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RREV's Innovative Pilot Template

As part of the **Innovative Mindset and Pilot Development** courses being offered through several of Maine's institutions of higher education, the RREV project uses a consistent template for the creation of all future pilots. Because every pilot created and tested with RREV funds WILL BE published in EnGiNE, we want all of Maine's educators to have the assurance of consistency.

This template provides an outline of the components required of an Innovative Pilot. The information in this template will serve as the basis for requests for school/district level project funding.

Section 1: Define the Need

A. Describe the need for your innovation.

Consider what evidence supports the need for an innovation, and the evidence that suggests your innovation will improve the current situation. at least 200 word count.

The forced shift to online learning has created an opportunity to explore options for virtual education beyond the pandemic. In MSAD 60, there is momentum to continue virtual learning for students who prefer that pathway to education. After learning many lessons in the past year, a team within MSAD 60 is working to develop the Noble Virtual Middle School (NVMS) as a starting point for future k-12 remote learning. NVMS will use project based learning to meet standards in a streamlined and engaging way.

The planning team had big concerns for the mental health and wellness of students who choose online education. Although for some kids learning from home has been largely a positive experience, there are potentially troubling consequences for students who choose this path. Mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety were on the rise among youth before the pandemic happened. In the past year studies have found that social isolation that comes with remote education has compounded these problems. During this time the parents have found their children have more trouble with concentration and sleep while engaging in less physical activities. These concerns must not be overlooked when a shift to fully remote educational options are considered.

Providing authentic and impactful access to social emotional learning and overall wellness will be key in helping students and families feel connected to and valued by this emerging remote option. It will also reduce the risks of children falling through the cracks, ensure that vital topics such as mental health, suicide awareness and intervention, stress management, nutrition, physical activity and more are not lost in the remote setting.

B. Identify which students would be impacted, targeted, or supported by the innovation.

Review the evidence – quantitative and qualitative data and research – that indicates this group of students is considered the most vulnerable and would benefit from the described innovation.

Data you can use to inform your innovation, rationale, and targeted student population include the performance of various groups of students (e.g., students in rural locales, students from low socio-economic conditions, students with disabilities,

students who are Els, students at risk for dropping out, student who are homeless) with regard to academic achievement, graduation rates, social emotional and mental wellness, economic data, and/or workforce participation.

250 word count.

MSAD 60 is a regional, rural school district located in southern Maine serving 3100 students from Lebanon, Berwick and North Berwick. The project outlined in this proposal, Be Well Connected, will provide the much needed wellness support for students who enroll in the Noble Virtual Middle School (NVMS), which will launch its first year in September 2021.

Staffing for NVMS will include three learning coaches, a partial special education position and a remote learning director. In the first year they will serve sixty students in grades 6-8 and eventually grow to offer the remote education option district-wide. It will be important for both students and parents to make a commitment to learning in this virtual environment. They will be selected for participation through an application process that includes written and video components from the student and a written application to be completed by parents. Their work habits, grades, attendance, parent input, and teacher or guidance counselor recommendations will also be considered. A student's need for IEP or 504 accommodations will not negatively impact their eligibility for enrollment; special education services will be provided as needed.

The audience we expect to serve includes students seeking flexibility in their educational experience. Students may also suffer with anxiety, depression, or experience with bullying, which makes it difficult for them to fully participate in school. In addition, this model may appeal to students who enjoy learning at their own pace, faster or slower, and benefit from an individualized education experience. With these things in mind, the NVMS must include social/emotional learning and wellness programming in order to assist students in gaining skills to cope and conquer any of these underlying concerns. Be Well Connected will provide structure and support to make that happen!

Section 2: Describe the Innovation

A. Describe the goals of your innovation.

Consider how your innovation will meet the needs of the identified target student population(s) and how you plan to achieve your goals. Additionally, consider any changes in policy, practice or structures you expect as a result of the innovation.

250 word count.

INNOVATION NAME: Be Well Connected

HEADLINE: Our students don't have to feel lost, stressed and alone in this virtual learning world.

THE PROBLEM: The lack of social, emotional and wellness opportunities are negatively impacting the success of remote students. This needs to be a priority in order to improve attendance, grades, test scores and connections in the new Noble Virtual Middle School.

