

YouthBuild Program Manual

Getting Started as a New
DOL YouthBuild Program



YouthBuild

Acknowledgements

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Electronic Access to this publication

This Manual can be accessed through the Internet at the YouthBuild Community of Practice:
<https://youthbuild.workforcegps.org/>

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Chapter 1: Getting Started as a New DOL YouthBuild Program



YouthBuild

Welcome to the Department of Labor

Congratulations on being a Department of Labor (DOL)-funded YouthBuild program. If you're reading this chapter, it's likely that you have received a DOL YouthBuild grant and are wondering how to get started. This chapter will introduce the basic concepts of YouthBuild, provide some historical background, and provide an "executive summary" of things you need to know, policies you need to begin to implement, and planning you should do now to get your DOL YouthBuild program off the ground.

About DOL

First, it's important that you become familiar with some basic information about your federal funder — the Department of Labor. The YouthBuild program is located in the Division of Youth Services, which is a part of the Employment and Training Administration (ETA). To keep up-to-date on the latest news from DOL's Division of Youth Services, use this link: http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services.

Your Guide to DOL

One person whom you will need to get to know is your Federal Project Officer (FPO). To find the name of your FPO, look in the Special Clauses and Conditions section of your grant award document. FPOs are responsible for the overall management and oversight of the grants and should be the first person you contact for any question about your grant.

Training and Resources

DOL provides extensive professional development to all DOL YouthBuild programs through the YouthBuild Technical Assistance Collaborative (TA Collaborative). The TA Collaborative brings a wealth of knowledge in youth development, alternative education, organizational capacity building, and, of course, the YouthBuild model, with the goal of helping YouthBuild programs build stronger organizations and produce better outcomes for young people. A coach from the TA Collaborative will be assigned to be a resource to your program. A variety of trainings will be offered by the TA Collaborative for you and your staff, and we encourage you to take advantage of them.

Another resource available to you as a DOL YouthBuild grantee is the online YouthBuild Community of Practice (CoP) — an electronic space where grantees can share and review documents, exchange ideas, and carry on dialogue via questions and answers. The CoP is a password-protected environment which fosters continued collaboration, peer networking, and best practices. In this environment, grantees can support each other in implementing successful programs, sharing tools, and fostering partnerships. Documents and resources contained on the CoP will be mentioned throughout this manual, so it is important to access the CoP in order to follow up and gather more information..

What is a DOL YouthBuild Program?

DOL’s YouthBuild program is a comprehensive youth and community development program which simultaneously addresses several core issues facing low-income communities: education, housing, employment, crime prevention, and leadership development. It engages out-of-school, low-income youth ages 16-24 and provides an alternative education and employment pathway that enables participants to obtain a high school diploma or GED, advance toward post-secondary education or career-oriented employment, and take responsibility for their families and communities.



Watch Video: Program Integration: An introduction to the process and value of a YouthBuild program.

The YouthBuild model fosters a supportive mini-community of youth and adults with explicitly positive values that encourages students to define and achieve their own highest goals and aspirations. Emphasis is placed on leadership development and community service as part of the process by which so-called “disconnected” young people change their relationship to society and develop a positive identity in which they can enjoy taking responsibility and “giving back” to their communities and families. This new identity tends to increase their motivation to succeed at school and work. YouthBuild allows young people to simultaneously serve their communities and build their own future.

Many YouthBuild graduates over the years have been heard to say various versions of this quote: “Without YouthBuild I might be dead or in jail, like so many of my friends. But instead, the staff here cared about me so much that I began to care about my own future, and now I am in college (or employed) and taking care of my children. I love YouthBuild. It changed my life.”

As a DOL YouthBuild grantee, you are part of a larger network of over 200 YouthBuild grantees from all over the country, in rural and urban areas, serving youth from many different racial and ethnic groups. The YouthBuild model has evolved over more than 30 years and has benefited from the experiences of those who designed the model and from those who have helped improve it over the years, including steady input from young people through various leadership councils.

The YouthBuild model is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of the community in which it is located. For example, some YouthBuild programs have become charter schools, some operate as programs of larger community-based organizations, some as part of municipal or tribal governments, some as local affiliates of national nonprofit organizations, and some as standalone community-based YouthBuild organizations.

History of YouthBuild

The first YouthBuild program was started in East Harlem in 1978 at a small, community-based, nonprofit organization now called Youth Action Programs and Homes, Inc. (YAPH). It was developed outside of the existing public school, workforce development, and criminal justice systems as an innovative and comprehensive approach to re-engaging young people for whom those systems had not worked. Most had left high school without a diploma, and many were court-involved; yet they had enormous potential to contribute to society. Young people in East Harlem were engaged in the process of defining what they needed and guiding the creation of YouthBuild.

The first YouthBuild program was so successful, and the demand to replicate it so strong, that in 1984 YAPH organized a coalition in New York City and succeeded in obtaining city tax levy funds to replicate it in five locations in the city. Soon there was such a demand nationally that in 1988 YAPH's leadership organized a national coalition to obtain federal funds for its long-term replication and spawned a national nonprofit organization called YouthBuild USA that orchestrated national replication in 11 cities with private funds. Dorothy Stoneman, formerly director of YAPH, became president of YouthBuild USA.

By 1992, YouthBuild USA and the National YouthBuild Coalition had succeeded in finding champions in Congress — Senator John Kerry (D-MA), and Rep. Major Owens (D-NY) — who got legislation passed called Hope for Youth: Youthbuild, that authorized YouthBuild as a federal program under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 1993, 40 million dollars was appropriated to start the federal HUD Youthbuild program.

In December of 2003, the Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth recommended that HUD's Youthbuild program be transferred to DOL, because it was more closely aligned with the purposes of DOL than of HUD and because DOL brought special resources to the program. In September 2006, the YouthBuild Transfer Act was passed by Congress unanimously, and the administration of the program was passed to DOL.

Since September 2006, DOL has taken responsibility for the development and expansion of YouthBuild to reach, engage, and transform the life prospects of disadvantaged youth in low-income communities, preparing them for post-secondary education, jobs and careers in high-growth industries, and community leadership. YouthBuild has now been integrated into America's workforce development systems.



The YouthBuild Program Model

How is YouthBuild different from other employment and training programs or from other youth development programs? Because of its comprehensive approach, the DOL YouthBuild program is a number of things at once:

- It is an **occupational skills training program** in which young people receive on-site training in construction skills at least 40% of their time in the program from qualified instructors who are often journeymen. This training leads to industry-recognized credentials which give youth an advantage for placement into construction-related jobs or apprenticeships that can lead to careers in the construction industry.
- It is an **alternative school** in which young people spend at least 50% of their time pursuing academic goals in highly individualized classrooms, which may include remedial education, study toward a high school diploma or GED, and preparation for post-secondary education and certifications. The academics in a YouthBuild program complement and build on the skills that young people learn on the construction site.
- It is a **community service program** in which young people build housing for homeless and other low-income individuals and families, providing the most valuable and visible commodity for their hard-pressed communities: affordable housing.
- It is a **youth development program** in which young people participate in peer support groups, life-planning processes, and counseling activities that assist them in healing from past hurts, overcoming negative habits and attitudes, and pursuing achievable goals that will help them establish a productive life, sustaining themselves and their immediate families. Case management processes help young people negotiate linkages to community resources that they need to achieve their goals.
- It is a **leadership development program** in which young people share in the governance of their own program and participate actively in community affairs, learning the values and the lifelong commitment needed by effective and ethical community leaders.
- For many, it serves as a **prisoner re-entry or diversion program** with as many as 40% of DOL YouthBuild participants nationwide having been court-involved. The comprehensive YouthBuild program has shown itself to radically diminish recidivism rates for young offenders.
- It is a **long-term mini-community** in which young people make new friends committed to a positive lifestyle, may pursue cultural and recreational activities together, and can continue to participate through follow-up services and leadership opportunities for graduates.



- It is a **community development program**, in which community organizations obtain the resources to tackle several key community issues at once, strengthening their capacity to build and manage housing for their residents, educate and inspire their youth, create leadership for the future, and generally take responsibility for their neighborhoods.
- It is fast becoming a **green program**, where YouthBuild staff and participants are working to lessen the environmental impact of home construction and renovation — the source of two-fifths of national energy consumption and extensive greenhouse gas emissions. In the process, YouthBuild participants are taking advantage of the surging clean energy economy to gain access to rewarding careers as new products, technology, and methods emerge in construction-related industries.

Thus, YouthBuild is a comprehensive model in which all parts work together to engage low-income young people to further their education and move on to careers, further training or post-secondary education, and responsibility for the well-being of their families and communities. It is designed as an effective way for young people to transform their lives through taking responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Program Components

All DOL-funded YouthBuild programs must contain five basic components:

1. **Education** to acquire literacy and numeracy gains, secondary education credentials, industry-recognized credentials, and preparation for post-secondary career and education placements and completion;
2. **Construction** that provides on-site skills training through well-supervised housing rehabilitation or construction work and leads to industry-recognized credentials for young people;
3. **Counseling and Case Management** to assist students in setting and achieving their goals;
4. **Leadership Development** through program decision-making, responsible leadership roles, and the study of how to improve the community; and
5. **Transition Services for Graduate Success**, including college and career counseling leading to placement in education or employment and post-graduation follow-up to support retention and completion in these placements.

Like all youth development programs, these program components need to be led by caring and competent staff, coordinated by a full-time Program Director. They need to be integrated with each other through intentional program design, operational policies, staff training, and coordination.





Education Component

Education (and career/college readiness) should be designed to meet the needs of participants and must comprise at least 50% of the program’s overall curriculum. This component should include basic skills instruction, accelerated learning for young people who are significantly behind grade level, bilingual education for persons with limited English proficiency, and curriculum designed to lead to the attainment of a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) credential. It should also incorporate a strong component encouraging young people to explore community college or other post-secondary education options, including college tours, assistance in obtaining financial aid, and introduction to college life courses. It is especially important for programs offering GEDs to encourage young people to consider community college from the first day of their enrollment in YouthBuild by visiting local community colleges and talking about community college as a goal.



Watch Video: Education: YouthBuild students and staff discuss the value of their YouthBuild Education program.

For those students who enter with a high school diploma or a GED, remedial education will be necessary to improve basic skills to prepare for college or careers. For many students, basic literacy must precede preparation for a diploma or the GED exam. For those whose skills are sufficient, enrollment in college classes simultaneous with YouthBuild participation may be available through building partnerships with community colleges, technical schools, or other institutions. Cultural history, current events, social studies, and leadership skills are also generally part of the academic curriculum. Career readiness training includes assessing one’s strengths and interests, job-seeking skills, and general preparation for handling oneself maturely in the world of work.

Successful YouthBuild programs aim for a teacher:student ratio of 1 teacher for 28 students, understanding that at any given time only 14 students are in the classroom due to the students’ division of time between school and the construction site.

Commitment to Education Component Success

DOL believes that re-engaging youth in innovative alternative education environments that are designed to help them succeed, such as the ones exemplified in well-run YouthBuild programs, are critically important. Before your first participants even enter the classroom, before teachers are hired and educational materials are purchased, there are a number of things that should be considered. Creating and sustaining an excellent education component will require talented educators and staff who are fully committed to supporting student success and ongoing professional development.

The basic legislative requirements for the educational component of a YouthBuild program are:

- students must be offered education and related services and activities during at least 50% of the time during which they participate in the program. Related services and activities include leadership training, career and post-secondary education readiness classes, counseling, and other support activities;
- educational services and activities must be designed to meet the basic educational needs of students, possibly including
 - basic skills instruction and acceleration geared towards the attainment of a GED or high school diploma;
 - bilingual education for individuals with limited English proficiency; and
 - counseling and assistance in attaining post-secondary education and financial aid.

But beyond the basics required by the legislation, DOL encourages you to consider the following key elements as you begin to plan your education component:

- **Regular standardized academic testing** should be held every three months, starting from student orientation or “Mental Toughness.” Establish the use of either TABE or CASAS for testing. You must use the same test for pre- and post-testing.
- **Experiential and project-based learning** will creatively and practically challenge YouthBuild participants to keep them engaged in their own learning. In addition, project-based learning is an excellent way to link the academic and construction elements of YouthBuild.
- **A multifaceted portfolio program** will help youth produce products that will demonstrate their academic and work-based skills. Such portfolios could include multimedia formats and creative approaches to produce multiple projects and products across core academic subject areas as well as to meet professional requirements of employer and post-secondary institutions.
- **A strong post-secondary education component** should be a part of the education program. This should include such things as expectation building around college attendance from day one of the program, regular college campus visits, dual credit courses while students are still at YouthBuild, assistance in completing college application and financial aid forms, and determination of areas of academic and career interest. Regular standardized post-secondary placement testing options such as the COMPASS and ACCUPLACER tests are an important part of the post-secondary education component.

- **Appropriate physical space** in which to conduct classes is another key piece of the education component. It is recommended that the site used for educational programming:
 - be in the same building or close to the administrative offices, for ease of communication and coordination;
 - be easily accessible from the construction site if at all possible (this is not always possible, particularly for rural programs), as participants must sometimes travel back and forth for counseling, meetings, and other activities;
 - have both large classroom space and space that is appropriate for and conducive to individual and small group work; and
 - Include room for vocational classroom instruction — either a corner of a large classroom with shop materials, or an actual shop classroom nearby.



