

**FEBRUARY 2005**

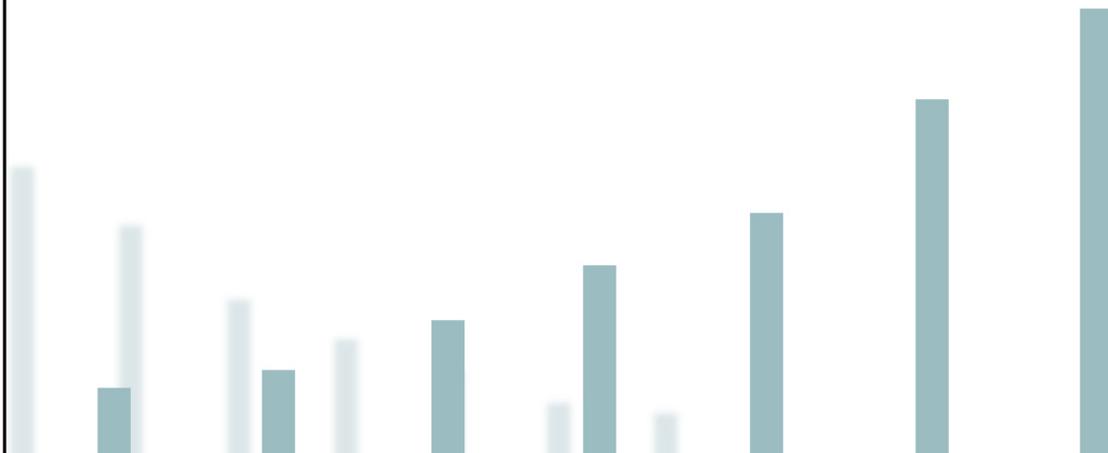
# **MY TURN, Inc.**

## **Preparing for Regional Growth**

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*Earn a reputation for achieving results and, more often than not, your organization will face a flow – perhaps even a flood – of requests to expand. Responding eagerly to as many as possible is a natural reaction, not only because it seems like the right thing to do, but also because saying “no” can be so very hard.*

*But altruism aside, saying “yes” to any and all comers has its problems. It effectively puts others in the driver’s seat when it comes to your strategic direction and priorities. How do you know that the initiatives you’re being asked to take on are the best match for your organization? And what about the opportunities you may be missing simply because no one brought them to your attention?*

*Consider the experience of MY TURN, Inc. Entering 2003, MY TURN was a relatively small youth-serving organization with a solid set of programs and a strong track record of results. It had expanded modestly over its first 20 years, largely by responding to requests from neighboring communities. Its management and board, encouraged by the impact their programs were having, were ready to accelerate growth and expand geographically. But while this growth imperative was clear, the details remained hazy. Under the leadership of Executive Director Barbara Duffy and Board Chair Paul Protentis, MY TURN joined forces with the Bridgespan Group to develop a more purposeful approach to growth.*

## MY TURN, Inc. at a Glance

MY TURN's origins trace back to the childhood of its founder, Paul Protentis. Protentis grew up in Brockton, Massachusetts, an urban community located 20 miles south of Boston. His parents – his mother a Holocaust survivor and his father the son of Greek immigrants – worked tirelessly to ensure he had every opportunity. Their encouragement helped him excel in the Brockton public school system and laid the groundwork for success in college and, later, in his career.

As Protentis moved into the business world, he increasingly realized the value of his upbringing and education. In observing the young people he employed – primarily entry-level, high-school graduates – he was surprised by their lack of basic employability and job-keeping skills. Seeing a chance to give local youth the sort of direction and support he had received, in 1984 Protentis teamed up with Barbara Duffy, an experienced school-to-career administrator, and founded the Brockton-based Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network, Inc. (MY TURN).

With Executive Director Duffy and Board Chair Protentis at the helm, MY TURN grew to be a leading provider of vocational and educational services to youth in southeastern Massachusetts. MY TURN field staff help high-school dropouts and unemployed young adults navigate local resources to advance their education, build career preparation skills, and strengthen their employment prospects.

