

NATIONAL **Youth** DEVELOPMENT Learning Network

Professional Development Series E-Newsletter

March 2004

The National Youth Development Learning Network (NYDLN) is a project of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a coalition of youth-serving agencies 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.

Recruitment and Selection of Youth Development Workers

Attracting dedicated, skilled and creative people to lead organizations and manage and implement high-quality programs is key for any organization's ability to make a difference for youth in this nation. Hiring effective youth workers is a combination of recruitment and advertising, interviewing and selection.

Recruitment and Advertising

“Act like (and be) a staff that people would like to be a part of. Do good work. Let people know about it, think of recruiting as part of your overall marketing plan.” ☞

Sites recommend that recruitment happen in a number of ways: advertise in your local newspaper; post internally; use websites; and recruit through local colleges and universities. Youth development organizations have found that their best staff come from friends of staff or youth that had been members of the organization.

- Our best staff comes from friends of our staff. Recruit from within and reward staff for finding new recruits in the community. Find staff who would be willing to confidentially share their on-the-job experience with people they know that might be interested in applying.
- We have found it successful to have a volunteer program in which teens volunteer beginning at age 12 to get to know all our programs. Once they are old enough, they are transitioned into paid employment and are already familiar with everything.
- We oftentimes recruit and interview youth who have gone through our programs. They are already trained and have a comprehensive understanding of what is involved in working with youth, in developing abilities in young people and working with their families. It is by far the most successful process.

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Interviewing and Selecting

“Make them do a working interview! Have them come in and work with young people. That way you can see if they sit back and do not do much or if they jump right in and start new activities.” 🐦

Organizations use similar methods to gather information on candidates including: resume; cover letter; reference and background checks; phone and face-to-face interviews; and a written sample for a lesson plan based on scenarios. In addition, youth development organizations highly recommended that there be an opportunity to see the candidate with young people.

Hiring youth development workers is consistent with any effective hiring practices. Make sure that you create a comfortable atmosphere. Remember the interview process is two-way. You are selling the organization, position, and community at the same time they are presenting themselves.

Think about the basic competencies/skills you need and ask questions and seek evidence accordingly. The following questions are based on competencies for front-line youth workers developed by the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY). They begin with some general questions you may want to ask of candidates followed by questions that relate to the NCY competencies for Youth Workers (in bold). No questions or interview process is fool proof but it is important to be clear about what you are looking for in your design of the entire recruitment and selection process.

Overview Questions

- Describe your ideal workday.
- What experience shaped you as a young person?
- What is the most important thing you think you would get from working here?

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.

Understands and applies basic child and adolescent development principles.

- What age group would you like to work with the most and why?
- What do you see as key issues facing young people?
- Can you state some basic differences between a 10 year old and a 15 year old?
- How might you see yourself working with a 12 year old?

Communicates and develops positive relationships with youth.

- How do you go about developing relationships with youth?
- What are your best memories as a young person working with an adult?
- How does this relate to how you might relate to young people?
- Finish the statement, “I relate to others by....”

Adapts, facilitates and evaluates age appropriate activities with and for the group.

- Describe a situation where you had to be flexible and/or improvise.
- Give an example of a time you led an activity with youth.
- If you had a group of 25 teens what would you do?

Respects and honors cultural and human diversity.

- What have been your experiences with cultures other than your own?
- Describe at least three strategies you would use for reaching and working with youth of a culture or background other than your own.

Involves and empowers youth.

- What are keys to successful partnerships with youth?
- What have been your experiences in involving youth in decision-making?
- What does leadership mean to you?
- How do you develop leadership?
- What do you think are the three key priorities in youth work?

Identifies potential risk factors (in a program environment) and takes measures to reduce those risks.

- Two young people are fighting, what would you do to insure everyone’s safety?
- With child abuse and child sexual abuse in the news, those of us working with youth want to make sure we keep youth as well as ourselves safe. Any thoughts on how you can protect youth in our programs or protect yourself from unfounded accusations of abuse?
- Tell me what you think might be the potential risks when working with teens. What policies would you support or what might you do to keep them emotionally and physically safe in your program?

Cares for, involves and works with families and community.

- How do you see your interaction with parents and the community?
- How might you involve parents in the program and activities you have for their children?
- A parent come to you with a problem about something you have done – what do you do?

Works as part of a team and shows professionalism.

- Describe your experiences in working with others as a team. Or
- Describe a time when you have been a part of a team (professional or personal). Explain your role on the team and how conflict was handled.
- Why do you think this position would be a good fit for you? Or Why do you want to work for us?

Demonstrates the attributes and qualities of a positive role model.

- Who was your role model growing up and why?
- How are you a role model for youth?
- A teen comes to you with a personal problem, how do you handle it?
- What do you think should be the boundaries when working with youth and how would you role model them.
- Describe a time when your integrity was challenged and how you handled the situation.

Interacts with and relates to youth in ways that support asset building.

- What do you think are the greatest gifts young people bring to this world?

Selection

- Look for someone who complements the staff team. Think about whether the person possesses the needed skills and will to be successful in this agency. Some candidates fit some of the criteria, but may not fit our entire team.
- Listen to the feedback from the young people—their instincts and opinions are often accurate. Observing the person first hand with youth is also a really important thing. Candidates must be able to demonstrate a solid understanding of boundaries and appropriate use of self with young people; they must show adequate self-reflection and communication skills; they must show a high level of personal commitment to the mission of the work; must understand youth empowerment models and be able to locate themselves as adult allies to youth (and other places of privileges).
- Look for qualities that do not necessarily show up on a resume—general attitude, sense of humor, level of focus and calmness, enthusiasm, etc. Personality and willingness to be the best they can be at the job sometimes outweighs experience. Experience is not always the key to a successful youth worker. Passion, mission, and a willingness to learn are almost always good indicators of success.

Information and quotes presented in this newsletter were collected from surveys completed by over 130 youth workers. Thanks to the youth workers that were willing to share what is working for them in the recruitment and selection of their staff.

Contact Pam Garza at pam@nassembly.org for more information about the Professional Development Series or other work of the National Youth Development Learning Network.

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NATIONAL  **DEVELOPMENT**
Learning Network

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