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## The Sylvan Beach Foundation

The Sylvan Beach Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in Baltimore, Maryland that operates from a unique perspective: it continuously seeks entrepreneurial activities to pursue a double bottom line - achieving both a social and financial return on investment. Sylvan Beach was founded in 1994 by Sean Smeeton, a former accountant who left his job after being inspired by an article on the Delancey Street organization in San Francisco. Building on the Delancey Street model, Sylvan Beach was developed to start for-profit businesses that would sustain its operations and provide life skills and employment training for at-risk men. These men live at Sylvan Beach, a resident facility, from which many of its businesses are run.

Unique to Sylvan Beach is their approach - they believe they must constantly evolve in order to improve. They continuously experiment with different business models, finding the right balance between achieving their programmatic and financial



goals. Sylvan Beach does not view itself as a charity, primarily because their residents will work in real businesses after graduating from the program.

Sylvan Beach has operated a successful lawn-care business, wholesale ice cream business, coffee shop, catering business and full-service café. Concurrent to running these businesses, there is a full-schedule of GED, life skills building, character building and social skills classes that residents are required to attend. Through pursuing both a social and financial return, Sylvan Beach believes that they have been able to enrich the lives of their residents through providing a real-world experience and devel-

oping the soft skills necessary to proactively move forward with their lives.

Sylvan Beach inherently thinks of itself as a business - a social purpose business - and its goal is to be fully self-sufficient. For their programmatic activities to expand, they believe that their businesses must expand also. Currently, they are approximately 65% self-sufficient and well on the way to achieving a high-impact double bottom line.



## Lesson from PTBA: Strategic Planning

Our publication, "Social Entrepreneurship—A Reference Guide" offers the following advice about strategic planning. When getting ready to implement earned income ventures, it is crucial to prepare your organization ahead of time. The following tips may be helpful in planning ahead when thinking about earned income ventures:

### Preparing Your Organization:

Being successful at generating earned income for your organization requires a deliberate effort from the board, executives and staff. In order to balance both social mission and financial goals, organizations should plan how to deal with potential issues prior to launching a business. For example, in many organizations, acting in a business-like fashion can threaten established organizational culture and values.

Establish why the organization is pursuing the venture - the need and purpose:

Determine up front whether the primary purpose of the



venture is to generate a profit, or whether profit is merely a by-product of a sustainable social program. Inevitably you will need to make trade-offs.

Evaluate organizational readiness:

Evaluate the cultural and organizational barriers to your success in business. Some barriers you can and should address (such as incentives). Others should form the boundaries of what activities you will pursue. However, don't wait until you are organizationally ready before you start developing the business - the two processes may run in parallel.

Reevaluate your strategic plan:

If you haven't recently updated your strategic plan, do so before you start developing commercial ventures. Establish how social entrepreneurship fits into your organization's strategic and business priorities and context before making major changes.

Form a team to champion the process:

Developing social entrepreneurship is not the role of a single person. There needs to be commitment throughout the organization and from the board. A planning team helps build support and ease implementation. Err on the side of inclusion.

Establish a process and policies:

Agree to a planning process at the very beginning. Be systematic and reduce risk. Be sure to include a way to evaluate and prioritize ideas and criteria for launch, in addition to a marketing and financial assessment.

To learn more about how your organization can create an entrepreneurial strategic plan or run a successful social enterprise please contact  
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