The results are striking. A 1997 Bridgewater State College study compared the performance of participants in the School-to-Work program to a control group. Seventy-one percent of MY TURN participants retained their first job following graduation for more than six months, compared with 32 percent of the control group. Moreover, 87 percent of the MY TURN participants were employed five years later, versus only 42 percent of the control group.

With results like these, MY TURN began to win formal recognition. It was one of 15 programs nationwide recognized by a PEPNet Award from the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor in 1998; it was cited again in 2002. And in May

2002, the Pew Partnership for Civic Change selected MY TURN as one of 19 “Solutions for America’s Youth.” These awards attracted the attention of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, a foundation committed to helping high-performing nonprofits increase their capacity to serve young people from low-income backgrounds.

By early 2003, MY TURN had grown to be a \$1.3-million organization serving 1,800 youth in a 25-mile radius in southeastern Massachusetts. But with more than 60,000 dropout and unemployed youth in Massachusetts alone, MY TURN’s management team and board were eager to expand the organization’s reach. Faced with more options for growth than MY TURN possibly could take on, they wanted to understand which opportunities to seize and which to let pass by. To clarify and fulfill their growth ambitions, they engaged with the Bridgespan Group on a business-planning project, funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

## Key Questions

Over the course of a five-month engagement, a project team consisting of Executive Director Barbara Duffy, seven members of her management team and board, and five Bridgespan consultants collaborated on MY TURN’s business plan. Among the questions they addressed:

- What critical ingredients of the MY TURN model would have to be replicated to ensure success in new sites?
- Where should MY TURN grow?
- What organizational and governance changes would be necessary to support growth?

## Identifying What's Critical

Over the years, MY TURN's management team and board had developed a gut sense for which young people the organization was best equipped to serve, what impact they could expect MY TURN to have, and what programming was required to create these results, but they had never articulated these elements fully. Their recent commitment to expanding the organization's reach put a premium on being absolutely clear about MY TURN's operating model. If they were to achieve consistency across a growing network, they would need to make their tacit knowledge explicit.

### **CRYSTALLIZING THE MODEL**

The project team started by documenting the fundamentals – the aspects that were part of the very fabric of the organization. For example, MY TURN's leadership knew precisely whom they wanted to serve: youth ages 14 to 21 who faced significant barriers to post-secondary achievement. They knew what success would look like: their clients would earn academic credentials and/or secure stable employment. And they knew what program design element was at the heart of MY TURN's success: having field staff help youth navigate all the resources in the community, rather than providing all the resources they needed within the MY TURN organization itself.

Two other aspects were not yet crystallized, however: the types of communities to serve and the set of services to offer. Solidifying these elements would require the project team to develop a better understanding of the operating and financial performance of existing sites. Specifically, they needed to identify holes to fill in the operating model and to surface strong practices to institute network-wide.

A pattern of somewhat uneven performance across MY TURN sites pointed to the importance of looking closely at community characteristics. For example, analyzing costs for several existing sites revealed that one particularly small site was much more expensive than the others on a per youth basis. This outlier

underscored the value of targeting communities whose size and demographic makeup would provide sufficient economies of scale. In addition, past experience indicated that intra-city transportation (which made it easier for teenagers to get to classes and jobs) was a key ingredient in MY TURN's success. That suggested ruling out small suburban towns with limited infrastructure. At the other end of the spectrum, the team also excluded large cities, because they typically have multiple nonprofits serving at-risk teenagers already. Altogether, the team clarified that MY TURN should serve small, urban communities with high youth unemployment and poverty rates, poor educational outcomes as evidenced by high dropout rates, and core transportation and other systems in place.

Specifying the service offering also required further analysis. As a starting point, the project team assumed that all existing services would remain, given that MY TURN was such a lean organization. Widely considered a low cost provider, MY TURN's full cost per youth served was under \$1,100 – substantially less than the \$7,700 rate of comparable providers in Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup> The team focused instead on determining which services, if any, MY TURN should bolster.

GED preparatory services jumped out as a strong candidate for investment. MY TURN's leadership knew from experience that GED courses, administered by local businesses and schools, were critical to helping their clients advance in education and/or find meaningful employment. Nevertheless, a number of MY TURN candidates for GED preparatory services were not accessing them. MY TURN leadership committed to making this service available to all candidates.

