings. Teachers have a great deal of data at their fingertips simply by their interactions with students, parents, and the administration every day. They can assess both students and the program. Staff meetings prove effective in providing a forum for teachers to share common issues that arise in a classroom full of active, highly intense gifted students. They also allow teachers to provide informal assessments on a variety of subjects. New teachers gain inspiration and encouragement by sharing with those who have had more experience in gifted programs. Regular meetings also enable administrators to communicate any issues or needs that arise and assess how the program's classes are progressing from week to week.

All of this information will help program administrators to see what worked well and where the weak points are. It is wise to not allow a few sour comments to become distractive to the evaluation process. Some

parents, teachers, and even kids seem determined never to be satisfied. A few angry people with chips on their shoulders should not be allowed to make the administrators feel the program failed to do what it set out to do. It is best to keep in mind the broader picture. How did most of the children respond? How did most of the participating families feel about their experience? Gifted programs need a great deal of nurturing, especially in the beginning. The assessments should be used to explore how what is working well can be strengthened and what can be done to help the program grow and expand for the next session.

Chapter 13 in this volume will also be of help in formulating assessment techniques.

BUDGETING AND FUNDING

Budgets for gifted programs depend on the organizations that support them, as well as on the policies of the funding sources. Programs run by a small group of parents and teachers may not have a budget at all when they start out, relying exclusively on tuition to reimburse the costs. Whatever the situation, it is necessary to plan the size and scope of a program within budgetary limits. It is also highly desirable, however, to be always seeking new sources for expansions to the program.

There is no way to tell what any particular gifted program will cost without knowing the specific details about it. Teacher salaries and the cost of renting sites (often schools) vary from one geographic location to the next. Nevertheless, an approach to the planning of a first-time budget might involve the following steps.

- Start small. Gifted programs are always costlier than expected. Plan for the number of children you can handle given your present resources.
- Write down all costs—personnel and nonpersonnel. Are there any areas where costs could be significantly reduced? An example might be a program run by a committed group who agree to teach without salaries for the first program or for significantly reduced salaries. Another example might be supplies that can be provided by a school, institute, or university or by staff and volunteers.
- Pad estimates of each cost on the list by 10%. As already mentioned, expenses usually exceed expectations.
- Create a timeline for the disbursement of expenses. Again, depending on the program's situation and organization, various types of paperwork may need to be completed by a deadline.

Many programs can function reasonably well from the resources of their organization and tuition. However, at some point, it may be desirable to expand the program. For example, when we decided to make a special

effort to include urban and minority gifted students for a 3-week summer program in the Chicago area, we applied for special funds to cover 60 scholarships, plus the extra costs of daily bus transport and additional faculty members. Most foundations do not give money to individuals or groups of individuals. This has been a strong incentive for smaller groups of committed parents and teachers to create nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit organizations can take several practical steps to apply for funds.

• Contact a local organization for grant makers. In Chicago, the Donor's Forum serves this purpose. Two useful Web sites that will be helpful in finding such local associations are the List of Regional Associations of Grant Makers (www.indoors.com/RAGlist.html) and Foundation Center—Links to Philanthropic Resources (fdncenter.org/onlib/npr-links/npr05.html). The organizations listed on these sites provide guidance in grant writing and can help locate potential donors in your area.

• Once a list of potential foundations and/or businesses has been found, contact them for applications and ask for deadline dates. Put these dates on your calendar.

• Have the specific project or plan clearly formulated as you write your proposal. Most foundations do not want their funds used for regular operating costs, as they are not interested in supporting an organization that is struggling to keep its head above water—no matter how worthy the cause! In the proposal mentioned earlier, we focused on the request to support minority and urban gifted children who had little or no resources available to them in their communities.

• Formulate a strong rationale for the project—one that demonstrates real need and that clearly explains how the program can fulfill that need in a way that other organizations do not or cannot.

• Create a budget that itemizes all costs—personnel and nonpersonnel—for the specific project needing support. Most application guidelines also request the complete budget for the program to verify fiscal soundness.

• Show the proposal to others; if possible, work with a grant maker's organization for advice and assistance.

DEVELOPING A MARKETING AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

Marketing a program begins with the families and children the founders know personally. The program's teachers can contact parents, other teachers,

and the gifted children they teach in their regular classrooms, explaining how the program will operate and asking if they might be interested. It is especially desirable to discuss a proposed program with parents—get them involved! Encourage them to talk with other parents and hold a series of meetings to discuss the program.

In a university, a program founder can make use of speaking engagements at schools, conferences, and parent groups as opportunities to talk about a new program. Schools where workshops have been given can be contacted and asked if they would be willing to disseminate flyers. Informational meetings can be held in local school districts.

