Program Evaluation Plan for:

Nevada Child Seekers

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¹(Note: Much of the information in this program evaluation proposal was originally prepared by Vic Shultze as part of an earlier proposal)
Stage 1: Focusing and evaluation

a. Program definition

The program to be evaluated is Nevada Child Seekers (NCS), a nonprofit organization that works to reunify families after a child has become missing or abducted, and is involved with community education and outreach efforts concerning missing children.

Nevada Child Seekers operates out of Las Vegas, although ostensibly it has a state-wide mission, and is funded by private and public grants. The organization is small, having five staff members, a part-time intern, and governing board of directors consisting of 12 members. NCS has operated for approximately 20 years, and was formed in response to the perceived social problem not adequately addressed in Nevada of missing and abducted children.

b. Stakeholders

Primary stakeholders include Nevada Child Seekers staff, its board of directors, a clientele of custodial parents, over 100 citizen volunteers, and missing children. Secondary stakeholders include partner agencies with which Nevada Child Seekers coordinates activities of recovery and education. These agencies include the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, North Las Vegas Police, Henderson Police, the Clark County District Attorney’s Office, the Nevada Attorney General, and the Clark County Family Court System. Tertiary stakeholders include various agencies and interest groups in Clark County which have an interest in child welfare and, to a less localized degree, national organizations in the field such as the well known National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The agency’s governing board of directors has 12 members. The agency intentionally seeks a strategically targeted population from which to choose board members to foster the
program’s goals, so that, currently, one member is a law enforcement officer at L.V.M.P.D. involved in missing persons at the level of sergeant, one is a Sheriff of a rural county, four are Vice Presidents of local companies in the community, two work for other non-profit agencies concerned with different children’s issues, one is an administrator of a media outlet, one is a district court judge, one is an elected official, and one works for the City Council.

c. Program goals and objectives

NCS’s ultimate goal is reflected in a statement in the program’s public service brochure, “Protecting children is what we do. Providing help, hope, and support is why we’re here.” The ultimate goal of protecting children is reflected in a three-fold mission of NCS. The first is to assist in the process of locating missing, abducted, and runaway children. The second is to act as an advocate of those same children. The third is to act as a preventative influence against the conditions in the community which create the need for the first two mission elements.

d. Program elements

NCS performs two basic functions in an effort to meet these goals. The first is to assist in the child recovery process. The second is to train teachers, children, and other members of the community, about missing and abducted children issues.

To meet the first function, NCS has a full-time case worker who works directly with families and legal guardians of missing children. This case worker works with police detectives who generally initiate the process by contacting the case worker directly or by referring the family of the missing child to NCS. The case worker also works with other entities such as national organizations and out-of-state law enforcement agencies.

Another program component for implementing the child recovery function is the NCS network of citizen volunteers. NCS’s Volunteer Search Force “stands ready to assist local law
enforcement agencies in their efforts to search for and locate missing children.” This group of citizens are trained by “local law enforcement and Nevada Child Seekers staff in basic search functions and procedures, utilization of volunteers during a search, contacting people during a search, and evidence recognition and preservation” (NCS, 2006).

To meet the second function, NCS has an active partnership with the Clark County School District wherein they train individuals to train both students and other volunteer trainers. NCS also provides materials for conducting training classes. This *Train the Trainer* program is necessary because, with a full-time staff of only five people, the number of children NCS can educate directly is extremely limited.

e. **Benefits and limitations of evaluation**

Although the full-time staff of NCS is small, it has numerous partnering organizations. Because the resources of the evaluation team are limited, it will not be possible to evaluate all of NCS’s interactions with outside organizations, even if the team limits its investigation to volunteer partners. To do so may overly complicate the evaluation without providing *value added*.

Also, although NCS has one basic goal, its two principal program elements tend to operate separate and distinct from one another. Because of their autonomy, it will not be necessary to evaluate the entire program. In fact, doing so may unduly complicate the evaluation and have an overall detrimental effect. Therefore, to ensure a successful evaluation, the team will focus on only one of NCS’s principal elements.

f. **Program component to be evaluated**

The evaluation team met with the NCS Director, Stephanie Parker, on 13 October 2006. The desire of the Director was that the evaluation be focused on the NCS’s volunteer workforce.
Specifically, she desired that the evaluation focus on the process of recruiting new volunteers and keeping existing volunteers engaged.

Citizen volunteers make up over 95% of the NCS’s available workforce. This is a sizeable percentage; however with the population of Nevada growing rapidly, the per capita number of volunteers is shrinking. The Program Director is therefore anxious to identify improved means for enlisting volunteers, improving their organizational value, and enhancing their community service.

g. Factors ensuring successful evaluation

In order to ensure a successful evaluation, the Program Director has committed to allowing the evaluation team unfettered access to her direct staff. She has also expressed a willingness to facilitate and coordinate access to agency partners and volunteers. Access to these key stakeholders will be necessary to ensure the success of the evaluation.

h. Evaluation customers

The primary customer for the evaluation is the Program Director and her staff. As the chief administrator of NCS, the Director has been charged with executing the program and achieving the desired end results. They are the individuals that are most desirous that the administrative functions of the organization be optimized for achieving program goals.

The Board of Directors for NCS will also be a key audience for the evaluation. Although the Director and her staff would likely be impacted the most by the evaluation report, in that they would be responsible for implementing it, they are not at liberty to implement programs or make drastic changes (if warranted) without the consent of the Board.

Since the focus of the evaluation, as currently envisioned, is to be the recruitment and retention, and engaging of volunteer, it is anticipated that the current volunteer workforce will be
another key audience of the evaluation. Existing volunteers will want to know how potential program changes could impact their current standing, duties, and responsibilities.

i. **Use of evaluation results**

A final report will be presented to the Board of directors of Nevada Child Seekers in a presentation by the evaluation team. It is hoped that partnering agencies and other stakeholders will be invited to attend the presentation. The report will summarize the material findings of the assessment. It is also anticipated that the report will make specific recommendation regarding agency actions, processes, and partnerships.