Job-development support was the second major need. Effective job developers were essential to finding MY TURN clients stable employment, especially in a turbulent economy. That said, MY TURN field staff were actually conducting most

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<sup>1</sup> Cost per youth for comparable Rhode Island providers was calculated by dividing the funds allocated to the two Rhode Island Workforce Investment Boards by the number of participants each board reported; the data came from the Rhode Island State Workforce Investment Office and Rhode Island WIB websites.

job-development activities, even though they lacked the expertise and time to do so. Whereas field staff were effective at working one-on-one with clients to understand and address their barriers to post-secondary education and/or employment, job developers needed to have strong sales skills, to be able to identify potential employers, promote MY TURN and its clients, and secure positions. Here, too, MY TURN's leadership decided to enhance its service offering.

## **INCORPORATING SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS**

With a clear imperative to strengthen MY TURN's GED and job-development offerings, the project team turned to figuring out how to do just that. The team first considered contracting with GED and job-development service providers in the communities MY TURN served. After all, MY TURN typically served an integrator, coordinating delivery of services others could provide more efficiently and cost-effectively, such as childcare, transportation, legal assistance, and housing support. A bit of investigative work showed that this approach would not work in many locations.

With GED preparatory services, the management team knew that several communities did not have viable GED service providers, and those that did often were so full that they turned away MY TURN clients. Previously MY TURN clients simply had to do without GED services in these communities. Going forward, the leadership team wanted to fill the void in-house where necessary.

Research into Massachusetts job-development service providers indicated that the market was fragmented and that existing organizations had too few job developers to meet MY TURN's needs. Furthermore, the team could not surface any job-development outfits with either expertise in or a commitment to helping at-risk youth. If MY TURN's leadership was truly committed to providing this support, the organization would have to hire its own job developers and serve the need itself.

Before signing off on these additions, though, the project team assessed the financial implications. MY TURN was committed to being a low-cost operation, and the team wanted to make sure the model would still be financially viable.

Running the numbers sealed the decision – the full cost per student served would rise to \$1,600, still far below alternate providers’ costs.

Exhibit 1 summarizes the operating model that emerged from the planning process. This model became MY TURN’s primary guidepost for operating decisions.

**Exhibit 1: MY TURN’s Operating Model**

**MY TURN’s operating model lays out how its services help participants transition successfully to adulthood**

For this population...	MY TURN uses these strategies and services	...to help participants make a successful transition to adulthood		
		Initial Outcomes	Interim Outcomes	Longer term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people, ages 14-21 in small urban communities that have:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High poverty</li> <li>- High youth unemployment</li> <li>- Poor educational outcomes/high drop out rates</li> <li>- Core systems, such as transportation, in place</li> </ul> </li> <li>• And have a substantial number of young people with barriers to post secondary achievement in education and employment, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not enrolled in an educational program</li> <li>- No high school diploma</li> <li>- No college attendance in family</li> <li>- Limited or no work experience</li> <li>- Limited capacity to access resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A many-pronged approach to working with young people that has at its core sustained, strong relationships with well qualified MY TURN staff who coordinate with community partners</li> <li>• Direct service program components include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing case management during enrollment through direct service and brokered support services</li> <li>- Curriculum delivered through group workshops and/or one-on-one</li> <li>- Work-based learning experiences (i.e., community service learning)</li> <li>- Career and college exploration and planning</li> <li>- Follow up for one year after active participation phase</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Other components:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job development</li> <li>- Employer relations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased education/employment-related knowledge and awareness</li> <li>• Increased education/employment-related skills</li> <li>• Improved self concept including sense of belonging and competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job placement               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any job</li> <li>- Career building job</li> </ul> </li> <li><i>And/or</i></li> <li>• Reengaged in education</li> <li><i>And/or</i></li> <li>• Post secondary education enrollment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six month job retention               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In any initial job</li> <li>- In career building job</li> </ul> </li> <li><i>And/or</i></li> <li>• Acquisition of credential (GED, training certificate etc.)</li> <li><i>And/or</i></li> <li>• Completion of freshman year of college</li> </ul>

With the model clearer, MY TURN senior staff turned to codifying it. Although the organization previously had been able to maintain program consistency by word of mouth, this approach would be unworkable with more geographically dispersed sites. Complicating matters was the fact that the model was by no means static.