It is helpful if the physical space communicates a culture different from that which the students previously experienced in the schools that did not work for them. Many programs use a variety of attractive message posters all over the walls, representing the values, goals, and philosophy of the program as well as examples of student work that motivates ongoing learning, and copies of GEDs or diplomas obtained by previous students. Classrooms are generally smaller and more informal, individualized in methodology, with students helping each other and teachers using differentiated instruction practices and regular assessments to insure that students have mastered the material before moving on. Clear goals and learning objectives are posted in classrooms, and student work and motivational materials are found throughout the space.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Detailed information about the Education component of a YouthBuild program can be found in the Education chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.



Construction Component

On-Site Construction Training on a closely supervised construction site, with high standards of teamwork and productivity, must comprise a minimum of 40% of the program's overall curriculum. Successful DOL YouthBuild programs strive for an on-site ratio of no more than seven young people per supervisor. On-site training must focus on rehabilitation or new construction of housing for homeless, low-income, or very-low-income families or individuals. In addition, through its Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), DOL has specific policies around health and safety that must be followed on the construction site. It is important that all grantees review these safety requirements at the link below.



RESOURCES

See [Safety Requirements Summary for YouthBuild Grants](#).

Vocational education, including classroom training in construction terminology and concepts, and earning industry- or trade union-recognized credentials is also part of the construction component provided at a YouthBuild program and counts towards one of the long-term DOL outcomes.

Commitment to On-Site Construction Success

Ideally, the construction site that you have selected will have several attributes. If possible, it should be a site where your participants have the opportunity to participate in all phases of the construction industry. This gives participants exposure to many different elements of the construction field and encourages a greater sense of ownership and pride in project progress. There are other logistics to consider during the planning phase as well:

- Is there enough room at the construction site to conduct training for all participants?
- How will weather (rain, snow, cold) affect construction and training?
- How will staff and participants get from the classroom to the site?
- How will tools and materials be transported and kept secure?

Your Statement of Work (SOW) is the proposal that your organization submitted to DOL for funding. It contains a detailed description of the construction site you proposed to DOL. If for any reason you must change the site you are using for your on-site training, you will have to submit a modification to your grant agreement. Contact your FPO for information on how to do this.

Another aspect of your construction component to consider is whether or not to participate in the **YouthBuild Trainee-Apprenticeship Preparation program (YB-TAP)**. DOL strongly encourages YouthBuild programs to participate in this program. YB-TAP is a set of national standards that were developed in conjunction with DOL's Office of Apprenticeship as a basis from which YouthBuild programs can work to establish an apprenticeship preparation program that meets the needs of their area. YB-TAP has as its objective the preparation of construction trainees with basic and soft-skills training, as well as training in entry-level technical skills that meet the requirements for entry into a registered apprenticeship program. The YB-TAP standards are designed specifically for YouthBuild to support the transition of its participants into registered apprenticeship opportunities and create consistency in the construction skills training offered by YouthBuild programs, as well as providing portable credentials for YouthBuild participants. **By using the YB-TAP standards, your YouthBuild program will be an approved training program of the DOL Office of Apprenticeship.**

Those programs who participate in the YB-TAP will be able to offer a Certificate of Training from the DOL Office of Apprenticeship Administrator to those registered trainees (your YouthBuild participants) who successfully complete the trainee apprenticeship preparation training requirements. These are specific requirements outlined in the Work Process Schedule of the YB-TAP.

If your YouthBuild chooses to register with the YB-TAP, your organization will be a participant in a national Trainee-Apprenticeship Preparation program. As such, your YouthBuild program will be an approved training program of DOL, which will allow you to pay your participants less than the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage rates when performing work with federal funds.

The Davis-Bacon laws require that those working on certain federally funded projects pay their laborers not less than the prevailing wage rates in the area. YouthBuild programs that participate in the YB-TAP may pay their trainees less than prevailing wages but not less than minimum wage. For more information on Davis-Bacon, go to:

<http://www.dol.gov/compliance/guide/dbra.htm>

RESOURCES



Complete information can be found in [YB-TAP Standards](#) and [YB-TAP FAQs](#). These documents include minimum training requirements, registration requirements and more.

Industry-recognized Credentials

As part of their construction component, DOL YouthBuild programs need to offer participants the opportunity to attain an industry-recognized credential. The two industry-recognized credentials currently being offered by most DOL YouthBuild programs are those designed by the **Home Builder's Institute (HBI)**, a nonprofit and educational arm of the Home Builder's Association, and the **National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)**, a nonprofit and educational organization with a focus on commercial construction. Both industry-recognized credentials are portable and have been developed with extensive industry input so they meet the definition of a certificate for the DOL performance outcome and are extremely beneficial to YouthBuild participants. The DOL TA Collaborative offers training in these credentials for YouthBuild program staff interested in becoming certified trainers.

A third credential recommended under YB-TAP is offered by the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department and is received for completion of the Multi-Craft Core Curriculum. Arrangements for delivering this curriculum must be made locally with the local Building Trades Council. This

curriculum provides a pathway for YouthBuild graduates to enter union apprenticeships and also counts toward the certificate measure. Information on these three credentials can be found at:

- Home Builders Institute: <http://www.hbi.org/Programs/Training-Programs/PACT-Programs>
- National Center for Construction Education and Research: <http://www.nccer.org/curriculum>
- Emerald Cities Collaborative: <http://www.emeraldcities.org/?q=multi-craft>

Construction Safety

Safety is a crucial part of the construction element of your YouthBuild program. To promote the safety and health of youth working on YouthBuild projects, DOL requires that YouthBuild grantees:

- provide comprehensive safety training for youth working on YouthBuild construction projects;
- have written, job-site specific safety plans overseen by an on-site supervisor with authority to enforce safety procedures;
- provide necessary personal protective equipment to youth working on YouthBuild projects; and
- submit to DOL the OSHA 301 Injury and Illness Incident Report within seven days of any reportable injury suffered by a YouthBuild participant. Reportable injuries include those that result in death, days away from work, restricted work or transfer to another job, medical treatment beyond first aid, or loss of consciousness.



Federal and state health and safety standards apply to YouthBuild participants. Such standards include laws governing child labor which prohibit youth ages 16 and 17 from working in identified hazardous occupations. Occupations prohibited for 16- and 17-year-olds under these “hazardous orders” relating to construction include, but are not limited to:

- operating circular saws;
- working on or about roofs;
- demolition work;
- excavating and trenching;
- operating a fork lift or a hoist;
- operating power-driven woodworking machines; and
- driving a motor vehicle on the job.

Health and safety standards applicable to YouthBuild projects also include using OSHA 300, 300A, and 301 forms, or equivalent forms, for recording injuries and illnesses. The OSHA 300 form is called the Log of Work Related Injuries and Illnesses, the 300A is the Summary of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses, and the OSHA 301 form is called the Injury and Illness Incident Report. Copies of the forms are available on line at:

<https://www.osha.gov/recordkeeping/RKforms.html>



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Detailed information about the Construction component of a YouthBuild program can be found in the Construction chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.



Counseling and Case Management

Counseling and Case Management is designed to help participants address barriers and challenges that interfere with fulfillment of their potential and successful life outcomes. Case management helps participants set goals and link to other community resources as appropriate to assist with challenges related to health, substance abuse, housing, childcare, family, or legal issues. Individual and group counseling should also be available for all participants. Individual and group counseling, including peer support groups, can help participants further develop their goals; overcome the effects of past physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; address drug or alcohol addiction; and develop successful habits and values related to life goals, use of money, personal relationships, drug abuse and other challenges. When it is needed, referral to professional counseling services should be available.



Commitment to Counseling and Case Management Success

Young people can experience obstacles that are both internal and external (internalized feelings from past experiences, current interpersonal problems, and system-related challenges) and should receive help in dealing with both types of obstacles. As you set up your Counseling and Case Management, consider these elements, which have been shown to lead to success:

- Counseling and Case Management is seen as a critical component to student success. This is evidenced by program structures which support case management/counseling activities (for example, time and private space set aside for one-on-one counseling or case management).
- The program has defined counseling and case management goals and objectives, including the creation with each student of an Individual Development Plan (IDP) or “Life Plan,” that defines his or her own goals in key areas of life.
- The program has trained on-staff counselors or case managers (ideally a ratio of no more than 28 students/counselor). Good counselors or case managers typically have a bachelor’s degree or graduate training with an emphasis on counseling, a deep commitment and capacity to work with young people, very good judgment, excellent listening skills, and patience. Many of the most successful have also experienced and overcome problems similar to those facing the young people.
- The program has identified a network of outside resources that the case managers or counselors can draw on to support students (substance abuse counseling, housing assistance, childcare resources, professional therapeutic counseling, etc.) and a clear sense of when it is appropriate to refer young people to these resources.
- Regular one-on-one case management/counseling sessions with participants are scheduled. Case notes are entered into the DOL MIS.
- Regular peer group discussion and/or counseling sessions are scheduled, and records are regularly maintained.

- Life planning and life skills classes are a part of the program’s regular schedule, and counselors and case managers are skilled at offering transition advice and support, as well as linking to community resources that can support postsecondary education and job transitions.
- A case conferencing system exists in which key front-line staff (counselors, teachers, and construction trainers) discuss individual students and make plans for maximizing their success, while respecting confidentiality of students’ personal concerns. The counselor/case manager also plays a role in the placement and transition of the young person after he or she completes the program.
- Counselor supervision and support is in place.
- Staff has envisioned how to create a program culture that fosters personal growth of students.

Some successful programs have included in their counseling/case management plan the assignment of a certain number of students to each staff member for ongoing individualized mentoring and support toward helping them achieve the goals they have set in their IDP or Life Plans. This strengthens the impact of the counseling/case management component, builds cohesion among staff, and deepens the program culture of commitment to student success through relationships with caring adults.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Detailed information about the Counseling and Case Management component can be found in the Counseling and Case Management chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.



Leadership Development

Leadership Development is critical to the YouthBuild model and is designed both to motivate students toward self-development and to further employment and leadership skills. Good leadership is defined by many YouthBuild programs as taking responsibility to make things go right for your life, your family, your program, and your community. It is important to foster personal leadership skills in all participants, so that they can take responsibility for their own lives and contribute positively to their families and communities. Young people who take themselves seriously as thinkers and contributors make better college students and employees, as well as leaders. The program and community also benefit when young people are involved in the governance of the program. Helping young people think through how they would recommend changing the conditions in their communities that create suffering for their families and neighbors generates a sense of responsibility and expresses respect for their intelligence.



Commitment to Leadership Development Success

The expectation that young people in a YouthBuild program be involved in program decision making and that they get training in leadership skills is one of the key factors that distinguishes YouthBuild from other job training and alternative education programs. To build an effective leadership development component in your new DOL YouthBuild program, you should consider the following key elements that are core to a strong DOL YouthBuild Leadership Development component.

- **Include leadership development in all components** of your YouthBuild program. Integrate leadership development activity into the classroom, the construction site, program operations, counseling/case management and placement. Put leadership development objectives in each staff person’s work plan annually, and make them part of the performance review process.
- **Establish a set of leadership development competencies** that young people are expected to pass before graduation. This will help you plan leadership development activities, workshops, skills training, and experiences linked to the competencies. Sample leadership development competencies can be found in the Tool Bench.
- **Develop an effective policy committee** that receives training on how to effectively participate in and facilitate meetings, meets weekly with the Program Director, and has a defined set of responsibilities that may include reviewing program progress and policies, assisting with interviewing prospective staff, creating new initiatives that will strengthen the program, participating in fundraising, and recommending solutions to problems that have presented themselves. Advice on creating an effective policy committee can be found in the [YB Policy Committee Handbook](#) located in the Community of Practice.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Detailed information about the Leadership Development component of a YouthBuild program can be found in the [Leadership Development at a YouthBuild Program Handbook](#).



Transition Services for Graduate Success

Transition services that support the successful transition of graduates into post-secondary education or employment and assistance acquiring college scholarships or AmeriCorps education awards, post-graduation follow-up and support to insure retention in these placements, and ongoing leadership opportunities for graduates is a key component of all YouthBuild programs.



- **Placement in post-secondary education or employment** is one of the core DOL outcomes and a key measure of success for all participants. Success on this outcome requires a strong transitions component, including a staff person responsible for building relationships with employers, community colleges, registered apprenticeship programs, and other advanced training programs. Additional activities which may support this outcome are career counseling, pre-apprenticeship training, college exploration, driver's education training, access to AmeriCorps education awards and individual development accounts, and internships in work environments. Activities to support success in this area should begin at orientation.
- **Post-graduation follow-up** for one year is required by DOL, but more importantly, is crucial to support YouthBuild graduates in their transition to post-secondary education, employment, or further training. Regular check-ins with graduates at their job site or education program should be a part of all YouthBuild programs. Assistance in solving problems that are undermining placements should be available. Alumni gatherings or other activities featuring opportunities for peer support, counseling, and further education on common challenges are important to help graduates make a successful transition to their next step in life.
- **Leadership opportunities** for graduates to return and help orient students, to serve on the Board of Directors, to assist with fundraising, to speak on behalf of the program, or otherwise publicly represent the program allow graduates to continue to belong to the YouthBuild community and to serve as inspiring role models and mentors to current students. The motto "Once in YouthBuild, Always in YouthBuild" helps reassure students that they will not be forgotten when they graduate.