For groups of local parents and teachers, word of the program can be spread most easily through the schools where their own children are or where they themselves teach. Principals or superintendents can be contacted, and a meeting with the group can be arranged to discuss the program and the role that local schools might play. Local libraries can be contacted for permission to use space for some speakers on gifted education who can inform local communities about the special challenges faced by gifted students in the regular schools. Gifted coordinators from surrounding districts should be asked if they would be willing to disburse flyers to their gifted students.

Marketing a new program takes time. A program should begin marketing at least two seasons before it starts. In the winter months, for example, it would be appropriate to begin advertising summer programs. At the end of summer, flyers for winter programs can go out. Once an organization has run several programs, lists of former participants can be used for future mailings on upcoming programs. Enthusiastic customers usually come back and often bring others with them. For our programs, we do a mass mailing to all the schools near the sites where we hold programs. We also distribute flyers whenever we give talks, do workshops in the local schools, or teach graduate courses on gifted education. Teachers can also be persuasive voices for gifted children in their own districts.

Spreading the word about gifted programs should have a personal touch. It is not enough to simply send informational materials to a school. In fact, more often than not, information sent in this way does not end up in teachers' mailboxes. Anyone who has worked in a school knows that school administrators do not see the distribution of mass mailings as a priority. Similarly, a family may receive a flyer in the mail and lose it a day later under a pile of newspapers. About 3 months before the programs begin and after information has gone out by mail, it is helpful to get a pool of people together to make phone calls. They can contact parents to ask if they have received the flyers, if they have any questions, and if they think their child might be interested in attending the program. Often, parents are interested but misplaced the flyer, had questions but didn't get around to calling, or were confused about the dates. Schools can be called after flyers are sent out to check on their status. Did they receive them? Have they been distributed? Are there any questions or concerns? This kind of contact—made in a

friendly, low-key way—has resulted in much greater participation in our programs than we would ever have had otherwise. When a program still has room for a few more students, staff members can tell people interested in the program that there are extra spaces if they know any other gifted children who might be interested. It is not uncommon for parents inquiring about the program to ask for extra flyers so that they can share the information with other families. Gifted programs are less institutions than networks, and like all networks, the benefit any single child receives from the program is increased by the presence of familiar peers. People in the gifted community—whether they be parents, teachers, kids, administrators, or counselors—tend to know each other and often move as a unit.

Whatever form of marketing a program may choose—mailings, phone contacts, informal talks at the local library or school, advertising, or any combination of these—start early! Six months ahead of the program's first day is not too soon.

DEVELOPING A TIMELINE FOR THE PROGRAM

After a program is completed the first time, it will be easier to grasp the time the process takes for the next program. Some points to keep in mind in developing a timeline include the following:

• Begin marketing right away—6 months in advance, if possible. Create a promo piece (such as a flyer) that can be used for mailings or for any situation of contact with parents or teachers. The promo piece can be used like a business card.

• Teachers need time to get acquainted with the program. Some professionals may have had very little teaching experience—in which case, they may require more preparation and support than regular classroom teachers. Unless it is an emergency, it is best to avoid hiring teachers just before the program begins.

• Renting space in the summer is typically much more difficult than during the school year. Start looking *early.* As soon as the geographical area for a gifted program is decided on, start looking for space right away. Be sure to think through the program's needs—computers, art supplies, science labs, and other facilities. A great number of schools undergo renovations in the summer months and do not allow any part of the building to be rented. A situation in which students and teachers are ready to begin the program but have nowhere to go should be avoided at all costs.

• Keeping the running schedule of deadlines for foundational funding up-to-date is highly important. Once one good proposal has been written,

its content can be modified to address the priorities and goals of other foundations.

• Mailings of promotional materials must be sent out early—especially for summer programs. Schools have many other pressing priorities after spring break, such as graduation and end-of-the-year testing, and it is difficult for a program to compete with these in the minds of teachers and school administrators. The same rule applies in mailings to parents. Families begin summer plans quite early. If the information reaches them by early spring and then the program follows up with a phone call, there will be a far better chance of interesting them in the program.

• For programs developed within organizations, it is best to find out how much time paperwork will take to be processed before the program preparations begin. Delays can easily occur in administrative bureaucracy. Most organizations have monthly deadlines for expense reports, teacher salaries, and approvals of various sorts. Getting this information in advance will eliminate the need to plead with various departmental bureaucrats later when time is running short.

FINDING SITES FOR THE PROGRAM

Programs meet in different kinds of places depending on the organization or group sponsoring them. For afterschool or in-school programs, the school's facilities can typically be used. At a university or for an independent group of parents and teachers, a site convenient to the student applicants must be found. In our summer programs, we use approximately 10 sites across different geographical areas of Chicago. We typically look for schools to rent because the size of each program (approximately 250 students) requires a large number of classrooms, including computer rooms, science labs, art rooms, and stages. For smaller programs, however, be creative! Studios, learning centers, museums, or even large houses may meet your needs.