The solution was two pronged. First, they would create a bound manual spelling out the essential elements of MY TURN’s service delivery methods. Second, they would continue to refine the model and to evaluate its effectiveness rigorously.

The leadership team committed to investing in a multi-year longitudinal evaluation. In the interim, they would keep tabs on the organization's performance by systematically tracking a discrete set of programmatic, organizational, and outcome metrics.

## Deciding Where to Grow

Armed with sharper clarity about MY TURN's operating model, the project team turned to mapping where the organization would expand.

### FOCUSING REGIONALLY

Over the years MY TURN's leadership had fielded numerous calls from organizations across the country that were eager to learn more about the MY TURN model. While they would have loved to respond to them all, they knew that developing a national presence was a longer-term goal, a 15-year vision. They recognized that to begin to build the credibility a national effort would require, the organization first needed to prove its model would work outside of Massachusetts. This pointed to a phased approach, stepping out gradually across New England before venturing further afield. As Duffy put it, "If we're successful in New Hampshire and/or Rhode Island, people will see us as a regional solution, not just as a Massachusetts organization."

In addition to making strategic sense, growing regionally made sound financial sense. The majority of MY TURN's funding came from site contracts with local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). A WIB contract would fund most of a site's direct operating expenses with Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dollars. WIBs in neighboring states were more likely to be aware of MY TURN's reputation. Moreover, New England sites could be served (at least initially) from MY TURN's headquarters in Brockton; launching elsewhere, in contrast, would require setting up regional offices – a source of complexity and cost.

With this long-term vision in mind, the team set out to develop a detailed regional growth plan for the next three years.

## **PRIORITIZING COMMUNITIES FOR EXPANSION**

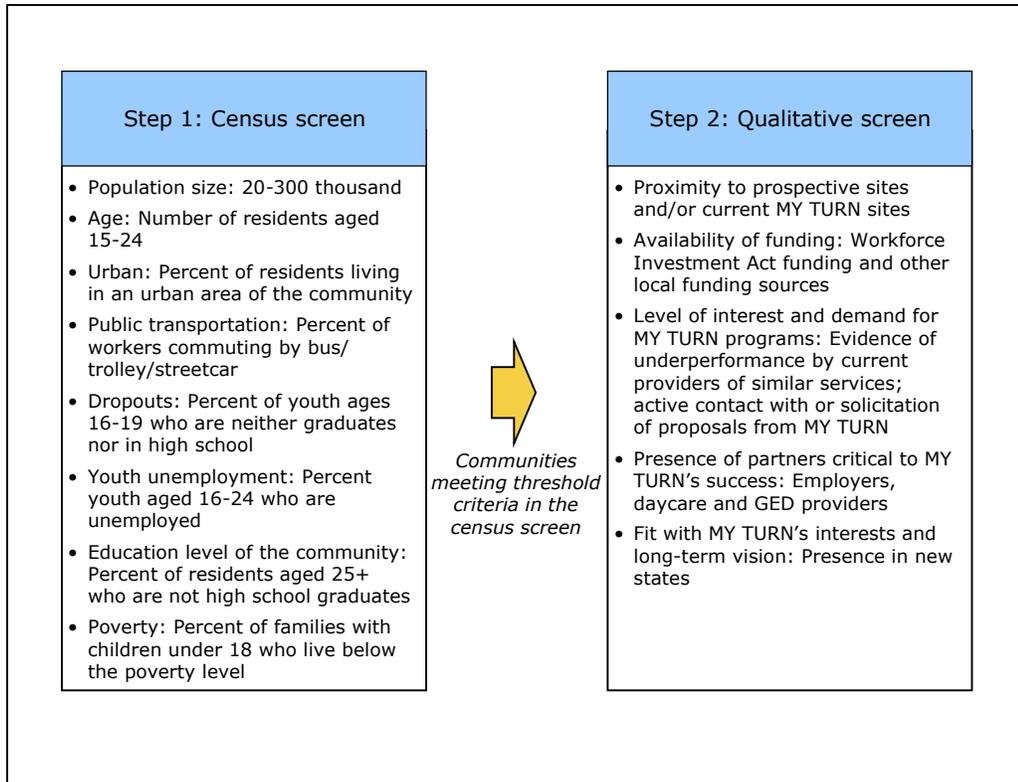
The decision to focus first on Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island narrowed the consideration set, but there were many more choices still to make. Historically MY TURN had grown opportunistically, with its leadership responding to WIB requests for proposals (RFPs). To guide expansion beyond the organization's home turf, they had to know which communities to pursue and which RFPs to decline. In short, they needed a rigorous process for screening potential expansion communities.

