

# Recommendation Report

## Public & School Partnership

---

### Problem:

There is a disconnect in communication between PSP staff, Vistas, and the school liaisons/coordinators. In multiple instances at multiple schools, Vista Members' time, skills, and commitment have not been respected and put to good use. Some school liaisons do not seem to have a clear understanding of PSP and the programs that the Vista Members are there to carry out. The results of this disconnect have been trouble between PSP/Schools/Vista Members and the abandonment of the projects that PSP had originally partnered with the school to complete.

There are three key organizational dynamics that play a part in this problem: culture, leadership, and structure.

**Structure:** PSP has a complicated organizational structure that involves cooperation between multiple organizations. This has left room for miscommunications between those organizations. In a survey of 16 PSP staff and Vista Members, many survey participants reported that their biggest issue with work is communication. One Vista member described this issue as a, "lack of cohesion between VISTA's...we all support each other but we rarely see each other to collaborate."<sup>1</sup>

**Leadership:** All three organizational dynamics are often closely related, and in the case of PSP, Leadership and Structure are no exception. In the survey, almost half of the Vista Members reported that their biggest workplace issue was communication with their school supervisor. One employee reported, "The only thing that has been frustrating about [the job] has been concerns that I have had with my site and PSP not communicating directly."<sup>2</sup> This demonstrates the confusion caused because Vista Members are required to answer to supervisors from both their school sites and from PSP.

Vista Members have reported that not all of their time is spent on working on their PSP projects. They have become the stand in librarians, office administrators, and more. Vista Members are subjected to this because their various leaders are not always on the same page. The ultimate result of this is the frustration of all involved parties and a lack of productivity towards PSP goals and projects.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Vista Member Interviews." Interview by Amory K. Harris. n.d.: n. pag. Print.

<sup>2</sup> "Vista Member Interviews." Interview by Amory K. Harris. n.d.: n. pag. Print.

**Culture:** From the Vista Member surveys, I have determined that a few key elements of the organizational culture of PSP are a mutual feeling of support from members and other staff and a system that relies on bureaucratic style paperwork and policies. One Vista Member reported that, “There's a lot of negotiation and policy that I don't understand but have to comply with.” While paperwork and policies are unavoidable parts of working for a nonprofit organization, they can be made more manageable with adequate support from peers and supervisors.

---

## Recommendations:

Public & School Partnership has an opportunity to increase its effectiveness and boost employee satisfaction. In order to do this, the problematic elements within the structure and leadership of the organization must be addressed.

Recommendations:
Beginning of the year meetings
Follow up meetings in the middle and at the end of each year.
Required weekly communication between Vista Members and PSP and between Vista Members and school supervisors
Designated PSP representative to aid Vista Members with their school supervisor relationships

Since so many Vista Members reported issues with communication between them, PSP, and their school supervisors, new policies that encourage frequent and effective communication should be implemented. As one Vista Member suggested<sup>3</sup>, a **meeting between school supervisors, PSP staff, and Vista Members at the beginning of each school year** could be helpful. This Vista Member reported that this meeting could help to more effectively communicate the Vista Member requirements from PSP so expectations can be set initially. One chief complaint of the surveyed Vista Members was that their time and skills were not being used effectively by their school supervisors. By setting the requirements and expectations at the beginning, all parties will begin their projects and professional relationships on the same page and will therefor be able to accomplish PSP goals more effectively.

In addition to an expectation-setting meeting at the beginning of the year, **follow up meetings in the middle and at the end of the year** will ensure that the set expectations are being met. These meetings should follow a preset template and should involve Vista Members, school supervisors, and PSP staff. If any of the involved parties are unsatisfied with what has been happening, these meetings will be an appropriate place to voice concerns.

While these meetings will certainly help to set expectations and ensure that they are being met, over half of the Vista Members surveyed reported that their biggest workplace issue was communication. With 3 meetings per year, the tone for communication can be set. However, this

---

<sup>3</sup> "Vista Member Interviews." Interview by Amory K. Harris. n.d.: n. pag. Print.

will not be enough communication to create effective relationships. PSP should encourage or require Vista Members to communicate at least once per week with their school supervisors and PSP staff. In the survey, Vista Members reported that, “faster feedback,” “consistent communication,” “taking the time to update weekly,” and “more face time,” would improve communication between them and their school supervisors.

Another way that PSP can support Vista Members is by designating one PSP representative who can be available to hear the complaints of Vista Members without judgment and provide assistance to them. Since Vista Members effectively feel like they have two bosses from two different organizations, they reported feeling conflicted about who to talk to about their work related issues.<sup>4</sup> This PSP representative can act as a source of authority and a liaison between the Vista Members and School Supervisors when issues arise.

Ultimately, Public & School Partnership has an opportunity to increase the satisfaction of Vista Members and effectiveness of all programs. By improving communication and working to streamline the setbacks caused by a complex and multi-faceted organizational structure, PSP can achieve its objectives and help more schools and children.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Vista Member Interviews." Interview by Amory K. Harris. n.d.: n. pag. Print.