Commitment to Graduate Success

Planning for your participants' placement in employment and/or post-secondary education must begin from the moment you receive your grant from DOL. By ensuring that your program maintains a culture of employment and post-secondary education from day one, you will assist your graduates in their transition into the workforce or post-secondary education. Building a strong graduate success component of your YouthBuild program should include these four elements:

1. **A program culture** with a forward focus that connects the work that students are doing now in YouthBuild with the work and education they want to be doing in the future. Such a program culture has a dedicated staff person for career development and placement, introduces career and post-secondary opportunities during recruitment, and continually emphasizes them throughout the program through workshops, internships, interest inventories, college tours, college displays, and the like.
2. **Preparation** for your young people to move into post-secondary education or the workforce. Such preparation includes interest inventories early on in the program, Life Plans as a centerpiece of career development, rigorous education outcomes, and opportunities to earn industry-recognized certificates and credentials, and early, ongoing positive exposure to the world of work.
3. **A set of partnerships** that promotes placement in post-secondary education and careers. To develop these partnerships, your program must systematically reach out to the private sector, establish agreements with post-secondary institutions, and create an advisory board with key contacts to build a bridge between your program and the workplace or college.
4. **Placement** and a set of retention supports after the program. Young people are placed in post-secondary institutions or jobs with career potential in accordance with their interests and aptitudes, and it is part of the job developer or case manager's job responsibility to support them in those placements.



Post Program Support

Graduate success also includes support for young people after they leave your program. Once your YouthBuild graduates are placed in employment, education, apprenticeships, or further occupational skills training, you still have a role to play. DOL requires that your program provide follow-up services to your YouthBuild graduates for one full year after they exit your program. Many YouthBuild programs choose to offer follow-up services for longer, using non-DOL funds.

Regardless of the model you choose, the first year after completion of YouthBuild can be very challenging. Graduates have left a protective "cocoon" of positive, supportive adults who have high standards and expectations for them and who understand the challenges they deal with on a day-to-day basis and have actively helped them address these challenges. It is crucial that you keep in close touch with your YouthBuild graduates during this first year of transition into the world of education or employment to offer support, encouragement, and assistance with challenges that arise so they don't get derailed.

There should be one staff person who is accountable for follow-up services for graduates, or this responsibility can sometimes fall through the cracks. Some programs choose to have a separate alumni coordinator, and some programs include this responsibility with one of the case managers or with the job developer. Regardless of which person is assigned, make sure you have a plan for keeping in touch with your participants before they leave the program. Ask for the names and phone numbers of five people who will always know how to reach each participant and use Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites to keep in touch with your graduates.

Some programs find that weekly check-ins are extremely helpful during the first three months after a graduate is placed in employment or education. If at all possible, at least once a month the check-in should be in person. After the first quarter, biweekly check-ins should suffice if your graduate is not facing any challenges. At some point, check-ins can shift to a monthly schedule at the judgment of the staff member. Early on, the check-ins should occur where your graduates are working or studying, so you can see them in their new environment. This may provide helpful information to you about challenges they are facing that they have not brought up and also give you ideas about people who can serve as resources or mentors to them in the workforce or at school. If possible, link your graduates to other YouthBuild graduates at the same job site or college campus for support. Often, college support staff can work with you to provide support to your graduates who are placed in post-secondary institutions. Also, you should meet with their supervisors at work to see if there are any problems that you might be able to address with your graduates.

When placements are obtained through partnerships with employers and colleges, ongoing regular communication with the employer or college is important in order to demonstrate continued commitment to the success of the placement, to maintain the relationship, and to spot problems quickly that need your attention.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



Detailed information about the Graduate Success component of a YouthBuild program can be found in the Job Development and Post-Graduate Program chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.

Program Culture



Program culture is the mortar that connects these five elements into a strong program. The creation of a successful program culture does not happen by accident — it is an intentional activity. A program culture that is supportive but also prepares young people for a future of work and post-secondary education will lead to greater participant success. This culture begins during recruitment and should continue through placement retention. A successful program culture includes the following elements:

- **Structure:** Clear rules, clear roles, tight schedule, measurable objectives, and reliable systems.
- **Purpose:** Personal goals, program goals, public service, housing construction, transformation, and advancement.
- **Authenticity:** Real work, real success, honesty, compassion, and real consequences in discipline.
- **Proven Program Qualities:** Careful and comprehensive implementation of the program qualities listed on page 24.
- **Intensity:** Lots of success, hard physical work, big issues discussed, and celebrations.

The Four Supporting Administrative Systems

To adequately support and implement the five YouthBuild program components and ensure the best possible program outcomes, the following administrative systems must also be in place:

- 1. Accounting, reporting, and program evaluation systems;**
- 2. A Management Information System (MIS);**
- 3. Program policies, including payment methods and exit determinations; and**
- 4. A participant outreach, recruitment, selection, and orientation plan.**

Later chapters in this manual go into detail on each of these five program components and the four administrative systems. These chapters can be found on the CoP.

- 1. Accounting, reporting, and program evaluation systems** should be in place to ensure efficient and accurate management and reporting of federal grant funds. Accounting systems should follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) for nonprofit and governmental organizations. Organizations should be prepared to meet the audit requirements of DOL and all requirements of OMB Circular A-133. Quarterly reports to DOL should be submitted on time and be accurate to the best of the program's ability. Accounting and strong financial policies and procedures are key to building a strong, sustainable organization.
- 2. Use of the DOL YouthBuild Management Information System (MIS)** is required for all DOL YouthBuild grantees. All data required by the DOL web-based MIS must be entered on a timely basis to report on the DOL outcomes of literacy/numeracy attainment, degree/certificate attainment, placement in employment or education, recidivism, and placement retention. Help is available from the DOL MIS Helpdesk. It is important that Executive Directors and Program Directors pay close attention to the data their program is entering into the MIS and ensure that it is correct. The data entered into the MIS is the basis for quarterly reports submitted to DOL that must be certified for accuracy.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call the MIS Helpdesk for any problems using the DOL MIS at 1 (866) 680-0855 via email at missupport@youthbuild.org

- 3. Program Policies** ensure that DOL YouthBuild programs have created manageable goals and program structures to ensure success. Policies around when and how to pay participants will address budgetary concerns around how much to put toward stipends and wages, will provide incentives and rapid rewards for excellent performance, and will create a sense of accountability in youth while ensuring consistent application. Implementing standardized policies for discipline, attendance and needs-based payments will increase student retention, attendance, and morale. Policies around exit determination will ensure that youth are provided with all the supports they need for success and may prevent artificially early exits prior to landing successfully in a post-secondary or employment placement.

4. Outreach, recruitment, and selection should be designed to attract youth eligible for YouthBuild. All YouthBuild programs funded by DOL must use the following eligibility requirements, as required by the YouthBuild Transfer Act.

Young people must be:

- between the ages of 16 and 24, inclusive, at the time of enrollment; and
- have dropped out of high school (see exception to this rule below).

In addition to those two criteria, a DOL YouthBuild participant must be (see exception to this rule below):

- a current or former foster youth **and/or**
- a youth offender **and/or**
- an adult offender **and/or**
- a youth who is an individual with a disability **and/or**
- a migrant farm worker youth **and/or**
- a child of an incarcerated parent **and/or**
- a low-income youth

25% Exemption

If the applicant has a high school diploma/GED or is not a member of one of the targeted populations above, but is basic skills deficient, he or she can be enrolled under the 25% exemption which states that up to (but not more than) 25% of the participants in the program may be youth who do not have a diploma or GED or are not members of a disadvantaged population based on the criteria above but are: 1) basic skills deficient, despite attainment of a secondary school diploma, GED credential, or other state-recognized equivalent (including recognized alternative standards for individuals with disabilities); or 2) have been referred by a local secondary school for participation in a YouthBuild program leading to the attainment of a secondary school diploma, only if the YouthBuild program to which they are referred is a high school diploma-granting program.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Detailed information about Recruitment, Selection, and Orientation can be found in the Recruitment, Selection, and Orientation chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.

Program Qualities

Looking at basic components is one way to get an overview of the YouthBuild program. Another equally valuable way is to assess the qualities that are most likely to create a meaningful, integrated, and successful program with an appealing and inspiring program culture. Many YouthBuild participants come to the program with years of past negative experiences. Programs must deliberately create a culture that helps students reverse these experiences. From the moment applicants walk in the door, their experience should be dramatically different from past experiences in other institutions. They should experience safety, respect, caring, and a sense of community, with high standards and positive values.



The following positive qualities have proven to create a particularly successful environment incorporated into all aspects of a YouthBuild program:

- profound respect for the intelligence of participants;
- a reasonable degree of power for them over their immediate environment;
- meaningful and important work;
- real, patient caring for their development;
- actual teaching of skills;
- a firm and loving challenge to stop self-destructive behavior and change negative attitudes;
- family-like support and appreciation from peers and adults;
- caring support in coping with extraordinary challenges;
- high standards and expectations;
- inspiring and caring role models including individuals from similar cultural backgrounds as the students;
- understanding of all participants' proud and unique cultural background;
- heightened awareness of the present-day world and their important place in it;
- a path to future opportunity;
- opportunities for enjoyable social and recreational activities; and
- real concern and action from the agency about changing the negative conditions that have affected them and their community.

Measuring and Tracking Success

Successful outcomes are key to any program. Remember, outcomes represent young people and their success, so tracking outcomes is crucial to managing and continually improving your program for the benefit of your young people. Documenting your success through tracking your outcomes is also essential to gain funding from other sources.

DOL is required to report to Congress on YouthBuild outcomes nationwide. Your program and your outcomes make up part of that reporting so your outcomes play a role in supporting the YouthBuild program nationally as well.



The Five DOL Program Outcomes

DOL has established five program outcomes for which all DOL YouthBuild programs are held accountable. It is important for you to share these outcomes with your staff and make plans for tracking, meeting, and reporting these outcomes to DOL through the web-based MIS. You should familiarize yourself thoroughly with the outcomes and how they are measured and captured in the MIS. The five outcomes are:

1. Placement in Employment or Education
2. Attainment of a Degree or Certificate
3. Literacy and Numeracy Gains
4. Retention in Employment or Education
5. Recidivism

The first three of these outcomes are also DOL Common Measures, utilized by many federal agencies to provide the ability to compare results across programs that serve the same population.

Interim Outcome Measures

While DOL does not require them, there are interim outcome measures that can guide the program during the program cycle. These include attendance and program retention, which give internal management immediate indications of how the program is progressing. Many programs also track wages upon placement as an important measure, which can be tracked through the DOL MIS.

Below is additional information on why each outcome is important to the success of your young people and how each outcome is measured.

- **Placement in Employment or Education:** Entering post-secondary education, long-term training, or employment is the key to transitioning to adulthood and independence for our young people. This outcome measures the percent of participants placed in employment, post-secondary education, military, or long-term occupational training in the first quarter (three months) after the quarter in which the participant exits the program. The number placed is divided by the total number of participants who exited the program in the previous quarter.
- **Attainment of Degree or Certificate:** Attaining a high school diploma, GED, or industry-recognized credential is a stepping stone for young people to higher education, higher earnings and more meaningful careers. This outcome measures the number of participants who attain a degree or skills certificate by the end of the third quarter after they exit divided by the total number of participants enrolled. This includes attainment of a GED, high school diploma, or industry-recognized occupational skills certificate. A complete definition of industry-recognized skills certificate can be found at: http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05_AttachB.pdf. However, you should note that this measure does **not** include certificates awarded by Workforce Investment Boards, work readiness certificates, drivers' licenses, CPR certificates, or OSHA certificates.
- **Literacy and Numeracy Gains:** A young person's increased ability to read and compute is the foundation for the other program outcomes. Unlike the other outcomes, this one measures growth. This outcome measures the number of participants who were basic skills deficient at enrollment who increase one or more educational functioning levels in literacy or numeracy. This outcome must be achieved within one year of enrollment. Basic skills deficient generally means an individual is reading, writing, computing, or speaking English at or below the eighth grade level. For educational functioning levels definition, please see http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05_AttachB.pdf.
- **Retention in Employment or Education:** We know that it is not enough simply to place our young people in a career or college. In order to significantly reap the benefits of these placements, young people must stick with them. This outcome measures the number of participants who were placed in employment or education in the first quarter after exit that are in a placement in the second and third quarters after exit. They do not have to be in the same employment or education placement in each of the three quarters.
- **Recidivism Rate:** Another major goal for our young people is to keep them out of prison. This outcome measures the number of youth who had been youth or adult offenders at the time of enrollment and have been re-arrested for a new crime or re-incarcerated for revocation of parole/probation within one year from the date of their enrollment. Note that if no re-arrest/re-incarceration occurs by one year from the enrollment date, the program must enter "not re-arrested" in the MIS to get credit for this outcome. Also, if a participant is re-arrested and subsequently released without conviction, he or she is not included as a recidivator.

Getting Started: Planning for Your First Year

Once you receive your DOL grant, you must immediately begin planning for your first cohort of YouthBuild participants. It takes most DOL YouthBuild programs about five months between receiving the grant and enrolling their first group of participants. It may take you more time or less time, but this time period is key for you to plan a successful first year for your participants.



Your first guide for this time period should be the Statement of Work (SOW) in your grant agreement. This is the proposal you wrote in order to receive your DOL grant. It reflects the agreement between your organization and the federal government about how you plan to use the federal funding you are about to receive. Use your SOW to help you plan your first year. In addition, read all the circulars that are referenced on the first page of your grant package.

What follows is information which can help guide you through some of the planning that must take place between the time you receive your grant agreement from DOL and your first day of classes at YouthBuild. Some of these tasks are dependent on whether you are a separate 501(c)(3) organization or part of a larger organization. For example, if your YouthBuild program is part of a larger community-based organization, your organization likely already has a payroll system, insurance, and other systems in place.