BENEFIT PROMISE: This program will improve attendance and result in more passing grades among students. We anticipate problem attendance (5 or more absences) to decrease by 40% and students failing 2 or more classes will decrease by at least one third. State and local assessment data will show that students will meet or exceed the expectations.

PROOF:

Research has shown that when students are healthier and well connected to their peers and teachers, they are absent less often and perform better in school. Healthy students, both mentally and physically, are better able to focus and learn. Be Well Connected will provide the tools and structure to eliminate barriers to learning and achieve better results for our students.

1. **A Virtual Wellness Counselor** with a background in school counseling or social work will be the key person to facilitate all aspects of the Be Well Connected program. This person will provide lessons using the Building Assets Reducing Risks iTimes curriculum and other lessons from MaineSEL library. Lessons will focus on communication, empathy, stress, anxiety and other wellness topics. The Wellness Counselor will serve as an in-house support for learning coaches as they work with their advisory groups to build a community of learners who feel connected. They will coordinate with the guidance counselors in the buildings to facilitate opportunities for NVMS students to enroll in courses and school activities if they choose to. They will also support tough situations any student and their family might be dealing with.
2. **Space for in-person learning** will be established in order to provide consistent classroom work space for collaboration and team building. Although NVMS will be primarily online, the classroom will offer storage for supplies, space for project development, meeting/training for staff and group activities. This space will be fully ADA accessible.
3. **Advisory Groups** will help establish strong connections between learning coaches, students and their families. Each group of 10-12 students will establish norms, participate in team building activities and form relationships to support the whole learner. They will be given the option to use a communication app that is just like texting but is also able to maintain teachers to student boundaries.
4. **Training** will be provided for learning coaches and the director. They will learn current information and skills that link health with education. The topics will include but are not limited to: trauma informed teaching, understanding the adolescent brain, mental health disorders, substance abuse prevention, strategies for making connections. Training opportunities may also be available to parents as they are critical partners in their child's education.
5. **Enrichment activities** and field trips will be planned with help from the wellness counselor. This person will collaborate with the NVMS team to find and plan opportunities for students to experience a variety of enrichment activities students might not otherwise have a chance to try. Opportunities may include future career exploration, community service, hobby exploration, and strategies to be the best version of themselves. Examples include music lessons, attending concerts, photography, museums, hiking, fishing, inspirational speakers, attending a youth leadership conference, job shadows, volunteering in a hospital or food pantry, yoga, knitting, art classes, farming, or any interests the students and learning coaches have and want to explore. All field trips will take ADA accessibility into account to ensure access to full participation for all students.
6. **Success of Be Well Connected** will be documented using attendance, work completion, passing classes and state and local assessment tools. Student and parent surveys will also provide data regarding feelings of connection and support as well as how to improve our program. With Be Well Connected in place, the sense of connection and support will help students be successful in many ways in school and beyond.

PRICE: \$250,000 for a 2 Year Pilot Program Budget -- More details below

Full time wellness coordinator \$150,000

In-person learning space for remote learners	35,000
Transportation	20,000
Enrichment experiences and field trips	30,000
Staff Training and Parent Education	10,000
Curriculum, technology and other supplies	5,000

VALUE: Connections are priceless - helping kids feel connected to their learning and teachers is critical to 21 century success. Empowering remote students within our own district will also help them remain enrolled and fully able to access all of the resources we can offer.

B. Describe activities included in your plan for each stage – preparation (P) or implementation (I) – of your innovation. **Yellow card Proof.**

- **Preparation** includes building stakeholder awareness, establishing routines and processes, and coordination of logistics.
- **Implementation** includes planned implementation activities, as well as professional development for the educators participating in the innovation.

