

Section 2: Impact Overview

Through this case study, we will be observing MEET through the scope of three different criticisms. First we will look at it's success strictly as a non-governmental organization (NGO) by looking at four traits: it's ability to partner with existing organizations, how well it reaches its target group, the program's ability to grow and sustain itself and a financial overview. Then, the impact of MEET will be held against another conflict resolution model, Seeds of Peace. Although documentation of this program's success is difficult to find, it is important to recognize other efforts being made on this front. Finally, a large component of MEET is run through an MIT student group. Because MEET includes several external positions, its efforts are completely different from similar student groups such as Africa Internet Technology Initiative (AITI).

Section 2.1 Limitations to Research

Most of the documentation comes from internal MEET reports and statistical information that MEET administrators had acquired through both interviews and surveys. The short time period of this assignment and the confidentiality of certain data made information very difficult to access. Specific measurement issues will be addressed as they appear in the following section. Although we conducted personal interviews of MEET founder Yaron Binar and instructors, there are still some gaps in our research, but overall our results are fairly conclusive.

Another important issue that affects our analysis is the short lifespan of MEET. Because this is the third year of the program, long term trends and lasting impact are impossible to measure. Although in the future this analysis will be necessary to measure

the actual impact of the program, the short term data offered here show a promising program that has the potential for long-term sustainability and success.

Section 3 Three Different Analysis Schemas for MEET

Because MEET is a relatively new program, and data is relatively scarce, no single method of analysis was sufficient to adequately discuss its successes as a program. Through its role as an NGO, a conflict-resolution model and a student organization at MIT, a more thorough discussion of its impact can be conducted.

Section 3.1: MEET as an NGO

MEET is primarily a non-profit organization with an infrastructure centered outside of MIT. As such, it has unique capabilities that many programs founded within the institute lack. In addition, because the Middle East conflict receives a large amount of attention, many people are very interested in supporting a working form of conflict resolution.

Section 3.1.1 Partnership and Financial Information

MEET's ability to interact with their community stems mostly through its ability share resources with existing institutions, organizations and corporations. In its first two years, the MIT Corporation funded approximately half of the program. Since the change in presidents, and also to increase sustainability efforts, MEET is looking to increase its outside funding sources. Currently MEET is seek \$2.5 million to fulfill its funding needs in establishing long-term ventures. An increasing number of private and public investors

are offering donations to the program. One significant donor was the Japanese government, who recognizes the potential this program has to impact change within the Middle East.

Another large source of funding and support comes from in-kind donations both from MIT and other sources. Several MIT professors have been instrumental in developing the program curriculum as well as measurement schemes. Hebrew University in Jerusalem has donated classroom space and computer labs. In total, this is a donation worth \$25,000 to \$30,000.

Section 3.1.2 Ability to Target Groups

The focus of MEET is to ultimately reduce tensions in the Middle East by informally educating the next generation of Israeli and Palestinian leaders directly. Their target group is ultimately all Israeli and Palestinian students. However, because of financial constraints it is very difficult for the program to accept students from cities outside of Jerusalem. In its second year, five students were accepted from Bethlehem, but they had to stay in the campus dorms throughout the week, only to return home on the weekends. The initial goal was to diversify the origins of the students, but because this relies so much on funding, this goal will take longer to fulfill.

Another possible aspect that affects the ability of the program to level the playing field is its location. Currently, Israeli students are not allowed to pass over the Palestinian border so the program must be on Israeli ground. As a result, the Palestinian students must pass through check points daily. The program also takes place at Hebrew University, a potentially biased institution. However, because Hebrew University donates

their space, a \$25,000-\$30,000 in-kind funding source, MEET cannot yet afford an alternative location.

Section 3.1.3 Capacity building

Student retention is another important aspect of the program. Over the summer, almost all of the students complete the class. About 60 percent of the students return from one year to the next. Projections estimate that another 70 percent of this class will return to complete their final year, while 85 percent of the second class will return.