Month 1

- Reread your SOW as a reminder of what you have agreed to do.
- Consider any award negotiations and early modifications with your FPO.
- Negotiate your budget (through form SF 424) and then translate it into a working internal program budget that you can use to track expenses and match.
- Review your enrollment goals.
- Share the news with community partners who may have been noted in the award.
- Set up the process for DOL draw-downs.
- Develop marketing materials and advertising plans for youth recruitment.
- Develop student application, eligibility determination, and selection process to be used. Check the CoP for examples.
- Consider staffing patterns, create job descriptions, and begin hiring process for new staff.
- Consider forming a youth advisory council from the community.
- Assure that the construction site will be ready for the youth, and if it is not, notify your FPO.
- Access and begin to use the CoP for resources, forums, and chats.

Month 2

- Consider being a part of YB-TAP by reviewing the materials included in your grant package.
- Attend the YouthBuild New Site webinar series to learn more about implementation.
- Attend the DOL YouthBuild New Grantees Orientation.
- Hold initial partnership meetings with community-based organizations, employers, apprenticeship programs, and post-secondary education institutions.
- Begin to develop personnel policies, operations manual, student handbooks, and program policies. Obtain samples from CoP.
- Begin recruitment and application process.
- Continue staff hiring.
- Make decisions about construction skill training if not already determined pre-award (NCCER, HBI, Multi-Craft Core Curriculum, other).
- Ensure that construction staff is trained and certified in the construction curriculum that is to be used.
- Review plans for youth transportation support.
- Contact your FPO regularly with questions; develop a strong relationship with him/her.

Month 3

- Continue staff hiring.
- Enroll staff in DOL YouthBuild Fundamentals Conference, if offered.
- Hold ongoing implementation meetings with community partners.
- Refine construction plan with timeline and budget.
- Line up OSHA training and complete safety plan and other required site notifications.
- Begin development of necessary program forms — resources are on the CoP.
- Develop orientation/Mental Toughness schedule and content. Draft program schedule.
- Consult assigned technical assistance coach with questions.

Month 4

- Continue using CoP for resources.
- Continue partnership meetings and development of activities within partnered components.
- Draft and sign Memoranda of Understanding with partners.
- Finalize manuals and student handbooks.
- Review and finalize youth daily schedules.
- With fiscal department, review match/process, develop or refine YouthBuild program budget, being sure that the fiscal department is familiar with the program model.
- Make determinations around wage/stipends/insurance.
- Identify and train MIS staff.
- Determine data collection process.
- Train staff on performance outcomes and use of CoP.
- Assure facility readiness for program activities.
- Schedule the first New Site Technical Assistance Visit (to include staff training).
- Have staff design engaging activities within their component areas and determine how they will integrate with other components.
- Finalize youth transportation support.
- Finalize program schedule.

Month 5

- Implement Mental Toughness orientation and select students.
- Have staff set up and implement regular meetings to include direct service partnered staff.
- Begin program activities!

Building Your YouthBuild Program Systems and Team

Checklist of Essential Elements

There is a set of factors that together have helped lead to program success for YouthBuild programs. While these elements are not specifically required by DOL, an overview of these factors may be helpful as a checklist for YouthBuild Program Directors, particularly those starting a new DOL YouthBuild program.



- A full-time Program Director and agency support.** YouthBuild programs are complex, and a full-time Program Director who has the authority through appropriate processes to hire and fire all program staff and who is capable of managing the complexity of the program, unifying a diverse staff, and inspiring the confidence of the participants, is crucial to success.

No matter what the organizational structure, experience suggests that a YouthBuild program needs a single highly competent and dedicated full-time point person in charge as YouthBuild Program Director. This is not an easy program to run, and it requires the full attention of an effective leader. When central decision-making authority is delegated to more than one individual, the program tends to lose its coherence. Many years of experience with a variety of structures has demonstrated this to be one of the single most important factors in determining program success. The Program Director can ensure that the various elements of the program work together as a holistic model. Ideally, the YouthBuild Program Director is hired immediately after the DOL grant is received or is already on staff and is well respected and well informed about the sponsoring agency’s resources.

Research has also demonstrated that the active support of the sponsoring agency is correlated with positive outcomes. The YouthBuild Program Director needs to receive regular financial reports and regular guidance and support from the sponsoring organization and his or her supervisor.

- Adequate staffing pattern.** The program also needs construction supervisors in the ratio of 1:7 trainees on the construction site; teachers and teachers’ aides in the ratio of 1:28 students, understanding that only 14 are in the classroom at any given time; 1 counselor/case-manager for 28 students; and a placement coordinator. The Executive Director needs to support the placement coordinator in creating partnerships with the placement entities because the Executive Director has high-level relationships that are necessary in this process.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



These sample job descriptions for the typical staff positions at a YouthBuild program can be found on the [YouthBuild Community of Practice](#).

- Clear lines of accountability.** Most organizations do have clear lines of accountability for their own staff in their organizational chart. In relation to partnerships, the accountability lines can sometimes be less clear, and difficulty in managing a YouthBuild program can arise if there are organizational partners that are not accountable to the YouthBuild Program Director. Programs can become fragmented and diffuse if there is not a clear organizational chart and a Program Director who integrates the work of various partners and insures consistency in the approach.
- Communication around outcomes.** Staff (including staff from partner agencies) and students should be united around the importance and the benefits of achieving high attendance, program completion, literacy and numeracy gains, GED or diploma attainment, career-related certifications, and placement in employment or post-secondary education. Achieving these goals is a part of students achieving their highest aspirations. It is helpful to let students know that not only do their gains benefit their own lives, but they benefit all the young people coming behind them, because positive outcomes reported to DOL and Congress count in public policy decisions.
- Systematic mechanisms for staff supervision, coordination, accountability, and building staff cohesion.** YouthBuild programs should have clear job descriptions and expectations of staff as well as decent salaries. Coordination should include weekly staff meetings, weekly supervisory meetings, and coordinating meetings between the site, classroom, and case management components. There should be time set aside for discussion and training on program philosophy and goals. Programs must have procedures for firing staff that do not produce or who cannot relate to young people. If an agency does not have a mechanism for removing weak staff members, the program becomes correspondingly weak. In addition, professional development should be made available to all staff to improve their skills.
- Recruitment of a large pool of eligible young people.** A program should strive to recruit as many as six times the number of applicants as there are spaces available in order to have a large enough group of youth from which to select. Selection of the most serious young people from the group provides the best opportunity to achieve positive outcomes for the youth. Since considerable resources are being directed to helping the participants, it is reasonable to select people who are the most ready to transform their lives. This process requires individual interviews and well-run group orientation sessions. Many successful programs follow an orientation process called “Mental Toughness.” More information on Mental Toughness can be found on the CoP or from the TA Collaborative.

- A **carefully planned schedule** which complies with the 50/40/10 rule and includes contingency plans for on-site training in the case of inclement weather, permit delays, or supply delays. The 50/40/10 rule, which is part of the YouthBuild Transfer Act, states that YouthBuild programs must be structured so that:

- participants are offered education and related services and activities during at least 50% of the time during which they participate in the program;
- participants are offered on-site construction training during at least 40% of the time during which they participate in the program; and
- the remaining 10% of program time may be used on either education or construction or another allowable activity such as community service or leadership development.



The 50% time for education and related services is meant to be spent on academics leading to a GED or high school diploma, but may also include case management, counseling, and placement activities as described in greater detail on page 10.

- A system of monitoring participant retention and attendance.** This monitoring system must be accompanied by rapid intervention when problems appear. As part of this rapid response, youth should be called or visited by program staff every time they are absent. This sends a powerful message to youth that their presence is noticed and they are missed when they are absent. For many young people this will represent the first time someone has noticed that they didn't come to school. Couching this intervention in terms of concern for the young person and assistance to them rather than punitively allows for a trusting relationship to develop. The Project Director and Executive Director should have up-to-date objective information about enrollment and attendance at their fingertips. This data will reflect the project's successes or difficulties. Low attendance and high dropout rates signal a significant weakness in the program culture or components. Difficulties should trigger exploration of the problem and corrective action.
- A system of regular youth involvement in decision-making.** As part of creating a culture of respect for the intelligence and leadership potential of the young people, it is recommended that the program establish a Youth Policy Committee, with committee members elected by their peers after basic criteria are set by the students and staff. After receiving training on how to participate in and lead meetings, this committee should meet regularly with the Program Director or Executive Director to review program quality, make suggestions for improvements, and develop activities that will benefit the rest of the students and staff. Responsiveness of the administration to problems raised and proposals offered by young people through the Youth Policy Committee sends a strong message of inclusion and respect to the students. Research has shown a correlation between high outcomes and the existence of an operating Youth Policy Committee.¹

¹ Abrazaldo, Wally, et al (2009). [Evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender Grants](#). Oakland, CA. Social Policy Research Associates.

- All program components tailored to the young people.** Successful programs have adults who care deeply about young people, going above and beyond the call of duty; high-quality classroom teaching; positive, respectful relationships; good site supervision; sensitive and effective counseling and case management; quick access to resources that will help students overcome obstacles; high standards for work performance and attendance; quick response to deviations from standards; and a responsive administration. All of these elements create a culture in which students will say, “I love YouthBuild. Staff cared about me. It changed my life.”
- Unity and morale-building activities.** Field trips, retreats, cultural events, sports, awards ceremonies, support groups, leadership opportunities, travel, and exchanges with other programs create an environment of support and positive peer interaction that helps young people counteract the negative experiences they have had in their life and build a positive peer network. These types of activities also level the playing field for youth who may find themselves in college or in careers with others who have been routinely exposed to these activities by their families.
- Fully aligned staff-partner relationships.** Regular partner meetings are essential so that all staff work together as a cohesive team on such issues, as selection of students, integration of program components, disciplinary issues and achieving outcomes. In addition, partner staff must be accountable for recording and sharing accurate data to be entered into the MIS. Strong and ongoing communication with partners is also vital to positive participant transitions to post-program success. Partner agency staff must share a positive view of youth and a belief in their ability to succeed, supporting the culture that your organization has created for young people.
- Component integration.** YouthBuild works best for young people as a comprehensive whole rather than a set of individual, discrete services. Thus, component integration is essential to a well-running whole. It is important to design a program schedule and staffing structure with regular time set aside for coordination, in the form of weekly staff meetings, daily “case reviews” of participant performance, periodic staff trainings on specific topics, and/or staff retreats at key points in the program cycle, such as before recruitment, midway through each cycle, and before graduation. Creating regular time for construction staff, for example, to check in with counselors or teachers to develop joint lesson plans and projects, and to address participant problems early on will lead to a more successful program. Young people do better when rules and expectations are the same on the construction site as in the classroom and when they hear consistent messaging about post-secondary and career success from all YouthBuild staff.
- Sound fiscal management.** The importance of sound fiscal systems cannot be overstated. Many organizations doing otherwise positive and important work for young people have found themselves out of business due to problems with their financial management. Sound fiscal systems must be in place to protect the integrity of the program and its funding. This includes systems to track and report expenditures against a monthly budget, pay vendors and employees on time, ensure that there are adequate internal controls in place, and submit financial reports to funders on a timely basis.

Setting Policies and Procedures

In the months immediately following receipt of a DOL YouthBuild grant, there are many policies and procedures you will want to ensure are in place. If you are part of a larger organization, such as a city or county government, Indian tribe, or a community-based nonprofit, you may already have some of these policies and procedures in place.

Staff and Workplace Policies

If your organization does not already have a personnel manual, you will need to develop a personnel manual that covers such issues as benefits and compensation, equal opportunities, harassment policies, hiring and promotion processes, performance review systems, attendance and timekeeping, code of ethics, conflicts of interest, safety, discipline and termination procedures, drug and alcohol policies, and more. If you do not have a personnel manual and the attendant employment policies, you should engage legal counsel to help you develop personnel policies which comply with all the relevant state and federal laws. You may be able to find a law firm that will work for your organization on a *pro bono* basis. Your law firm can also assist you on many other issues that may arise, such as negotiating leases, consultant contracts, organizational subcontracts, and other such documents.



In addition to personnel policies and legal issues, you will also need to ensure that your YouthBuild program has adequate insurance in place. You should work with an insurance broker to determine what types of insurance your program needs. Keep in mind that insurance is regulated on a state-by-state basis, so you should work with someone who is familiar with the laws in your state. Some of the types of insurance coverage are:

- **Employee:** covering claims made by employees for losses occurring while they were working. Depending on the state, participants receiving a stipend are often considered in the same class as employees for the purpose of insurance.
- **Property:** covering property or equipment owned or leased by the organization against damage or loss due to fire, theft, and other perils.
- **Liability:** covering “trips and falls” and other similar claims made by non-employees at your office or site or actions of staff or board which result in a claim, lawsuit, or other loss.

Program Compliance

Additional programs and policies that need to be put in place have to do with your YouthBuild program's compliance with the rules set forth by DOL. For example, you must make plans to meet all the **reporting requirements** of DOL. Like all programs that receive government funding, DOL YouthBuild programs are required to submit reports. DOL YouthBuild programs must submit three reports, each on a quarterly basis: a quarterly performance report (QPR), a quarterly narrative report which is attached to the QPR, and a financial report, the ETA-9130. All of these reports are submitted through the ETA reporting system which can be found at www.etareports.doleta.gov. The reports are due 45 days following the end of each quarter.