Activity	Purpose	Stage (P or I)	Date of Completion	Person Responsible
1. Create an idea for improving mental and physical health of remote students	This will address an ongoing concern relating to the link between the overall wellness of students learning in a remote setting.	P	2/28/2021	Erin Dickson and Miranda Wakefield
2. Survey middle school remote teaching staff, administration and other key adult stakeholders.	This will help determine which components of the program will need more thought and planning and if there is buy in for this idea.	P	3/9/2021	Erin Dickson and Miranda Wakefield
3. Present Be Well Connected information to students and survey them for feedback.	This survey will help to determine which components of the program will need more thought and planning and if there is buy-in for this idea among the audience we will be serving. .	P	3/9/2021	Erin Dickson and Miranda Wakefield
4. Staff hiring of 3 learning coaches for virtual middle school	Staff will be responsible for collaboration and implementation of Be Well Connected.	P	April 2021	Assist. Superintendent
5. Research cost and logistics for learning space.	As this program develops it has become clear that a physical	P	June 2021	Erin Dickson

	space is an important component for building a sense of community and strong connections. The district has very limited space available.			
6. Establish project based learning curriculum.	Be Well Connected may be incorporated into the curriculum. PBL approach will honor the interests of students and provide choices in their learning.	P	August 2021 and ongoing	NVMS Director and MSAD 60 Curriculum Coordinator
7. Determine which text-type communication strategies for staff and students	Building connections will be a critical component of Be Well Connected. Communication strategies that appeal to students will increase the likelihood of success.	P	September 2021	Erin Dickson and Miranda Wakefield
8. Establish Advisory Group structure for the Remote Academy	This will be a structure for building connections, planning activities and lessons. Within this there will be an established easy communication method that includes a texting app to be used with set boundaries for communicating among peers and the learning coaches.	P	September 2021	NVMS Director and Learning Coaches
9. Hire the Wellness Counselor	This person will be a critical part of developing and implementing the program. They will serve as a liaison with the schools, plan health lessons and support students with mental health needs.	P	1 month after receiving funding	MSAD 60 Assistant Superintendent
10. Purchase or renovate space for remote classroom and supplies.	A Yurt classroom or other classroom space in an existing building would provide an affordable solution to providing a consistent	P	Immediately once funding is secured.	NVMS Team

	space for the students in the virtual school to meet in person periodically for team building and collaborate on project based work.			
11. Outline calendar for the year including training, wellness/enrichment opportunities and SEL lessons.	This will include input from learning coaches, the director and students. It will give an outline and plan for the year.	P	Immediately after the Wellness counselor is hired.	Wellness Counselor
12. Training for Learning Coaches and Director	This will be ongoing and will help coaches gain skills in building a community and connections.	I	Monthly starting 1 month after the Wellness counselor is hired.	Wellness Counselor in collaboration with the NVMS director.
13. Deliver SEL and Wellness lessons to students	Students will gain knowledge and skills to help them be healthier and cope with stress, anxiety, conflict, decision making and building strong communication skills.	I	Weekly - 2 months after the Wellness Counselor is hired.	Wellness Counselor
14. Field Trips	Provide an enriching experience that relates to learning for students and provide opportunities to explore possible sparks in students. They will be able to try things and visit places they may not otherwise experience.	I	Minimum once per month 2 months after Wellness Counselor is hired	Wellness Counselor with input from students and the NVMS team.
15. Community Service	Building a strong connection to community and a feeling of belonging. Community service will boost confidence and self esteem. This component could also help students explore careers.	I	Minimum once per month 2 months after Wellness Counselor is hired	NVMS Team
16. Data collection	Acquire data to determine needs and success of the program through surveys, attendance records and	I	Baseline, mid- year and end of the year.	NVMS Director and Wellness Counselor

	passing classes. Use State and district assessments to review student progress.			
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Section 3: Define Innovation Outcomes & Measure to Assess Outcomes

- A. Identify the outcomes (*i.e., student outcomes, changes in instructional practices, changes in student practice*) that you expect to see as a result of your innovation. *350 word count.*
- B. *Consider both short-term and long-term outcomes, at different points in the time (e.g., at 6 months, 12 months, 2 years and 3+ years).*

Five years ago, Noble Middle School was among the first middle schools nationally to implement Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR), “a strengths based educational model that provides schools with a comprehensive approach to meeting the academic, social and emotional needs of all students through the power of data and relationships” (barrcenter.org). The BARR model is used in grades 6-9 in the MSAD 60 district.

Using the BARR model, every week teachers, counselors, and administrators meet to talk about how to support all students. Among the most common concerns are truancy, failing grades, mental health, and difficult situations at home. In addition to classroom interventions, administrators and counselors spend a large portion of their days communicating with families and students about these concerns. They provide home visits, find mentors for students, create incentive or behavior plans, make referrals for counseling, and link families to community resources whenever possible. Some of these students may thrive in the Noble Virtual Middle School.