The team's prior work clarifying MY TURN's operating model was instrumental here, dictating several of the characteristics to look for in target communities:

- Small, urban communities
- High youth unemployment, school dropout, and poverty rates
- Convenient public transportation
- Proximity to prospective sites and/or existing MY TURN sites
- Availability of funding in the community
- Level of interest and demand for MY TURN programs
- Presence of partners critical to MY TURN's success (e.g., employers, daycare and GED providers)
- Fit with MY TURN's long-term vision of being a national program (e.g., presence in new states)

Demographic and public transportation information was readily available from the U.S. Census. The remaining criteria, however, would require more time-intensive qualitative analysis, including phone calls and interviews with local experts. With 609 communities in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire, screening them all on the full set of criteria wouldn't be feasible. Instead, the team defined a two-step process, first screening all the communities using the quantitative data from the census and then subjecting those that passed (34 communities) to a qualitative assessment. (See Exhibit 2 for an overview of the screening process).

**Exhibit 2: Process and criteria for screening communities**



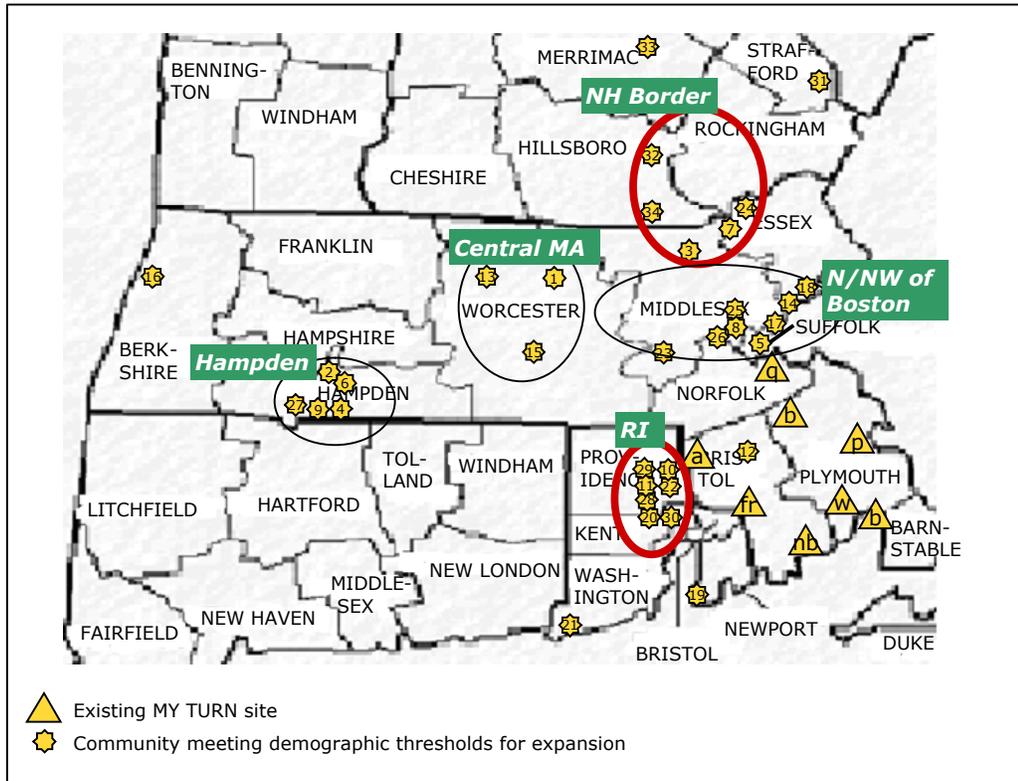
To kick off the qualitative screen, the team assessed the proximity of each of the 34 threshold communities to other prospective communities and to existing sites. The closer sites were to each other, the easier it would be for MY TURN to serve them. When the team plotted the communities on a map, as shown in Exhibit 3, five geographic clusters emerged. The clusters in Rhode Island and along the southern New Hampshire border were particularly attractive, as they would enable MY TURN to build a multi-state presence.