In order to be able to report on the work that you have done and the outcomes that your youth have achieved, you must have **data collection systems** in place from the beginning of your program. Such a system includes the critical elements of collecting, entering, checking and using data. Investing in this effort takes time, resources and leadership. Successful programs use data to document their program's success as well as to continually assess what isn't working so they can make mid-course modifications to improve the program. After carefully reviewing the DOL performance outcomes and attending the new grantee training, you will need to set up a system for collecting, entering, checking, and using your data. It is important to be clear about who on your staff has the responsibility for each of these tasks for each data element that must be collected.



RESOURCES

A helpful tool for this effort is the [MIS YouthBuild Training for New Grantees](#).

All DOL YouthBuild programs are required to provide non-federal **matching funds** in the form of cash or in-kind resources equivalent to 25% of their grant award. Only funds spent on costs allowable by DOL are allowed to be used as matching funds. You should set up a system with your accountant for documenting your matching funds from the beginning of the program. You must report on matching expenditures along with grant funds on a quarterly basis. You will also need to raise additional flexible funds for costs that are not currently allowable by DOL but are desirable, such as payments for meals and snacks that you provide to your students.

You may have one or more **Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** in place with partners who will complete some aspect of your YouthBuild work, or you may need to develop MOUs in the first months after you receive your DOL grant. MOUs are formal agreements between organizations that establish the structure and roles and responsibilities of a partnership relationship. For example, some YouthBuild programs have an MOU with a community college to teach the GED classes for their YouthBuild program. In order to be successful, it is helpful if MOUs contain:

- a clear description of partner roles;
- expectations for outcomes; and
- a schedule of communication.



RESOURCES

[Sample Partnership with Labor Management Memorandum of Agreement and Element by Element MOU Guide.](#)

Participant Policies and Procedures

Student Handbook or Contract

In addition to organizational and employee policies and procedures, there are many participant policies and procedures that need to be in place before you enroll your first young person. For example, you will need to develop a participant contract that explains the stipend, attendance, and behavior policies for your YouthBuild program. Many programs work with their enrollees to develop this contract so that the young people feel a level of ownership and buy-in to the contract. However, there are likely to be some elements to the contract that are non-negotiable.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on developing a participant contract can be found in the Recruitment, Selection, and Orientation chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.

The student handbook or contract should be ready to provide to the youth on day one of the program (except for the parts they will help write in the first few days). It will serve as a reference to the students for what they need to accomplish to successfully complete the program.

Mental Toughness

The orientation that you provide to young people before actually enrolling them in YouthBuild is often called “Mental Toughness,” modeled after an innovative orientation created by YouthBuild Boston in the early nineties and replicated across the country. This orientation is key to setting the tone and expectations for a successful program. Most programs use a one- or two-week model for Mental Toughness. You will want to work hard on the agenda for your program’s Mental Toughness and go through it carefully with your staff. Make sure your staff is all on the same page regarding student discipline procedures during Mental Toughness as inconsistent discipline procedures can undermine student morale and desire to participate in YouthBuild.

There are important administrative and fiscal details to be aware of when planning Mental Toughness. In short, there are some expenses associated with Mental Toughness that cannot be paid for with DOL funds because the participants are not yet enrolled in the program. These include (but are not limited to) stipends, bus tokens, work boots, participation in a ropes course, and guest speaker fees. DOL funds may be spent on some services that are conducted during Mental Toughness, such as background checks, drug tests, staff time, or assessment tools.

For a fuller explanation of what may or may not be charged to DOL during Mental Toughness, see <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL14-09.pdf>



FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on Mental Toughness can be found in the Recruitment, Selection, and Orientation chapter of the YouthBuild Program Manual.

Exit Policy

Determining when your participants should graduate from YouthBuild and when they should “exit” the program are decisions that have many ramifications for your students and for your program. Therefore, your program should have a graduation policy and an exit policy which are well thought out in advance of the start of your first program year. A distinction should be made between the moment a student exits the program and the date of graduation. In general, participants should graduate from the program when they have completed the educational, occupational skills training, and leadership curricula and have fulfilled their post-program transition preparation or when they have reached personal benchmarks outlined in their own personal development plan, such as receiving their GED. Most programs plan celebratory graduation ceremonies for cohorts of students who complete the program at the same time. However, students do not need to be technically exited from the program simultaneous with the graduation ceremony, because there may be additional services and tasks that must be completed for individuals before they are actually placed. They need to be placed in the quarter after exit, so thought needs to be given to how to insure that the timing of their technical exit allows their placements to be counted as positive outcomes.

Some of DOL’s outcomes are longer-term outcomes, meaning they may be achieved after a student exits the program. For example, a program will receive a positive outcome for a participant who attains a GED anytime during the program or within the first three quarters after exit. The exit policy should address the expected goals to be achieved prior to exit, individual variations, and criteria used to determine when exits are categorized as successful or unsuccessful.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Advice is available from the MIS Helpdesk at 1 (866) 680-0855 or via email at missupport@youthbuild.org

Sustainability – Building Towards the Future

YouthBuild programs that have proven successful over time have developed a variety of funding streams. As with all federally funded programs, your YouthBuild program is not guaranteed continued federal government funding. Therefore, although it may strike you as counterintuitive, you should begin to work on a sustainability plan immediately, so that, should your program lose federal funding, it will continue to provide training, opportunities, stability, high standards, encouragement, and support for young people in your community. YouthBuild programs do best when they are deeply rooted in their communities and nourished to grow over time. Having only one or two funders does not provide a sufficient level of diversification to sustain a YouthBuild program for the long haul. Diversifying funding sources requires work and attention, but it can strengthen everything else that a YouthBuild program does. This is another key role for the Executive Director and the sponsoring agency.



To be successful and sustainable, your YouthBuild program must establish solid and well-grounded relationships with people and organizations that are also working to provide opportunities for low-income youth in your area. For example, through this process, some YouthBuild programs have become charter schools. Through these partnerships, your YouthBuild program becomes an integral part of the local community, successfully networked and supported towards the fundamental goal of improving outcomes for youth.

Solid program outcomes are the linchpin of a sustainable YouthBuild program. Good outcomes provide concrete evidence of your program’s ability to deliver results, thus attracting young people who witness the success of their peers in achieving concrete goals. Excellent program outcomes allow you to tell a compelling story and make the case for additional funding from a broad range of funders.

What Does a Sustainable YouthBuild Program Look Like?

A sustainable YouthBuild program:

- has diverse, enduring partnerships that offer a broad range of support;
- remains true to its mission and constantly tries to find new ways to better carry out that mission;
- has graduates who demonstrate the difference that YouthBuild has made in their lives, and employers and colleges who attest to the quality of the graduates;
- is visible in its community;
- allows itself to be helped by others;
- can grow in size and quality to meet the needs of its community and supporters; and
- has a variety of funding streams.

What Do You Need to Make Your YouthBuild Program Sustainable?

In order to begin aligning potential resources with established or intended program outcomes, organization and planning are essential. Preparation for tapping these potential resources requires:

- short- and long-term goals and timelines;
- time for planning, execution, and follow-through;
- strong outcomes and a clear articulation of your assets and needs;
- desire and opportunities to acquire skills and information (using self-assessment, community and resource assessment and exploration, and fundraising tools); and
- committed and mobilized staff, leadership, Board, and other champions.

For more sustainability resources:

- Grants.gov: <http://grants.gov/>
- Foundation Center: <http://foundationcenter.org/>
- Center for Nonprofit Management: <http://cnmsocal.org/>

Chapter 2: Recruitment, Selection and Orientation



YouthBuild

Introduction

As you prepare to launch your Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild program, DOL wants to support you in your recruitment efforts. One of the most important considerations you have is how to find and select your participants. How do you find the young people in your community who are eligible for the program and who are ready to make significant changes in their lives? This chapter will help you recruit, select, and orient young people into your DOL YouthBuild program.



Before beginning your recruitment efforts, it is important to review your Statement of Work (SOW) to remind yourself of the commitments made to DOL in your proposal. In particular, you should review your partners and the roles that each is to play, which may include a role in recruitment; specific populations of young people whom you said you would reach out to, such as young mothers, immigrants, those coming out of the juvenile justice system, or others; and the outcomes you said you would achieve.

Another important early step is a staff retreat or meeting to discuss recruitment. Have a robust discussion with your staff at the beginning of the year about who is likely to be best suited for the program. Your program will not be able to serve everyone. This may be hard for some staff to accept. It is heartwrenching to turn young people away from a program that offers them help and hope for the future. Yet the reality is that most YouthBuild programs cannot serve everyone in their community who wants to enroll (which is why it is important to have a referral sheet, see page 10), and YouthBuild may not be the best choice for every young person who applies. Having an open and honest discussion about this with your staff before recruitment season begins and bringing staff to agreement regarding which groups of young people are best suited for the program given your enrollment targets and the outcomes you are trying to achieve is an important part of the recruitment process.

Sometimes, staff have very strong feelings about these issues, and it may not be possible for everyone to agree. However, you can make sure everyone is heard, and you can explain the thinking behind final decisions that are made and ask for everyone's buy-in at that point. Remember, recruiting young people who are **ready** for YouthBuild will have a significant impact on your program's outcomes. Being **ready** for YouthBuild is not necessarily the same thing as having a certain reading or math grade level or having work experience. Being ready is about wanting to transform one's life and being willing to work hard to do so.

Ideally, your recruitment efforts should start about five months before the program begins. Below is a sample timeline of major recruitment tasks, along with a suggestion on numbers of flyers and applications to print and numbers of young people to recruit at different stages based on your target enrollment number.

Staff meeting on recruitment; hire part-time, temporary recruiters	Recruitment	Group Information/ Orientation Sessions	Interviews	Orientation (Mental Toughness)	First Day of Program
April 15	May 1– August 1	June 1- August 1	August 4-6	August 16-20	September 1
600 applications printed; 1,050 flyers printed	200 completed applications received	150 students attend group orientation sessions	80 students attend interviews	60 students invited to Mental Toughness	30 students enrolled

Eligibility

At the most basic level, all YouthBuild participants must be **eligible** for YouthBuild. All YouthBuild programs funded by DOL must use the following eligibility requirements, as required by the YouthBuild Transfer Act:

Young people must be:

- between the ages of 16 and 24, inclusive, at the time of enrollment; and
- have dropped out of high school (see exception to this rule below).



In addition to those two criteria, a DOL YouthBuild participant must be (see exception to this rule below):

- a current or former foster youth **and/or**
- a youth offender **and/or**
- an adult offender **and/or**
- a youth who is an individual with a disability **and/or**
- a migrant farm worker youth **and/or**
- a child of an incarcerated parent **and/or**
- a low-income youth.

25% Exemption

If the applicant has a high school diploma/GED, or is not a member of one of the targeted populations above, but is basic skills deficient, he or she can be enrolled under the 25% exemption which states that up to (but not more than) 25% of the participants in the program may be youth who do have a diploma or GED, or are not members of a disadvantaged population based on the criteria above, but are: 1) basic skills deficient, despite attainment of a secondary school diploma, GED credential, or other state-recognized equivalent (including recognized alternative standards for individuals with disabilities); or 2) have been referred by a local secondary school for participation in a YouthBuild program leading to the attainment of a secondary school diploma, only if the YouthBuild program to which they are referred is a high school diploma-granting program.

This 25% flexibility in eligibility was deliberately included in the statute in order not to penalize hard work and perseverance in low-income communities. Young people with parents who have worked hard and exceeded the low-income level, or students who have stuck with their education and completed high school but still need YouthBuild, should not be excluded from a program that they see as a great opportunity to further advance their lives. Program Directors have heard of young people on the street asking each other, “What do I have to do to get into YouthBuild? Do I have to drop out of school? Do I have to commit a crime?” It is important that the answer to these questions are, “No, you can get into YouthBuild if it is the right thing for you without doing anything negative or counterproductive for your life.”

DEFINITION OF LOW-INCOME

The definition of low-income for a DOL YouthBuild program is taken directly from the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437a(b)(2)) which states:

“The term ‘low-income families’ means those families whose incomes do not exceed 80 per centum of the median income for the area...”

The median income for your local area can be found at: <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il.html> The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a tool that allows you to select the state and county in which you are operating and view the 80% low-income threshold for different family sizes: <http://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il.html>

In summary, a participant must be aged 16 to 24 at entrance. At least 75% must have dropped out of high school and be a member of one of the target populations.

These requirements leave considerable latitude about whom to accept into the program. YouthBuild is not for everyone, and because there are limited spaces in any YouthBuild program, it makes sense to put thought into selecting those young people who can most benefit from the program, those young people who are "ready" for the program, rather than selecting youth by lottery or on a first-come-first-served basis.