With the benefit of Be Well Connected, students enrolled in the Noble Virtual Middle School as a pathway to middle school education will have their mental health and wellness needs met there. They will be able to access an education while working on coping strategies to address the things that are making it difficult to come to school. If we can offer a solution and support for students who will be more likely to succeed in the remote learning environment, it will allow guidance staff and administrators to better serve in-person students.

Whatever the reason, a student who decides to apply for the Noble Virtual Middle School will be where they have chosen to be. When students are in the setting that works best for their learning style, they are more likely to be successful. Based on this, the expected success of the Be Well Connected program will result in an improvement in attendance, more students passing their classes, improved state and local test scores and an overall enhanced sense of wellness among students.

Improve Attendance, Grades and State/Local Test scores:

BARR data will provide a baseline for attendance and failing classes. We anticipate problem attendance (5 or more absences) to decrease by 40% and students failing 2 or more classes will decrease by at least one third. The state and local assessment tools will be used to review progress in academics as well.

Improve Mental Health and overall wellbeing for students:

Pre/post survey of students will determine a student’s feelings of belonging, connections with adults, mental health and overall wellness. The survey will be developed using similar data questions used on other health

surveys such as the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey and the mental health check-in survey developed by the Choose To be Healthy Coalition.

Through the work with BARR, the district knows that building intentional and meaningful connections with students improves outcomes for students. Long term, Be Well Connected will prevent high risk behaviors that often occur as a result of poor performance in school.

C. Describe your plan for collecting and reviewing data to assess your innovation outcomes. **Fermi estimating impact game plan.**

Potential data to collect includes qualitative and quantitative data (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, exit tickets, and on-demand assessment(s) that can be considered.

Data Type	Baseline (B)- System map Interim (I) Summative (S)	Frequency of Data Collection	Person(s) Responsible for Collection and Data Quality
1. Attendance -- Unexcused absences and classes missed.	(B) 20-21 school year data for remote/hybrid students (I) Mid-year comparison (S) Spring 2022	2 times per year	Wellness Counselor
2. Passing grades in classes	(B) 20-21 school year data for remote/hybrid students (I) Mid-year comparison (S) Spring 2022	2 times per year	Learning Coaches and Director
3. State and local assessment tools will be used to show student progress.	(B) 20-21 school year data for remote/hybrid students (I) Mid-year comparison (S) Spring 2022	Consistent with school policy and state requirements.	Learning Coaches and Director
3. Student feedback surveys	(S) End of year survey	2 times per year	Wellness Counselor
4. Parent feedback	(I) Parent/Learning Coach mid year check in (s) End of year survey	2 times per year	Wellness Counselor
5. Enrollment Applications As numbers of interested students enroll in the NVMS we will know it is a success.	(B) number of students apply for 21-22 school year. (S) number of students apply for 22-23 school year	1 time per year	NVMS Director

D. Describe how you will **scale and sustain** your innovation, including necessary policy changes, changes in mindsets, capacity-building activities, and **long-term financial sustainability**. 250 word count.

Consider the systems changes that this innovation will require and promote.

MSAD 60 is no stranger to innovative approaches to education. There is a long history of finding unique, personalized, student-centered approaches to learning. This path of continuous improvement and professional growth has been the focus to create conditions within which every child has the necessary opportunities and supports to build durable, meaningful learning. The district has demonstrated repeatedly that it is committed to all students by both supporting those most in need and working to make sure that all students are both challenged and adequately supported.

Some examples include:

- Building Assets Reducing Risks, implemented in grades 6-9, this is “a strengths based educational model that provides schools with a comprehensive approach to meeting the academic, social and emotional needs of all students through the power of data and relationships” (barrcenter.org)
- Multiple Pathways, an alternative education program offered at the high school that is designed to focus on student growth in four domains: personal identity, social interaction, community service and intellectual inquiry.
- Mary Hurd Academy -- An alternative 6-12 grade school providing a focus on positive behavior support, experiential learning and restorative practices.
- School Based Health Center -- Offered health care, dental care and mental health services to students district-wide.
- School Health Coordinator -- The district maintained a part time position for the school health coordinator after the Healthy Maine Partnerships funding ended.
- Full buy in and early mastery of the Standards Based grading model and Standards based diploma beginning in 2016.