If a program includes science, art, or any kind of performance class, the focus should primarily be on schools. Some space may be available in a community center or YMCA, but this will generally be limited. Most community centers have activities throughout the year and rarely have the equipment necessary for a gifted program. In looking for schools, explore first those schools with which program administrators or teachers have connections—either through a contact or a workshop given there or through a parent group. Independent schools should also be included in the search. They often most appreciate receiving the extra funds, and because they are not solely state funded, administrators have an incentive to seek further means, especially during the summer months when the

school would otherwise sit idle. Renting a site will require a contract agreement. Charges for space vary, so researching and comparing prices will often be productive. Some districts provide discount site rentals to groups that hire some of the district's own staff and students, so faculty hiring should be considered in conjunction with site location.

PLANNING FOR THE FIRST DAY: CLASS SCHEDULES, ATTENDANCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

By the first day of the program, each child needs a schedule of classes. In our programs, children choose five classes in order of preference on their applications. They actually attend only three classes, but a list of five means that if their first choice is filled, their preferences will be respected for alternatives. It is important to keep track of applications as they arrive. For a large program or one in which certain classes are quite popular, the principle of first-come, first-serve may be the fairest allocation mechanism. Computer classes tend to fill up quickly. When classes fill up, a note to that effect on any additional flyers sent out will avoid confusion and frustration between parents and program staff.

Class choices can become complicated and messy if policies are not clear from the very beginning. Decisions to be made for each program include the following:

• How are spaces in popular classes to be allocated? As already mentioned, first-come, first-serve may be best, but other allocation schemes may also be effective. Giving each student his or her first-choice class before assigning other classes on a first-come, first-served basis, instead of assigning all classes by date of application, is another method.

• Can children change classes, and if so, when should the deadline for this be? It is preferable for gifted children to have the option of changing classes if a class turns out to be different from what they expected, but this choice should be made within the first few classes to be fair to teachers and other students.

• How late in a program can a new child join? The student needs to be able to catch up with the other children and participate fully. If a program is 10 weeks, it would be difficult to accept new students after the third week.

Each faculty member must keep attendance, which includes keeping accurate records of new students and/or any changes that occur during the first few sessions. Each child needs to be kept track of at all times for the

security of the students and the sanity of the parents. Also, teachers can use the attendance list to make notes on each child, so that at the end of the program, they can write detailed evaluations and comments on the students' performance during the course.

Transportation to and from the program is another detail that needs to be prearranged by the time the first day arrives. Some small, local programs may not require special transportation arrangements. Parents can bring their children in their own cars and pick them up later. In other cases, a busing service may be necessary.

It is important to research local bus services before signing a contract with one and to do this research well in advance of the program. Schools and community programs that use buses can give references for reputable and reliable bus services. Regular inquiries from parents about carpooling should also be expected. If a number of applicants wish to carpool, a system to efficiently locate them by geographical area should be created for convenience. The time taken to administer such a system will easily pay for itself in reduced busing costs. Carpooling allows a group of parents to share the burden of transporting children to and from the program and is also a wonderful way for families with gifted children to become acquainted.

A FINAL NOTE

More than an educational alternative, a gifted program is a community and a culture. When a child walks through the door to find her first class, she becomes part of a small but vibrant world that embraces and inspires her beyond what school has ever done. She can no longer slump at the back of the class or surreptitiously read a book while the class goes over an assignment too easy for her to think about any longer. A gifted child soon realizes this is a different place. Other children seem more like her. The teacher doesn't mind if she comes up with an unconventional, slightly bizarre response. In the halls, kids are streaming in and out of classrooms chatting energetically, and when she peeps into some of the rooms, she sees half-finished art projects, geometric structures in various stages of completion with scribbles and diagrams all over the boards, paintings and photographs to inspire the poems and short stories that now lie piled on the teacher's desk, and, in almost every room, tables crammed with materials that make her want to join in.

Gifted programs can turn the tide for a gifted child who has given up, who no longer expects to learn anything new or interesting, who has begun to believe that he will never fit in with a group of fellow learners, or who wonders if life will simply continue to be an endless round of repetition and routine. Gifted programs can take students along paths they may never travel in a school context and can turn them loose in ways that help them to take greater risks and respond more creatively to a new challenge.

Becoming an inventor, a judge, an aviator, a physicist, a writer, or an artist for the duration of the program places the gifted child in a new universe and enables that individual—perhaps for the first time—to be struck with wonder at the vision.

For these benefits to accrue to gifted youth, however, a program must be well administered, expertly taught, and effectively monitored and evaluated. The rough guidelines presented in this chapter should be helpful in organizing the needs and goals of any program and meeting them through an effectively developed and efficiently run program. The other chapters in this book detail how these guidelines have been successfully implemented in a variety of settings, but each program, like each eager attending child, is unique and deserves special care.