Selection Criteria

During your program planning sessions, establish criteria (in addition to the eligibility criteria described above) that define who would be a good candidate for admission into your YouthBuild program. Consider the following factors:

- **Commitment to Changing Life.** This should be a key selection factor. You will have to assess this primarily through the interview. You can develop questions for the interview that will address this factor. It may also be reflected in the initiative which applicants have already taken to deal with housing, day care, or other needs, or the steps taken to move away from a destructive lifestyle. This can also be assessed at the orientation. The orientation that you provide to young people before actually enrolling them in YouthBuild is often called “Mental Toughness,” modeled after an innovative orientation created by YouthBuild Boston in the early nineties and replicated across the country. Mental Toughness is key to setting the tone and expectations for a successful program.
- **Interest in Both Construction and Academic Components.** Try to select applicants who are interested in both the construction training and the opportunity to get their GED or high school diploma or to upgrade their reading and math abilities.
- **Proportion Who Have Completed Their GED or Obtained a High School Diploma.** The federal law requires that at least 75% of a class consist of young people who have dropped out of high school. Many programs accept some high school graduates who need remedial academic training; some have chosen to accept up to 25% high school graduates to ensure a balance of young people who may start out with greater self-discipline and who will definitely be eligible for trade union apprenticeships (which depend on having a high school diploma or GED). Accepting high school graduates will, of course, affect the program design as the coursework for these students will be different than that for the students working towards a GED or high school diploma.
- **Reading Level.** Experience has shown that most students entering the program with reading levels below seventh grade will not be able to get their GED in 12 months, although there are also data indicating that the single strongest predictor of GED acquisition is not incoming reading level but the dedication and skill of the teachers. You may choose to accept students with lower reading levels, as long as there are provisions for extended study for the GED. Under the DOL statute, students can be enrolled full-time for up to two years with an additional year of part-time follow-up services. Also, under the DOL performance measures, young people have up to nine months following exit to earn their GED. Some programs have used non-DOL funding to create what they call “Pre-YouthBuild” for students reading between second and sixth grade level. In Pre-YouthBuild the program focus is on academic remediation full-time until the student reaches sixth or seventh grade level and advances into the full YouthBuild program that includes hands-on construction training. This technique allows the program to enroll young people whenever they apply and then move them into the full YouthBuild when the next cohort begins.



- **Age.** Within the 16-to-24 requirement, each YouthBuild program must decide whether to give preference based on age. Some programs have found that students in their twenties are more serious than younger students. Other programs, which are affiliated with public schools and provide credits toward a diploma, give preference to younger students. Another age consideration that programs may want to consider are the federal and state health and safety standards which prohibit youth ages 16 and 17 from working under certain hazardous conditions, many of which relate to construction. Many programs do not make age a selection factor.



RESOURCES

For more information on these health and safety rules, see the [Safety Requirements](#) document

- **Criminal Record.** Previous experience with YouthBuild participants has indicated that a criminal record in itself has no bearing on success or failure. Some programs have deliberately given preference to people with prison records because there are fewer options for them and their time spent incarcerated often provides a high level of motivation.
- **Drug Use.** Drug testing is sometimes part of the application process. Some programs make a decision not to admit anyone who is currently using illegal drugs, because of safety issues and the challenges that may arise for them in securing employment after completing the program. Others admit those who are currently using only marijuana but with conditions on their enrollment, such as participation in drug treatment counseling and a steady decline in drug levels, with the understanding that they will not be able to graduate from the program unless they are drug-free. There are pros and cons to both approaches. Regardless of which approach you choose, this is an important issue to have discussed thoroughly with your staff in order to get everyone on the same page. There is usually a distinction made between different types of drugs. Young people addicted to heroin, cocaine, or other hard drugs are unlikely to be able to benefit from the program until they have first addressed their addiction.
- **Gender.** Women historically have comprised roughly 25% of participants in YouthBuild programs. It is important for a program to develop strategies to encourage and support women who are interested in the program. These may include separate recruitment information sessions designed to meet the needs and concerns of women, identification of local childcare resources, and ongoing support groups for women once in the program.
- **Cultural Diversity.** Once defined, the geographic community served will affect the cultural diversity of the program. Consideration should be given to validating and respecting the diversity of the cultural perspectives of all program participants and making sure to serve all the populations represented in the community.
- **Interest in Leadership.** Many applicants will not yet have concrete leadership experience. However, interview questions can assess their interest and potential for leadership — for example, interest in being involved in improving neighborhood conditions and helping other people.

Recruitment

Recruitment messages should emphasize the positive aspects of YouthBuild. They should not be misleading in any way and should contain specific information on the program. Emphasize that this is a training program where participants can “earn while they learn” and that graduates are prepared for post-secondary education and challenging careers, especially in the high-paying, demanding field of construction. Mention the chance to work toward a GED or high school diploma and the opportunity to serve the community by building homes for low-income families. Invite people who are interested in becoming community leaders. Emphasize that YouthBuild is for young people who are willing to work hard and sacrifice. Do not make or imply promises that the program cannot keep. Make it clear that all applicants eager to get an education and work experience serving their communities are welcome regardless of past court involvement. Many youthful offenders have given up on being accepted in any job or program and need to be encouraged.



Also, keep in mind that it is especially important during recruitment season to have an excellent **receptionist/greeter** at the entrance to your space. Your YouthBuild program should always have a friendly, welcoming, knowledgeable person in place to greet visitors and answer the main telephone line. This is even more important during recruitment season when young people will be stopping by your program office to pick up, fill out, and turn in applications. At this point, they may find out that they are ineligible for YouthBuild, perhaps due to their age. The receptionist should give them a **referral sheet** (see page 10) and be encouraging to them.

Recruitment Tools

The following tools will help you meet your recruitment goals:

- Applications.** As a general rule, print 20 times as many applications as there are available spaces in your program. For example, if you plan to enroll 30 young people in your program, print 600 applications. At a minimum, your application should request name, mailing address, Social Security number, telephone number, current income, educational background, work experience, interests, and emergency-contact person. Request four phone numbers where the candidate can be reached. The application should also include questions about why candidates think they are ready to commit to the program and work toward changing their lives. The application should determine motivation to join the program and what the applicant hopes to accomplish. Ask questions that determine strengths, such as what do you like about your life? what are your strengths? Ask how the young person found out about the program, so you can determine which recruiting avenues are working.



RESOURCES

[Sample YouthBuild Application One](#) and [Sample YouthBuild Application Two](#) are included in the recruitment Tool Bench.

- Flyers.** Effective, eye-catching, informative flyers are a key part of your recruitment effort. Print approximately 35 times as many flyers as your enrollment goal. For example, if your goal is to enroll 30 students, print 1,050 flyers. Half sheet flyers work just as well as whole pages and save money and the environment. Make them brightly colored. The recruitment flyers should direct interested young people to your site to pick up an application.



RESOURCES

A [Sample Outreach Flyer](#) is available in the Community of Practice.

EXAMPLES OF MESSAGES THAT ATTRACT YOUNG PEOPLE TO YOUR PROGRAM:

- Earn While You Learn
 - Build Homes for Your Neighbors While Learning Construction Skills
 - Get Paid While You Earn your High School Diploma and Build Homes
 - Get a Fresh Start in Life: Earn Your GED while Building Homes for Your Neighbors
 - Time for a Change? Earn your GED While Earning Money
- Information Sheet.** An information sheet should be ready to hand to all participants who turn in a completed application. This sheet should describe the overall program design and the rest of the application process. Explain that the young person will be invited back for an interview, and dependent on the results of the interview, he or she may be invited to Mental Toughness. If he or she makes it through Mental Toughness, the young person will be eligible to enroll in the program. This sheet should include important upcoming dates such as the last day to submit applications, dates that interviews will be scheduled, Mental Toughness dates, and the first day of the program year. The information sheet should also include a list of all documents that young people need to turn in before being accepted to the program. These include documents such as birth certificate; income eligibility information or proof of membership in another disadvantaged population, such as proof that the applicant is a former foster youth or offender; and other eligibility documents that your program may require. The information sheet should include information on drug testing if that is a part of your application process. Also be sure to include information about the requirement that all males aged 18 and above who enroll in YouthBuild must be registered with the selective service.
 - Referral Sheet.** Your program should have a referral sheet to give to young people who apply to your YouthBuild program but are ineligible due to age or another reason. It is always difficult to turn away young people who want to improve their situation. Even though they do not qualify for your program, you can give them a set of other programs to explore. These could include the closest One-Stop Career Center, other training programs, and adult basic education programs. Make sure to check all the information on your referral sheet frequently to ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date.

Recruitment Methods

With tools in hand, your program is ready to begin recruiting young people for YouthBuild! Here are methods that have proven effective for YouthBuild programs.

- **Hire Young People as Recruiters.** Many programs hire recent graduates as part-time recruiters for several months after they have completed the program. Young people who have graduated from YouthBuild are your best source of future participants. However, if you are a brand-new program without any graduates yet, you may need to reach out to existing youth programs or high schools to hire part-time, temporary recruiters. Send young people out in pairs to places where other young people congregate: malls, fast food restaurants, street festivals, subway and bus stops, and other hangouts. It is helpful to send your recruiters out in pairs, such as a Latino and an African American or a young man and a young woman. That way they will be more approachable to all possible participants. Make sure and provide training to your recruiters on safety issues, on how to approach people respectfully, and on how to respect people's wishes if they are not interested in the program.
- **Presentations to Community Organizations.** Many YouthBuild programs have had success by sending staff and youth to make presentations to staff meetings of other community organizations; for example, public housing projects, local health clinics, juvenile justice detention centers, probation officers, Public Defender's office, One-Stop Career Centers, and others. Also, consider making presentations at local churches, mosques, and synagogues. It is often parents and grandparents who bring YouthBuild to the attention of their family members, so this type of outreach can be very effective.
- **Open House.** Host an open house at your site from 3-6 p.m. Invite your partners, staff from other community organizations, training organizations, local government representatives, and others. Give a short presentation about YouthBuild and invite attendees to refer young people to your YouthBuild program.
- **Social Media.** Set up a Facebook page, a MySpace page, and a web page for your program. Include flyers on these pages and links to the application. Ask young people to help you set up your electronic pages, so they are appealing to other young people.
- **News Media.** Advertisements in local newspapers have been very effective because parents and grandparents see them.
- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs).** Many local television, radio, and print outlets will air information about your program and how to apply for free as a public service announcement. Contact your local media outlets to ask about this service.
- **Local High Schools.** Many high schools maintain lists of students who have dropped out, although sometimes it is difficult to gain access to these names due to privacy concerns. However, it is worthwhile to visit the school's guidance counselor or principal, explain the YouthBuild program, ask if contact information is available for former students, and leave flyers with them. In addition, some young people can be referred directly to a diploma-granting YouthBuild program without having dropped out of high school.



- **Mailings.** Consider sending a mailing with information on your YouthBuild program to other training programs, high schools, local community boards, tenant associations, employment offices, probation offices, and alcohol- and substance-abuse facilities.
- **Partners.** Entities that are expected to play a partnership role throughout your program should begin by supporting the recruitment process in whatever way is appropriate for their role.

Throughout the recruitment season, document what worked and what didn't. Keep track of organizations you visited, neighborhoods your recruiters worked, which yielded results, and which did not. Start and maintain a recruitment mailing list that you mail to every season and a contact list that you call at the beginning of each recruitment season to let them know that it is time to refer interested young people to YouthBuild for a new program year.

The outreach process is a broad community relations process through which the larger community becomes aware of your work, so it has greater value than the specific objective of recruiting your students. Your good reputation, which will have value in obtaining services and jobs for graduates and gaining support of various kinds for your program, is affected by your recruitment process.

PROGRAM MARKETING AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL
<p>Your YouthBuild program should be engaged in telling the story of its success year-round. Building a relationship with the local media – newspapers, radio, and local television journalists -- is important. You should send them press releases when your young people complete a significant service activity, such as complete a home for a low-income homebuyer. When the new homeowner comes to get the keys, your young people can be there to turn over the keys. This is a wonderful news story. It is important to give the media a chance to highlight the positive contributions that young people make to their communities. Too often, we only see negative stories about young people in the media. Also invite your local news media to cover your graduation ceremonies and suggest different feature stories to them. This type of positive press coverage of your program will lead to more applicants and may lead to more funders and partners as well.</p>

After one year of operation, and increasingly after every year of successful operation, the recruitment process changes to one that is primarily word of mouth, with former students and family members spreading the word about how well YouthBuild worked for them and recommending that friends, relatives, and neighbors try it. At that stage, community outreach is important primarily to make sure that all eligible young people have a chance of learning about YouthBuild and to continue to be visible in the community. At this stage, most YouthBuild programs have two to ten times as many applicants as they can accept.

Application Process

Application and Eligibility Documents

As a first step, applicants will have to turn in a completed application and eligibility documents. For some young people, it may be hard to compile all the documents they need to prove their eligibility for YouthBuild. Your case managers should work with your applicants to help them compile their documents. YouthBuild programs all have somewhat different deadlines for eligibility documents. Some programs require all documents before the interview will be scheduled, while some accept documents as late as Mental Toughness. The first day of the program should be the latest date you will accept documents. Make sure that young people understand that they will not be allowed to enroll without their eligibility documents.



RESOURCES

[A full list of documents](#) required by DOL to prove a young person's eligibility for YouthBuild can be found in the Community of Practice.

The Group Orientation Sessions

Many programs hold group orientation sessions to introduce the applicants to the staff, to explain the overall program design and philosophy, sometimes to show a video, to answer questions, and to demonstrate the kind of warm, respectful, positive atmosphere that YouthBuild creates. All program staff should participate and introduce themselves with some statements of what they like about YouthBuild and their own role.

The group orientation session is also a good opportunity to discuss the many career opportunities in construction, some of which may not be as obvious, such as project management, design, and construction administration. You can also point out that even if young people don't want to go into the field of construction as a career, the soft skills they will learn through their time on the construction site are transferable to all careers and to post-secondary education as well.

It is useful to hold these sessions to inspire young people, to make them aware of the advantages of YouthBuild, and to warn them of the high expectations prior to their going through the entire application process. You may want to include one or two interactive activities so that applicants can get a feel for how they will be expected to fully participate at YouthBuild.



RESOURCES

Here are some [examples of activities](#) that can be used in these sessions.

At these group orientation sessions, staff members should be available to speak individually with applicants and offer additional information about the program.