The team also assessed MY TURN's chances of securing ample government funding in the threshold communities. This consideration was critical to a potential site's viability. For MY TURN's programming to be effective, it needed to be integrated into the community. Lining up government support was an essential part of becoming a community insider.

The team found that the formula dictating disbursements to WIBs resulted in more grant dollars being available in the RI and NH-border clusters. These two clusters

each had roughly \$2.3 million to allocate annually, versus \$1.3 million or less each for the other three.

**Exhibit 3: Community clusters**



Gauging how much of this money MY TURN could expect to secure was more difficult. The WIBs base their contract awards on a number of factors, and do not comment on their decision making outside of the formal RFP process. They do report, however, on the performance of current contractors. The team reasoned that WIBs dealing with underperforming contractors would be more receptive to MY TURN's services, and therefore used underperformance as a proxy for possible demand. Again, the RI and NH-border clusters led the pack.

Finally, for the most promising communities, the team gathered data on the availability of necessary community resources and partners. For instance, a career center or other educational or employment facility willing to house the MY TURN programs was essential, and a GED program, which would eliminate MY

TURN's need to bring this service in-house, was a plus. The RI and NH-border clusters both had sufficient resources and partners available, and emerged from the qualitative screen as the top prospects.

The team then formulated strategies for developing communities based on their performance in the screening process:

- **Court actively:** For the 12 communities that comprised the RI and NH-border clusters, MY TURN would do further due diligence and lay the groundwork for expansion, whether or not an RFP was pending.
- **Respond:** For communities in the remaining three clusters, MY TURN would respond to RFPs, but would not initiate contact.
- **Do not respond:** For communities not associated with any cluster, MY TURN would avoid engagement, in order to maintain focus on priority efforts.

While the screening process confirmed some earlier instincts, it also produced a few surprises. The team was surprised, for instance, that the RI and NH-border clusters were more attractive than the area north/northwest of Boston, which lagged in terms of likely funding and apparent need. A welcome confirmation: a community MY TURN targeted shortly before the business-planning project had made the new list of priority communities.

## Supporting Growth

At the same time that the team was deciding where MY TURN should grow, they were also identifying the organizational and governance implications of growth. How should they structure the network? How would the organizational chart have to change to support growth? How would the board have to evolve?

## ESTABLISHING THE NETWORK MODEL

While it was clear that there would be more MY TURN sites, the structure of these sites had yet to be determined. Options included:

- **Branches** that MY TURN would wholly own (MY TURN's current structure);
- **Affiliates** that would use the MY TURN name but operate under their own 501(c)(3)s;
- **Licensees** that would offer the MY TURN program but operate under another organization's 501(c)(3) with a different name.

To identify the most appropriate option for MY TURN, the team consulted with replication experts from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. In wide-ranging discussion, the group debated the tradeoffs.

Both the licensee and affiliate options had appealing aspects. They carried faster growth potential than branches and tended to place a lighter burden on the central office. Digging below these generalities, though, the experts felt that MY TURN wasn't ready for either the licensee or affiliate approach. The organization still could reap benefits from the tight central control of a branch model, given that it continued to hone its operating model. Moreover, the distinguishing characteristic of the model – the close, personal relationship forged between the client and the field staff – was, in the experts' experience, one of the hardest things to teach and thus transfer to affiliates and licensees. Additionally, MY TURN had yet to establish the strong brand necessary to attract parties interested in affiliation or licensing.

The group reached the conclusion that wholly-owned branches remained the best structure for MY TURN for the next five years. By the end of this period, MY TURN will have codified its operating procedures, learned how to run sites remotely from Brockton, and demonstrated multi-state capabilities, potentially making the affiliate or licensee option more viable.

