

# NATIONAL **Youth** DEVELOPMENT Learning Network

## Professional Development Series E-Newsletter

December 2003

The National Youth Development Learning Network (NYDLN) is a project of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) that collectively serves more than 40 million youth, employs over 100,000 paid staff and utilizes more than six million volunteers. NYDLN is designed to further attract, develop and retain high-quality youth development workers by leveraging existing information, resources and training to more youth workers in more communities.

## Competencies for Youth Development Workers

### What are Core Competencies?

Core competencies are based on the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes of youth development workers. They are the “demonstrated capacities” that allow a youth development worker to be a resource to youth, organizations, and communities.<sup>1</sup>

### Why Core Competencies?

Core competencies in youth development organizations should be used to determine recruitment, selection, and development strategies. Just as the development of program or training curriculum does not infuse change into an organization, the development of competencies is not sufficient in and of itself to change the way a youth development staff worker performs. Core competencies are most successful to the extent to which they are viewed as one piece of a larger professional development plan and fully integrated into the entire organization.

### Benefits

Organizations that have developed and used youth development worker core competencies describe several advantages:

*Personnel issues can be guided by competency expectations and can ensure greater objectivity. The competencies are used for:*

#### Position Announcements

- Job descriptions
- Evaluations
- Hiring
- Rewarding
- Terminating

<sup>1</sup> As defined by a working group of the National Collaboration for Youth in a project administered by the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Educational Development

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*The consistent use of core competencies throughout the agency can lead to the creation of a team committed to the goals of the organization, youth development, participation, and:*

- Better qualified staff
- Personal job satisfaction
- Greater understanding between administrative and frontline staff
- Lower staff turnover
- Choosing youth development as a career

*In addition, core competencies can provide the framework for:*

- Ongoing training development
- Degree programs
- Certification
- Youth Development research agenda

## Lessons Learned

*Creating an entire competency based system does not happen overnight. Organizations that have been doing this work over the last decade offer some useful tips and cautions.*

- Work from what exists and add what supports the organizational mission.
- Decide early the outcomes the competencies are expected to meet.
- Remember it is easier to establish competencies than to train and supervise staff to fulfill them.
- Consider getting external help in developing the system.
- Implement the competency based system gradually.
- Provide a checklist to organizations to determine readiness for competency based systems.
- Be sure to include competencies in promoting youth voice, working in youth/adult partnerships and understanding the tenets of positive youth development.

## WHAT IS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES?

*“Through its extensive experience in the field, the Casey Foundation has found that a stable, prepared, and motivated human services workforce yields real reform and better results for children and families.”*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Human Services Workforce Initiative

Any organization’s ability to make a difference in a young person’s life is dependent upon the people in that organization. Success requires dedicated, skilled and creative people able to lead organizations, manage and implement high-quality programs. The Professional Development Series will survey youth development professionals and promote their promising strategies for investing in this work force.

The National Youth Development Learning Network project will publish (online) a Professional Development Series that explores promising strategies in youth development designed to further attract, develop and retain youth development workers. The publications will be short, 3-5 page snapshots of work being done in the following areas:

- Competencies
- Training and Training Approval Systems (Pre-Service, In Service)
- Blended Learning (E-Learning and Classroom Learning)
- Coaching, Mentoring, Study Groups
- Recruitment and Selection
- Professional Associations
- Program Standards
- Career Development (Registry, Portfolio, Career Opportunities)
- Career Lattice (Certificates, Credentials, Degrees)
- Recognition
- Compensation and Benefits
- Retention
- Resources for Professional Development

This Professional Development Series is done in such a way that if you copy and keep together you will have a glance at some of the key issues and promising practices in attracting, developing and retaining high-quality youth development workers.

# Promising Practices

A working group made up of key representatives from the *National Collaboration for Youth* organizations met for over a year to conduct definitional work needed to develop strategies to address professional development issues. The working group was part of a larger project administered by the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Educational Development (AED), which identified 10 core competencies that are categorized into four areas. These competencies are being used in a number of different ways by a number of different organizations, including:

Members of the National Collaboration for Youth such as Girls Incorporated.

In the development of *Advancing Youth Development: A Curriculum for Training Youth Workers* (AYD), a product that was supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Prevention specifically geared toward direct line youth workers at the community level. This publication was part of a collaborative effort with the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Educational Development and the National Network for Youth (August 1996).

As part of the National Training Institute for Community Youth Work and their efforts with local intermediaries through the BEST (Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers) Initiative, the AYD Curriculum has served as the foundation of local training and education programs for thousands of youth workers across the United States.

For more information on the development and use of these core competencies, contact Elaine Johnson, director of the National Training Institute for Community Youth Work at the AED (202) 884-8334, or visit the Web site at [www.nti.aed.org](http://www.nti.aed.org).

Since 1997, *Girl Scouts of the USA* has made significant progress in developing competency models to support the ongoing professional development of Girl Scout Council CEOs and exempt staff members. The models supplement and enhance the goal based performance management systems and tools that have been successfully used for many years. The goal based models and systems focus on *what* a staff member has accomplished and are used for determining merit ratings and compensation. However, the competency based models and tools focus on *how* the staff member accomplished her or his goals. Supervisors and staff members use the models to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement and as a basis for developmental planning. This model will be incorporated in a multi-rater performance appraisal and development tool, which allows for input and feedback on competencies from multiple sources. The competency models will also be used to develop behavior based interviewing tools for employee selection and guides for employee development. For more information contact Sharon Czebotar at [Sczebotar@girlscouts.org](mailto:Sczebotar@girlscouts.org).

Representatives of the *National Collaboration for Youth* have pulled together the work done by many organizations around competencies to create a core list that can be used across the National Collaboration for Youth member organizations. The competencies are for entry-level youth development workers such as the front line volunteers or two-hour a week employees. The goal is to keep it extremely simple, yet include enough substance to make it useful for recruitment activities such as job descriptions and interviews, as well as development plans for further training, coaching and support.

## **Department of Labor Apprenticeship Programs**

*Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship (YDPA)* is a new national initiative funded by the Department of Labor that targets youth workers who work or will work in youth programs delivering services to young people as frontline staff. YDPA is an education and training program being developed and piloted by different organizations, including National Collaboration for Youth members such as YMCA and 4-H and other youth development agencies such as YouthBuild and the National Training Institute for Community Youth Work at AED. Apprentices participate in educational experiences like trainings, workshops, courses and on-the-job training based on core competencies for youth development professionals. These core competencies were developed from feedback received from the field of youth development to the Department of Labor. For more information visit the Web site at <http://www.ydpaclearinghouse.org>.

## **City Effort**

*Achieve Boston* is an example of one collaborative effort initiated by seven partnering organizations to create a professional development infrastructure for after-school and youth workers across the city. Achieve Boston's Competency Framework represents an integration of the competencies for both after-school and youth work. Eleven competency areas are further distinguished into particular topics, and issues of inclusion and special needs are addressed throughout the framework. For more information, visit [www.achievetoboston.org](http://www.achievetoboston.org).

***Contact Pam Garza at [pam@nassembly.org](mailto:pam@nassembly.org) for more information about the Professional Development Series or other work of the National Youth Development Learning Network.***

*National Youth Development Learning Network is funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc.*