The Interview

The interview comes after the application has been submitted and after the applicant has attended a group orientation session. It is an important part of the YouthBuild selection process. It is a chance for staff to begin to build rapport with future students. In the selection process, it allows staff to provide a diversity of opinions about the suitability of an applicant. It is also an opportunity to share additional information about the YouthBuild program and the responsibilities of participants. Be sure to explain in the orientation or in the interview that construction is not an optional part of the program and can take place under difficult weather conditions. Explain that the varied components of the program are both an opportunity and a challenge.

All program staff who will be dealing directly with the participants should participate in the interview process. If possible, each interview should be conducted by two or three staff members who represent the construction training, counseling/case management, and academic components. For existing YouthBuild programs, it helps to have the participation of one or more current students or recent graduates. For programs that do not yet have graduates, you might consider using the part-time recruiters you hired.

Determine if the applicant can participate and still meet financial obligations. Explain your wage or stipend structure. If a part-time job will be necessary in the evenings, determine the motivation to make that commitment.

Following is a sample format for an interview.

Sample Interview Format

Individual interviews take approximately half an hour. Applicants are sometimes rated on a scale of one to five by interviewers in order to compare these ratings between different interviewers and also between different applicants during the selection process. The interviews are conducted by the Program Director or program manager, one or two other staff, and a graduate or other young staff member (such as part-time recruiter), if possible. If an applicant is late for the interview without calling in advance, reschedule the interview for another date/time. Explain that if he or she is late a second time, the application will be rejected for this year but he or she can apply again next year.



RESOURCES

Here are some [suggested interview questions](#).

Purpose of Interviews

There are two broad purposes of the interviews:

1. to assess the motivation of the applicant and
2. to begin to build a warm, respectful, purposeful relationship with each potential student. Many YouthBuild graduates report that this interview was the first time anyone ever asked them about their life goals.

Through an interview you can get an impression regarding whether the applicant is motivated to

- improve educationally;
- learn construction skills;
- do hard, physical work;
- stay with a job for a long period;
- show up on time, all the time;
- get along with peers;
- leave negative behavior behind and overcome past mistakes;
- deal with personal problems so he or she can succeed;
- help other people through building homes for them; and
- take on leadership role in program or community.

You can begin the process of learning about the applicant’s goals and objectives and past life experiences.

Final Selection for Mental Toughness

Interviewers should take notes and make evaluations immediately after the interview. Then all the interviewers should come together to determine those who should be invited to Mental Toughness. Try to identify any problems and ask, “Is this person right for this program? Is the program right for this person?” Invite about twice as many young people to Mental Toughness as you plan to enroll in the program. For example, if you plan to enroll 30 people in your program, invite 50-60 young people to participate in Mental Toughness.

Acceptance or Rejection Procedure

Applicants accepted to Mental Toughness should be given at least one week’s notice to make final preparations for childcare, transportation, etc. Avoid last-minute selections and notifications. These are disrespectful of the lives of the applicants. It is best to send a letter **and** make a phone call. Make sure that a member of your staff actually speaks to each applicant extending the invitation to Mental Toughness. Mail and messages left with friends or relatives may not always make it to the applicant. It is crucial that this important information reaches the applicant. It is very challenging to have several young people show up **AFTER** Mental Toughness saying that they never received the information that they were accepted to Mental Toughness. By not attending Mental Toughness, they may have forfeited their application to YouthBuild.

Applicants who have not been accepted to Mental Toughness should be notified with the same speed and respect as those who have. At no time should contact with a YouthBuild program be discouraging for young people who have taken the important step of reaching out and seeking help. Include with your rejection letter the referral sheet to other resources that you have prepared as part of the recruitment process and include, if possible, the offer for the applicant to come and talk with the case manager about these other options.

Orientation (Mental Toughness)

A well-organized orientation session of one to two weeks, referred to as “Mental Toughness” in most DOL YouthBuild programs, is key to setting the tone and expectations for the year and for making the final selection of young people who will enroll in your DOL YouthBuild program. (See below for information on allowable costs for Mental Toughness.) Invite more young people to Mental Toughness than you plan to enroll in the program. This will allow for some self-selection out for those young people who are not able to get up every morning and come to the program and for those who decide either the rigorous physical and academic work or the high expectations for participation are not right for them at this point in their lives. Mental Toughness is also the place to continue to build relationships between students and staff and to build a cohesive, safe, supportive peer group.



In addition to setting the tone and expectations for the year, Mental Toughness should also motivate and inspire the young people who participate. Mental Toughness is the first place where young people are thoroughly exposed to YouthBuild's unique model of high standards combined with love, support and respect.

Be clear with young people at the beginning of Mental Toughness that being accepted to Mental Toughness does NOT mean they have been accepted to YouthBuild. In order to be accepted to YouthBuild, they must successfully complete the week(s) of Mental Toughness. Let them know how you will determine who is ultimately accepted into YouthBuild. Will it be based on perfect attendance? No late arrivals in the morning or after lunch? Active, positive participation in the classes and activities of Mental Toughness? This must be clear to young people so they know the basis on which they are being evaluated.

Mental Toughness Allowable Costs

Young people who attend your Mental Toughness session are not yet officially enrolled in YouthBuild. Thus, there are expenses associated with Mental Toughness that cannot be charged to DOL. For example, stipends, help with transportation costs, work boots, books, food, or other supportive services provided during Mental Toughness cannot be charged to DOL. Other activities, which are considered part of recruitment and eligibility determination activities are allowable costs. Examples of these include background checks, drug tests, staff time, or assessments. For a full explanation of DOL policies regarding Mental Toughness, you should carefully review [DOL's Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 14-09 Mental Toughness/Orientation Allowable Costs In A YouthBuild Program](#). This can be found in the Tool Bench. If there are costs that your program believes need to be covered by the program, but are not eligible costs, you may use leveraged funds to supplement your DOL budget.

Your partners have a role to play in Mental Toughness as well. For example, if the academic or occupational skills instruction at your YouthBuild program is done by one of your partners, those instructors should be present at Mental Toughness, participating fully as staff members, teaching sample classes, and serving as mentors to groups of young people.

There are many different models for Mental Toughness. Some programs run a two-week Mental Toughness, some use a one-week model. Some run a full-day model and some a half-day model, so that students can use the afternoons to work on getting their required eligibility documents or completing certain assignments, such as registering to vote. Some programs combine these models with one week of half-days so that applicants can gather their paperwork and a second week of full days. Your program's Mental Toughness will take on its own personality based on your decisions on how to set it up, the strengths of your staff and partners, and the personality of your community.

Recommended Elements for Mental Toughness

Regardless, to be an effective tool for motivating and screening potential candidates for your YouthBuild program, every Mental Toughness should include the following elements:

- **Immediate Building of a Peer Group:** On the first day, within the first two hours, students learn each other's names through various types of name games. One typical game has students sit in a circle with about 8-10 others and throw a bean bag from one student to another, stating their name, starting with just first names, but adding last names when they seem ready. There is a lot of laughter and eye contact. When everyone has had a chance to catch and throw the beanbag several times, the facilitator invites anyone who thinks he or she can name every person in the circle to try it. One after another they get to do that. By the end of the game, which takes about 20 minutes, most people know each other's names, which allows them to begin to relate to each other as members of the group. Other name games can be used of course. The goal is for everyone to get to know one another's name quickly.
- **Small Groups Lead to Success:** Another key method for building a cohesive mutually supportive group is to break the large group into smaller groups of four to six students and have each of them take about four minutes to explain to the group how they found YouthBuild, why they chose to enroll, and what they are hoping to achieve. This builds solidarity around realizing that they are all there for the same general reasons, and it tends to build a mutually supportive feeling. Assign each staff member to one of these small groups of students and have this staff member be the mentor and guide to this group of students throughout Mental Toughness. These groups will gather throughout Mental Toughness to share different aspects of their past experience and their goals, building solidarity. Some YouthBuild programs call these groups teams or squads, and the teams give themselves a name on the first day of Mental Toughness. The staff member should make sure the name has a positive goal-oriented tone to it.
- **Exposure to All Aspects of YouthBuild:** Students should spend at least one day, preferably more, with the construction trainers doing work similar to that they will do once accepted to YouthBuild. This will provide them with an exposure to the hard physical work of YouthBuild so you and they can see if they have the interest and motivation to do this kind of work. It is especially important to be mindful of safety at this point, since the applicants will not yet have undergone the safety training that they will receive once they enroll in YouthBuild. Similarly, they should be exposed to several days of classroom work.

This will allow them to get to know the YouthBuild academic instructors and vice versa. Just as importantly, it will expose them to a different type of classroom experience — a smaller, more interactive, participatory, creative, individualized process of teaching in which students are encouraged to support each other and nobody can sit back and fade into the background.

In addition to the education and construction elements of YouthBuild, young people should be exposed to the life skills, leadership, job readiness, and post-secondary preparation aspects as well.

Additional Activities for Mental Toughness

The following are examples of other types of activities that will lead to a successful experience for your young people in Mental Toughness:

- introduction and overview of program goals and expectations;
- introduction of staff—their roles and expectations;
- applicants' expectations of the program, the staff, and themselves;
- goal-setting and team-building presentations and exercises;
- awareness of factors contributing to applicants' past success and failures and an analysis of barriers to success;
- conflict resolution skills;
- examination of issues related to gender, substance abuse, and sexual harassment;
- building appreciation of different cultural and racial groups;
- listening and communication skill building; and
- review of participant contract (a sample participant contract can be found in the recruitment Tool Bench).



An effective Mental Toughness can utilize large and small group discussions, videos, guest speakers, role plays, youth panels, team-building exercises, support groups, specific goal-setting practices, Outward Bound-type trust-building activities, rigorous physical exercise, and a completion ceremony. Mental Toughness offers an opportunity to explain to applicants the history of YouthBuild, the fact that it started in Harlem based on the ideas of teenagers there and spread around the country with the hard work of thousands of caring adults and support from legislators so that there are now hundreds of YouthBuild programs around the country and even in other countries. Invite graduates from other YouthBuild programs that exist nearby to inspire them. Show them some historical videos. Let them know that they are part of a network of young people working to transform their lives and their communities. Let them know that what they do in the program will matter to others, because their own success will persuade community leaders to spread the opportunity to other young people. Generally, YouthBuild students have not been taught to believe that what they do makes a difference; this information makes a difference. There are various sample Mental Toughness workshops in the Tool Bench.

Facilitating Mental Toughness is challenging. All staff need to be present and fully engaged. All staff should have professional development and training in facilitation skills and group processes, and staff should be on the same page about how to handle various discipline issues so that applicants do not receive mixed messages.

After Mental Toughness

After Mental Toughness, your staff will have to come together to decide who will be accepted into your program, using the criteria you've developed. It may be based on attendance, promptness, participation, positive contributions to the process, or some other criteria or combination of criteria you've developed. Again, it is important to notify applicants quickly and respectfully of their ultimate acceptance or lack of acceptance into the YouthBuild program and to give them a week to make preparations for their new responsibilities as a YouthBuild participant.

The challenge of turning away applicants who have succeeded in Mental Toughness is daunting. Some programs have decided that if they have more successful candidates than they can enroll, they will select the final enrollees through random selection because this avoids the experience of failure and rejection for those who are not accepted even after they have met all the requirements. Staff are not always as able to predict the success of candidates as they think they are, so if the candidates are roughly equal, it may be less discouraging for the rejection to be based on luck than on the staff judgment.

All applicants who either drop out of Mental Toughness or do not get admitted for any other reason should be given a listing of other resources and should have a meeting with a case manager to think through which one might be useful to them. They should also be encouraged to try again the next year. Many of them believe this is their "last chance" and need assistance in realizing that it really isn't.

Participant Contract

A participant or student contract should be shared with participants on the first day of the program (after they've been accepted into the program). It is an important part of the orientation process. The participant or student contract clearly lays out information about wages and stipends, expectations for behavior, and consequences for various types of unacceptable behavior. Some programs have their newly enrolled students play a role in developing the student contract each year. In this model, the program starts with a base student contract which has non-negotiable items in it, such as consequences for bringing a weapon to YouthBuild, consequences for coming to YouthBuild while high on illegal drugs, etc., but there are other items that are left to the students to determine; for example, how many times should a student be allowed to be absent before being suspended or expelled from the program? How many times may a student be late before being asked to leave the program? These parts of the contract can be decided through a well-facilitated group process. This group process gives young people ownership of the rules in the contract since they had a role in developing them.

Your recruitment, selection, and orientation process sets the stage for the rest of your program year. Your process during this important stage of your program year sends a message to young people about your respect for them and the high expectations you hold for them. In order to get your year off to a good start, it is important to give this stage of the process the time, attention, and planning it needs so your YouthBuild program year will go well.

Tools and Resources

- [Safety Requirements for YouthBuild Grants](#)
- [Sample YouthBuild Application One](#) and [Sample YouthBuild Application Two](#)
- [Sample outreach flyer](#)
- [Sample interview question sheet](#)
- [Sample Mental Toughness schedule](#)
- [Mental Toughness/Orientation Allowable Costs in a YouthBuild program \(TEGL 14-09\)](#)

Sample group activities for group orientation sessions and Mental Toughness:

- **The Fallout Shelter**
http://scc.losrios.edu/~harrispa/assignments/group/exercises/fall_out_shelter.pdf (note: this activity can be shortened to 15-20 minutes).
- **Marshmallow Towers**
http://www.firelandsschools.org/Downloads/Marshmallow_Towers.pdf
(note this activity works well with different sizes of marshmallows)

Videos available to show at Mental Toughness:

- <http://www.youthbuild.org/site/c.htlRl3PIKoG/b.1310741/apps/s/content.asp?ct=5346255>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VX5DUQLiPo8>
- <http://www.ybpcs.org/video.html>

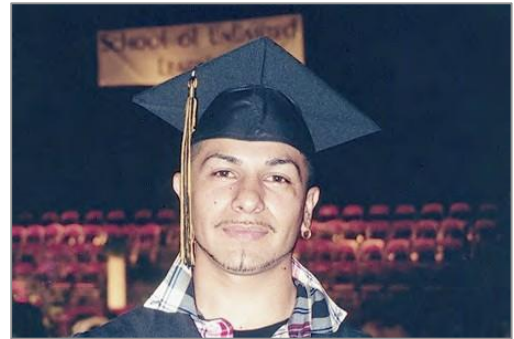
Chapter 3: Using Data for Program Management and Improvement



YouthBuild

Why is Data Important?