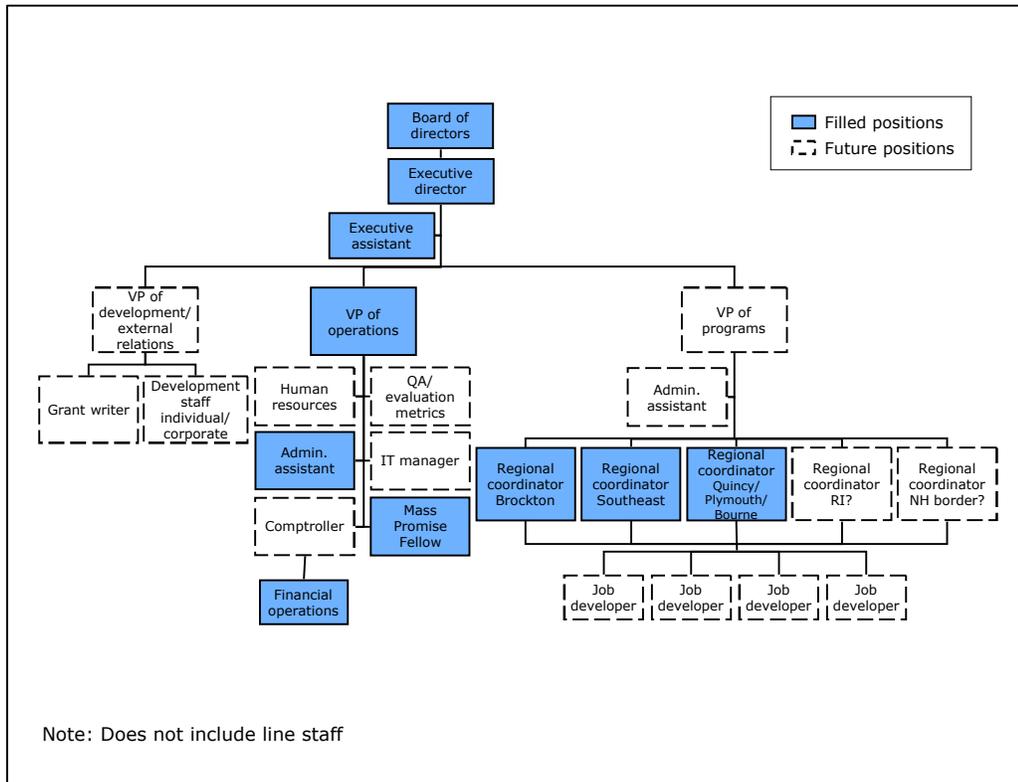
## REWORKING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

At the beginning of the planning process, MY TURN had two separate reporting structures for field staff. Field staff reported to either the in-school or the out-of-school programs director, depending on whether they served youth who were still in school or those who had left school. The basic service model was essentially the same for both, though, and MY TURN clients often moved back and forth between in-school and out-of-school settings. As MY TURN had expanded in recent years, the burden on the two program directors had escalated. It was becoming evident that one person could not be responsible for coaching and quality control at every site, especially if those sites were to be spread across a larger geographic area.

Given these factors, as well as the fact that MY TURN's model depended on a deep understanding of the community and close cooperation with other service providers, MY TURN's leadership decided to adopt a regional structure. In place of the in-school and out-of-school program directors, regional coordinators would oversee each geographic cluster, starting with MY TURN's three existing clusters (Brockton, Southeast Massachusetts, and Quincy/Plymouth/Bourne). The regional coordinators would report to a vice president of programs. (See Exhibit 4 for MY TURN's new organizational chart.)

Filling out this organizational chart would require quite a bit of hiring. In recent years, MY TURN had managed to stretch its organization and people to provide more services on a shrinking budget. The members of its small management team each wore several hats, and field staff caseloads had soared. While viable in the short run, the strain was not conducive to sustaining high-quality service. According to Duffy, "We realized we were stretching our infrastructure to the breaking point."