The other group MEET must continually attract are the course instructors. In 2005, 60 MIT students applied, while only 5 were accepted. Although MEET hopes to increase the instructors to 8, there should still be an adequate number of quality applicants.

Section 3.2: MEET as a Mediation Model

The main focus of MEET is as a conflict resolution model between Israeli and Palestinian students. The program indirectly addresses diversity issues, an innovative method that is the first to be applied to the Middle Eastern conflict. Other methods directly address the issues by having the students play leadership games and discuss their feelings about the matter. In MEET, the focus is purely on technical education, but uses the technical component as a method to bring the opposing groups together and remove prejudices through practice.

Section 3.2.1: Seeds of Peace

Starting in 1993, Seeds of Peace brings about 450 students from the Middle East to a neutral and secluded environment in Maine.¹ The students are brought together in small groups to discuss their perceptions of each other and of the conflict at home. With a daily schedule that maximizes interactions between Israelis and Arabs², the students play challenging games that focus on self-discovery, confidence, teamwork, communication and group skills. The students are selected by their individual governments.

Although the direct impact of the program is difficult to assess,³ media coverage and student reactions appear to have a positive affect. This summer, 600 student alumni gathered back at the camp to celebrate their time there.⁴ An Israeli student said of the program, “I got to know not just Palestinians but Arabs from around the world. It's really true we all like the same things and we all want one thing: a peaceful environment for us and for generations to come.”

Section 3.2.2: MEET

A typical way to promote diversity within the United States, this type of program has been tried successful to increase the placement of U.S. racial minorities in top tier universities. Studies performed by the University of Chicago, MIT and University of California-Berkeley showed that the students began to trust each other more as they continued the program. By playing several trust games, analysts decided that the students

¹ “Seeds of Peace” Website. 11 December 2005. < <http://www.seedsofpeace.org/site/PageServer>>

² Students come from Jordan, Morrocco, Palestine, Oatari, Yemeni and Tunisia as well as Israel.

³ We are assuming that the same internal documentation of impact exists as for MEET, but are kept private.

⁴ “Seeds of Peace Fall 2005 Bulletin.” 11 December 2005.

<<http://www.seedsofpeace.org/site/DocServer/BulletinFall05pageone.pdf?docID=2101>>

in the second year of the program were trusted each other more than students in the first year. Through out the summer, their trust factors increased.⁵

Section 3.2.3: Comparison of the Two Models

Despite the appearance of initial success of Seeds of Peace, Binur questions its ability to impact long-term change. The first problem is that Seeds of Peace removes the students from the source of conflict and shelters them.⁶ It is much easier to reconcile differences, he says, when the source of conflict is far away. Once students return to their homes, it is much easier to return to earlier view points. One advantage about MEET is that because its students are still in the region of conflict, they are forced to reconcile diversity issues directly in the face of conflict. Although a more difficult task, it has the potential for more substantial long-term affects.

Although this doctrine was enforced in part because of a lack of funding, Binur is happy with the choice. “We could have had the program somewhere more neutral, like Turkey,” he said, “but we could not afford it. Also, then the students would have had to come home and returned to their same opinions. This way, we deal with it as it happens.”

Section 3.3: As a student group

MEET began as a student group through MIT. As such it has certain advantages that other NGOs lack. For instance, because of the close association to such a high caliber university, international students are attracted to the MIT name brand. Also, MEET has ready access to student applicants because of MIT’s large student population. However,

⁵ This actual study has not yet been released and there is no current working paper version. This information was gleaned from interviewing Yaron Binur.

⁶ “Seeds of Peace” Website. 11 December 2005. < <http://www.seedsofpeace.org/site/PageServer>>

because MEET out sources much of its program operations to external officers, it has some advantages over other student-run organizations at MIT.

The MIT-AITI program is similar in content, yet has a strikingly different internal structure than MEET. MEET founder Yaron Binur, also heavily involved in AITI, modeled MEET after AITI. Therefore, a comparison of AITI with MEET is necessary to adequately assess MEET.