Students enrolled in Noble Virtual Middle School will remain part of the MSAD 60 system. If students determine remote learning works best for them, they will seek out remote learning, if not in MSAD 60 then somewhere else. Be Well Connected offers a unique and meaningful aspect of remote learning that students will not find in other remote learning schools. We want to keep these students connected to our district. If they do go elsewhere, we will not only lose valuable members of our student community, they will lose the state subsidy. Offering the remote option locally will make it easier for students to transition back to inperson school if they choose.

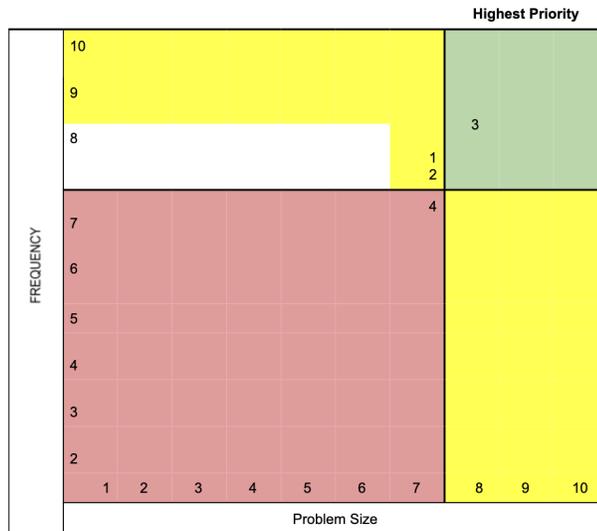
Be Well Connected needs two years of funding in order to provide start-up costs and time to see results. During this time, the Noble Virtual Middle School will grow in student enrollment requiring the need for the full time wellness counselor to continue. Two years will also allow the team to develop relationships with community organization and resources as well as seek grant funding to support enrichment opportunities. After the initial pilot, the data will reveal success and continued need for the program.

The primary ongoing cost to sustain this program will be the continuation of funding for the wellness coordinator position at an estimated \$75k per year. With that role in place and an established program, there will be opportunities to find smaller grants or community sponsors to support enrichment opportunities and ongoing professional development. At the end of two years the clear choice for the MSAD 60 school board will be to include Be Well Connected in the 2023-24 school budget.

- E. Describe the feasibility study you engaged in during the development of your innovative pilot plan, including which aspects of the plan for the pilot were reviewed, which stakeholders were engaged, feedback received and revisions made to the plan as a result of the feedback. *150 word count.*

The idea for Be Well Connected has evolved through many surveys, research and conversations related to the current remote learning environment in comparison to the environment the district hopes to offer future students enrolled in the Noble Virtual Middle School.

This first step in the process was to assess what areas of concern stakeholders see in relation to remote education.



Problem	Size	Frequency
1 - Student work completion is a concern with non-traditional forms of education.	7.5	7.9
2 - Feeling connections with teachers and peers is a concern for students with a non traditional (such as remote learning) education setting.	7.5	7.8
3- A student's social, emotional and overall wellness is a concern in non-traditional education setting.	8	8.3
4 - Families and students who are considering non-traditional education feel overwhelmed with details.	7.3	7.1

Size median - 7.5

Frequency median - 7.85

PDAS -- Uncertainty related to the use of a texting APP

Conversations with school personnel lead to surveying stakeholders to gauge support for including a communication method that is like texting as a way for students, peers and learning coaches to interact. Questions were included in the survey to educators and parents as well as in the prototype survey for students and educators in MSAD 60.

Social Media Post of the Online survey for educators and parents -

We had hoped for 2/3 level positive feedback to carry on with this aspect of the plan. With many numbers much closer to 75% I believe that this shows just how beneficial this aspect of the plan can be and what will help us be meaningfully unique. It may not be for everyone but it looks like it would be well received by most

- 90.7% agreed or strongly agreed that most students are comfortable texting. This feature would not be required but will provide another tool to help reach students and parents in a meaningful way.