**Exhibit 4: Organizational chart in FY 2007 (planned)**



Duffy and the board committed to investing more in building management capacity. They would fill out a number of program, development, and operations functions to build an organization capable of supporting growth:

- Programs:** Beyond the vice president of programs and regional coordinators, MY TURN's leadership would hire additional field staff to bring caseloads down to more manageable levels. And to fulfill the team's plan to offer GED and job-development services at all sites, they would hire GED staff and job developers.
- Development:** MY TURN's ambitious growth vision meant that the days of sharing grant-writing responsibilities across the management team had to be numbered. Analysis of multiple government programs and private foundations indicated potential to broaden MY TURN's funding base. The plan called for government to remain MY TURN's largest source of funding and for private sources to play an expanded role. To reach these sources,

they would hire a vice president of development and external relations, with a dedicated grant writer for government and foundation fund development activities and a development staff member focused on individual and corporate donations. They'd bring in a development consultant to help while they arranged for the full-time hires.

- **Operations:** The headquarters staff would also expand, professionalizing functions formerly provided by generalists. They would hire an IT manager and a director of quality assurance, evaluation, and metrics, in part to help the organization step up its metrics-tracking efforts. A human resources director and a controller were other additions. These hires would be critical to allowing Duffy and her other senior managers to focus on the activities in need of their attention.

## **FORTIFYING THE BOARD'S ROLE**

MY TURN's board had served as an invaluable resource throughout the project, helping the management team clarify the operating model, serving as a sounding board for key strategic decisions, and providing guidance on the new organizational design. With so much organizational change underway, the board realized that they, too, would have to change. In Protentis's words, "the board has to move and grow as MY TURN moves and grows."

MY TURN's board members used a board self-assessment tool to identify its most pressing needs and any missing capacities. Not surprisingly, the board that was appropriate for a \$1.5 million local MY TURN organization was not ideally suited to a larger, regional organization with even bigger ambitions. Specifically, the board members agreed that they needed to increase diversity within the board, add more members, enhance the board's fundraising capacity, and take a more strategic focus.

The assessment was just the beginning. To help the board navigate these changes, they committed to hiring a board consultant. This consultant would help define board members' roles and responsibilities, form committee structures, and create specific fundraising goals.

By the end of the five-month project, the team had developed a business plan for rapid but controlled expansion. Duffy explained, “We had to decide not to do it overnight, to develop a plan that wouldn’t make us go insane.” With site additions, new hires, infrastructure investments, and the development of financial reserves, MY TURN’s budget would more than double by the 2007 fiscal year, from \$1.3 million to \$2.8 million, funded largely by new WIB contracts and private money that the new development staff would raise. Programmatic growth would be relatively modest in the 2005 fiscal year, allowing the organization adjust to its new organizational and governance structures. The plan called for opening three sites in the 2005 fiscal year, followed by six and five in the 2006 and 2007 fiscal years, respectively.

## **Making Change and Moving Forward**

As of January 2005, MY TURN was already making strong progress against the plan. Manchester and Nashua, two communities in the NH-border cluster, had selected MY TURN as their school-to-career service provider. The organization had added GED and job developers to most sites, and put in place data collection tools to gauge the efficacy of these program enhancements. The longitudinal evaluation was underway, with the Heller School at Brandeis University leading its design and implementation.

MY TURN’s leadership had filled several of the new management positions, including the vice president of programs, the vice president of operations, the vice president of development, and the regional coordinator for New Hampshire. They had engaged a board consultant, who had begun mapping out new board roles, job descriptions, and recruitment plans.

MY TURN’s efforts to increase its funding from private sources also were bearing fruit. The organization has secured a three-year, \$1.8-million grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to support MY TURN’s implementation of the business plan, along with sizable grants from the Stoneman Family Foundation and Lumina Foundation.

As a result of the business planning process, the organization has a clearer sense of how to marry strategy and opportunity – a logic for pursuing opportunities and for saying “yes” or “no” as opportunities present themselves. In Barbara Duffy’s words, “Because of this strategic clarity, we can say ‘no’ to things that don’t make sense for us, so we’re not getting caught chasing money.”

Duffy sees the dedicated time her management team and board invested in the project as critical to its success. “Before we always created the strategic plan at a board meeting or a board/management team retreat, and it was never enough time. Or we’d be in the office and there would be all these distractions ... What resulted were a list of goals, objectives and timelines – the plan, but not the strategy. This time we have strategic clarity ... Taking the time to step away and think about it was key.”