Section 3.3.1: MIT-Africa Internet and Technology Innovation (AITI)⁷

In 1999, three MIT students found a need to address the digital divide in Africa. The long-term goal was that by teaching African students how to use technology, ultimately AITI would help address social disparities. The program included a four-week Java program and a week introduction to UNIX in a Kenyan University. In addition, the MIT students also installing routers and switches to better connect the university's existing network. Since the program has grown to a six-week class that features an entrepreneurship component as well as an emphasis on independent learning based on open courseware ideology.⁸

MIT-AITI functions solely as an ASA-recognized group on campus.⁹ This association allows for access to a large amount of resources through traditional student group funding. However, because of the breadth of the program, the financial costs

⁷ Binur, Yaron, and Manish Gaudi. "A Student-Teaching-Student Model in Kenya: A Case Study Following the Progress of the MIT-Africa Internet Technology Initiative." Working paper.

⁸ The open course-ware ideology invokes a burden on developed countries to supply open access to resources for the rest of the world. By allowing the disadvantaged to freely gain information, the ultimate goal is to decrease information gaps, thus decreasing social stratification. This is more thoroughly explained through the AITI case study. (See previous footnote for reference.)

⁹ Association of Student Activities is the organization that directs student groups on campus. In order to function as a member, student groups must adhere to a list of fairly restrictive guidelines that attempt to guard against internal corruption, but often restrict the capacity of student groups.

require much more funding. As such, full-time MIT students are required to find financial support as well as solicit other students' interests to sustain the program. Although currently the program appears to function well, large demands are made of student participants and it can be difficult for them to focus both on AITI and their academic course-load.

Section 3.3.2 MEET

Although started by MIT students, the ASA-recognized group was not formed until the fall of 2005. Because of institute restrictions, it is difficult for the group to rely solely on this organization, but MEET does obtain some benefits from it. Most importantly, it contributes to the sustainability of the program, by creating a cyclic structure within MIT, the program's home base. In addition, the student group serves as a better recruiting agent because it has greater recognition among the MIT community.

MEET does not rely solely on the infrastructure of the student organization however. Because of constraints placed on student groups by the institute, it is very difficult to pay outside workers. For MEET, a full-time employee in Israel helps to run on-site, administrative tasks. Crucial to time sensitive and efficient operations, the position would disappear entirely if MEET were run entirely underneath the blanket of a student organization.



Figure 1

Section 3.3.3: Comparison of MEET and AITI

The main difference between the programs is the distribution of tasks within and outside of MIT. Both programs rely heavily on external contacts to connect them to the project sites overseas. However, MEET pays their overseas staff while AITI uses contacts with existing educational infrastructures to establish a connection. Because MEET allocates a full-time position to establishing connections and running the project in Israel, the student organizers have to spend less time worrying about logistics overseas. AITI on the other hand must focus a significant amount of time to setting up their program in Africa. Because there is no paid position that focuses on these logistics, it contributes to a high rate of student burnout. Also the dependence on a disconnected and unpaid source in Africa to help set up the program makes certain aspects of the program difficult to access. Because MEET has a spokesperson directly located in Israel, it is much easier for them to make progress with local contacts because they are right there.

Student groups also play a large part in the organization's fund-raising. Currently both AITI and MEET rely heavily on student funding initiatives. Both groups experience

the same types of burnout and time and location constraints that AITI experiences in settling the logistics of their program. Long-term, MEET projects that it will have a secondary fund-raising position that parallels the year long project manager's position. This is important because it refocuses student emphasis directly on the educational aspects of the program which contributes directly to the educational quality of the classes as well as encourages more MIT student participation. The end result of this movement is an increase of the overall program sustainability.

Section 3. 4 Overall Successes

Overall, MEET appears to be quite successful. Not only does it accomplish its obvious objectives of running a successful computer information program, but also it appears to succeed in helping to remove barriers between Israeli and Palestinian students. More observation and data analysis is necessary before empirically determining the impact of the program. However, the initial program results appear fairly positive and the overall projections for the program's future seem to expand MEET's ability to achieve its goals.