- 76.7% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I think students would be more likely to reach out to their teachers in a fully remote situation if they could text them (vs just email or setting up a video meeting though those options would remain)."
- 67.4% - agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I believe that solid boundaries could be maintained to make sure that teachers did not feel that they needed to respond at all hours or that they are "always on call" if a texting like option existed." Of note 11% chose neutral on this one - I wonder if non-teachers were more likely to choose that if they didn't have strong feelings either way.
- 73.2% - agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I would support a texting like communication option between students and teachers in a small fully remote academy."

Prototype Share and Survey

For this research we shared a flyer explaining the program with about forty 9th grade students in health class. We found significant support and interest in the program.

- 74% believe this idea will help students feel more connected to their teachers and community
- 7% ranked the idea as a 6/10 or higher
- with a rank of 6/10 or higher....
- 87% felt the field trips would be beneficial
- 75% felt this would improve attendance
- 70% agreed grades would increase

Student focus group

In a small focus group of high school students they felt that the program really had potential for the students who wanted to remain home "post covid."

- 100% ranked uniqueness of the idea at a 7 or higher.
- 80% said they would contact a teacher more readily via text with an 8 or higher.
- 80% rated advisory groups as an 8/10 or higher in supporting student success and connection.
- 80% felt that the enrichment opportunities would boost student learning and increase engagement and sense of belonging.

Prototype flyer shared with Staff/Admin

Admin agree...the response to the idea is overwhelmingly positive. On 1-10 scale aspects of the plan were rated as the following -

- 100% felt that this would improve connection with a 7 or higher.
- 91% felt this will improve grades with an 7 or higher
- 91% believe it will improve attendance with an 8 or above
- 91% felt the texting feature would benefit students with a 7 or above
- Over 80% rank field trips and enrichment activities as an 8 or higher
- 70% felt the idea was unique
- 100% rated the overall concept at an 8 or higher!

Noble Virtual Middle School Planning Team discussion and input.

Noble Virtual Middle School Planning team includes:

- Assistant Superintendent

- Curriculum coordinator
- Technology director
- Technology integrator and current remote learning coordinator
- Middle School Principal
- Middle School Assistant Principal
- School Health Coordinator

The discussion that occurred during interviews with the candidates for the three learning coach positions gave the team several components to think about. Noble Virtual Middle School is still in development stages but some common themes that came out of the discussions put an emphasis on the importance of having a physical space available for the remote students to use when meeting with their learning coaches and peers. The district does not have a consistent space to dedicate to this academy but instead will allow for learning coaches to schedule the use of space as needed. Based on this discovery, further research needs to be done to determine feasibility of affordable classroom space. A yurt was one idea that surfaced and is something to research further.

Section 4: Identify Key Expenses

- A. Identify the key expenses associated with the preparation, implementation, and ongoing refinement of your pilot. *150 word count.*

Expenses could include staff time, materials, professional development activities, facilities, and other related expenses. This section does not need to include specific costs, but rather list out the different costs that should be considered to implement the innovation.

The budget presented below accounts for a 2 year pilot for the Be Well Connected program which will be implemented in conjunction with the Noble Virtual Middle School.

Item	Description	Cost
Full time wellness counselor	\$75K/year for 2 years. <i>A two year position for an individual who can provide leadership and support for student wellness. Ideally, this person will have a background in counseling and education.</i>	\$150,000
Learning space for remote learners	<i>This space will be incorporated into a building in the district or constructed on district property. This will provide a homebase for the students so that they can periodically have a consistent space to connect and work collaboratively.</i>	\$35,000
Transportation	\$1K per month for 20 months. <i>This will include use of the district vans/buses for a variety of field trips.</i>	\$20,000
Enrichment program funds -	\$1500 per month for 20 months <i>With anticipated monthly field trips for 60 students and 5 staff members this will be the estimation for providing these enrichment opportunities.</i>	\$30,000
Staff Training -	\$2K per each of 5 staff members. <i>Training and speakers for staff and some funds may also be used to provide educational opportunities for parents.</i>	\$10,000
Curriculum resources and supplies	\$500 per teacher/staff each year for 2 years. <i>The wellness coordinator will seek out the best resources for supporting the wellness education of students. In addition the remote academy staff will purchase curriculum materials, technology needs and other supplies they may need for building connections and team building activities.</i>	\$5,000
	TOTAL ESTIMATION:	\$250,000