Many YouthBuild programs use moving and inspirational stories of participants who have transformed their lives to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs. These stories are far more effective when accompanied by reliable data that reflect on the entire program’s accomplishments and not just one individual. While data or inspirational stories by themselves can tell a part of your program’s story, combining the two is a powerful way to present your program’s accomplishments. In this chapter, we will tell you why.



Data is important to tell the whole story about your program in a compelling way. It is equally important for structuring processes for self-improvement based on the objective facts.

Understanding and using data is a crucial part of managing your U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild program. Some people feel overwhelmed or confused when they have to work with data, although they are able to tell many individual stories about young people who have experienced success in a YouthBuild program. Others have math anxiety that impedes their willingness to work with the data that is needed to manage a YouthBuild program effectively. Even if you do have math anxiety, this chapter will help you:

- understand the importance of using data to improve outcomes for your participants;
- become familiar with the data elements that DOL requires its YouthBuild programs to track and report;
- use a simple template to collect, enter, and check data to improve your program;
- involve your staff in **using** data to improve your YouthBuild program; and
- understand how the design of your YouthBuild program may affect your outcomes.

What is data anyway?

The Encarta Dictionary defines data as

“information often in the form of facts or figures obtained from experiments or surveys used as a basis for making calculations or drawing conclusions.”

- **Why is data important for managing your YouthBuild program?** As a YouthBuild Program Director or staff person, you care about seeing young people improve their lives through education, on-site construction training, and service to the community, eventually moving on to college or a meaningful career and community leadership.
- **At its most basic level, collecting and using data is the most effective way you have of knowing whether what you care about is happening.** For example, are your students improving their reading and math skills? Are your students getting jobs or moving on to post-secondary education after they graduate from YouthBuild? Are they keeping those jobs and completing their post-secondary credentials? If you can’t answer these questions about all of your students, you don’t know whether your program is working and you can’t figure out how to improve it.

- **Another reason that data is important is that it is a requirement of your grant from DOL.** As part of your agreement with DOL, your organization made a commitment to collect certain data and report it using the Web-based DOL Management Information System (MIS). DOL uses this information to provide Congress and the public with regular updates about YouthBuild’s effectiveness, so the data that you collect not only reflects on your individual program but the YouthBuild program as a whole.

DOL closely tracks national and individual grantee outcomes to ensure that the YouthBuild program is meeting its goal for helping young people develop their careers and take their next steps. Proper data management helps you show the positive impact that you are having on your young people, makes a stronger case for renewed funding for your program, and also demonstrates the effectiveness of DOL’s YouthBuild program to Congress and the public.

Data management is an executive function and must be led from the top. As a Program Director, the systems you put in place for managing data must be as thoroughly planned and organized as the systems you develop for strong educational, vocational, and leadership components.

The DOL YouthBuild Outcomes

DOL has established five **performance outcomes** for which all DOL YouthBuild programs are held accountable. It is important for you not only to share these outcomes with your staff and partners but also to make sure they understand them as well. This chapter will help you make plans for tracking and reporting (through the collect, enter, and check system) these outcomes to DOL through the Web-based MIS, as well as using the outcomes to manage and improve your program.



Below is additional information on each DOL outcome:

- why the outcome is important to the success of your young people, and
- how it is measured.

These outcomes are calculated directly from the data entered into the DOL MIS, which highlights why it is so important to make sure that your program is entering its data correctly into the MIS.

DOL Performance Outcomes

1 Placement in Employment or Education

Entering post-secondary education, long-term training, or employment is the key to transitioning to adulthood and independence for our young people. This outcome measures the percentage of participants placed in employment, post-secondary education, military, or long-term occupational training in the first quarter (three months) after the quarter in which the participant exits the program. The number placed is divided by the total number of participants who exited the program in the previous quarter.

2 Attainment of Degree or Certificate

Attaining a high school diploma, GED, or industry-recognized credential is a stepping-stone for young people to higher education, higher earnings, and more meaningful careers. This outcome measures the number of participants who attain a degree or skills certificate by the end of the third quarter after they exit divided by the total number of participants enrolled. This includes attainment of a GED, high school diploma, or industry-recognized occupational skills certificate.

A complete definition of industry-recognized skills certificate can be found at: http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05_AttachB.pdf.

However, you should note that this measure does **not** include certificates awarded by Workforce Investment Boards, work readiness certificates, driver's licenses, CPR certificates, or OSHA certificates.

3 Literacy and Numeracy Gains

A young person's increased ability to read and compute is the foundation for the other program outcomes. Unlike the other outcomes, this one measures growth. This outcome measures the number of participants who were basic skills deficient at enrollment who increase one or more educational functioning levels in literacy or numeracy. This outcome must be achieved within one year of enrollment. Basic skills deficient generally means an individual is reading, writing, computing, or speaking English at or below the eighth grade level.

For the definition of an educational functioning level, please see http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05_AttachB.pdf

4 Retention in Employment or Education

We know that it is not enough simply to place our young people in a job or in college. In order to significantly reap the benefits of these placements, young people must stick with them or must find another job if the first one doesn't last, as it often doesn't.

This outcome measures the number of participants who were placed in employment or education in the first quarter after exit that are in a placement in the second and third quarters after exit. They do not have to be in the same employment or education placement in each of the three quarters.

5 Recidivism Rate

Another major goal for our young people is to reduce the cycle of crime and incarceration. This outcome measures the number of youth who had been youth or adult offenders at the time of enrollment that have been rearrested for a new crime or re-incarcerated for revocation of parole/probation within one year from the date of their enrollment.

Note that if no rearrest/re-incarceration occurs by one year from the enrollment date, the program must enter "not rearrested" in the MIS to get credit for this outcome. Also, if a participant is re-arrested and subsequently released without conviction, he or she is not included as a recidivist.

The first three of these performance outcome measures were created by an inter-agency task force in an effort to track performance across youth workforce development programs administered by different federal agencies. These are called the **common measures**. The methods of calculating the common measures were determined by the task force. The other two measures, retention in employment or education and recidivism rate, were developed by DOL as useful indicators of program success with at-risk populations.

Sharing these performance goals and your program's current numbers on each of them can be a great way to build collective buy-in amongst your staff and partners. When they see the big picture and how their work connects to your ability to sustain and expand support for your YouthBuild program, they will be more motivated to collect the required data and to engage with strategies to improve performance. Data not only tell the stories of your students but also tell a story about your program, and your staff is understandably proud of the positive changes they are making in young people's lives. Sharing the numbers with staff and partners helps them identify gaps or weaknesses, either in data management or program implementation, and develop ways to address them.



It is important to have an intentional program design for each of the performance outcomes. What we mean by intentional program design is a program design that has been thoughtfully planned to provide the best services for your young people and to capture the work that your program has done so that it is reflected in the outcomes you report to DOL and other funders. The [Factors and Considerations](#) tool will help you set up your program design for each of the five DOL performance outcomes and become more intentional in capturing them.

In addition to the long-term measures described above, there are also **interim outcome measures** that can help you manage your program during the program cycle. These may include recruitment numbers, attendance, program retention, initial placements, and others, which can give you an immediate indication of the effectiveness of your program in engaging youth and motivating them to succeed.

Interim measures can help you track participant progress throughout the program year and may assist with identifying the need for early interventions for improving the quality of the program offered and increasing supportive services to help youth stay on track. Because these interim outcome measures are not tracked through the DOL MIS, you must set up your own system for tracking them. Many programs use an Excel spreadsheet to track attendance, for example.

In order for any data to be useful, it's important to ensure that information is being accurately collected, entered, and reviewed. This is called the **collect, enter, and check** process.

Required DOL Reports

Like all programs that receive government funding, DOL YouthBuild programs are required to submit reports. DOL YouthBuild programs must submit three reports, each on a quarterly basis:

- **A quarterly performance report (QPR)** – The information in the QPR comes directly from the data you enter into the DOL MIS.
- **A quarterly narrative report which is attached to the QPR.**
- **A financial report, the ETA 9130.**

All of these reports are submitted through the ETA reporting system, which can be found at www.etareports.doleta.gov.

The reports are due 45 days following the end of each quarter, and timeliness in submitting these reports is important.

How Do I Collect, Enter, and Check Data?

In order to use data effectively, you first have to obtain the data, or collect it. Then that data must be entered into a spreadsheet, an MIS, or some other format that makes it easy for you to see a lot of information at once so you can see trends and draw conclusions. And finally, before using the data, you must check to make sure the data was collected and entered correctly.



This section will give you more detail on each step of this three-step process that must be completed before you can effectively use your data. If you have any questions on the collect, enter, check process, call the MIS Helpdesk.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Advice is available from the MIS Helpdesk at 1 (866) 680-0855 or via email at missupport@youthbuild.org

Collect

Collecting information is a key step in your data management process. Your program must collect data about your students during the application process, during Mental Toughness, enrollment, throughout the program cycle, when students exit, and during the one year of post-program follow-up. Effective data collection relies on your staff understanding:

- **what** information needs to be collected;
- **when** it will be collected;
- **who** is responsible for collecting it; and
- **how** the information will be collected.



RESOURCES

The [DOL YouthBuild MIS Data Collection tool](#) will help you make sure that all of the requirements for successful data collection are met.

What Information Needs to Be Collected?

For every phase of the YouthBuild program, you must collect different information. You must collect a variety of information on participants from the moment you meet them and begin working with them. For example, you collect:

- demographic data to determine program eligibility;
- service data to determine what services are being provided, to whom, how often, and when these services begin and end;
- data on outcomes as you work with the youth to achieve literacy/numeracy gains, attain certificates or degrees, and transition from the YouthBuild program into an initial placement — can include such items as test scores, certificate attainments, and employer and wage information; and
- follow-up data to further confirm outcomes, track participant retention in employment or education, and continue to provide supportive services to ensure participant success. This data might include how and when you followed up with your students to see that they are still in a placement and if they are not, to provide assistance in finding another placement.

When Will It Be Collected?

After determining what information needs to be collected for each DOL performance outcome and any interim outcomes you are tracking, you must think through when you will collect the information. For each outcome, there are defined time periods when information may be collected. If information is not collected at the right time, it may not be useful to you, and even more problematic, it can have a negative effect on your program and your performance reporting.

For example:

- If **eligibility information is not collected before** you enroll a young person in the program, you may inadvertently enroll someone who is not eligible for the program. When you discover this later in the year, it will be a real hardship for the program to either cover that person's costs from other sources or require the young person to exit the program.
- **Literacy/Numeracy gains** are another example of information that must be collected within a certain timeframe. For example, pre-tests for the literacy/numeracy gains outcome must be given **within the first two weeks** that a young person is enrolled in the program, or you may use a test that the young person took in a previous school or program if that test was taken within six months of his or her enrollment in YouthBuild. Further, if you don't retest within the first year of enrollment, you will miss the window of opportunity for recording literacy/numeracy gains.

Knowing when to collect data requires that you and your staff understand the “big picture” of performance outcomes. For instance, because post-program follow-up is necessary to having accurate data for the DOL performance outcomes, you need to know that you should collect several different names and phone numbers for people who will know how to reach your participant after he or she exits the program. Having multiple contacts may be the difference between data reporting a positive outcome for the youth and no data at all. You may even want to think about setting up free email accounts for each of your students through Hotmail or Google as a way of keeping in touch with them.



RESOURCES

Who Will Collect It? Use the [DOL YouthBuild MIS Data Collection](#) tool to help you track when data needs to be collected for each DOL performance outcome.

Who Will Collect It?

Because there is so much data to collect on every student, from simple demographic data (the student’s age) to academic data (his/her reading scores) to credential attainment data (completion of an NCCER, HBI, or Construction Trades Multi-Craft Core Curriculum certificate), **collecting data cannot be the job of just one person.** For this reason, it is important to be explicit about who is collecting which data and during what time period. The **DOL YouthBuild MIS Data Collection tool** will help you do that.

Experience has shown that programs often have incomplete data because the data has fallen through the cracks. The Program Director may not have been clear with each staff person about which data elements that person had responsibility for collecting, or there may have been subsequent staff turnover. Explicit communication between Program Director and staff regarding data collection and submission is one of the key components of successful and accurate data management.

What a Difference Communication Makes

Unclear communication regarding data collection:

Program Director: “We need to make sure that we collect all the student test scores and the information on occupational skills credentials before May of this year.”

Clear, explicit communication regarding data collection:

Program Director: “Eva (GED Instructor), you will be responsible for collecting all student test scores this year. Please turn in an Excel spreadsheet with the scores by the 5th of every month to Iris (Office Manager). Along with the spreadsheet, turn in hard copies of the tests for the students’ folders.”

“John (Construction Manager), you will be responsible for collecting all occupational skills credential information this year. By the 5th of every month, turn in copies of the credentials earned the previous month to Iris for the students’ folders.”

“Iris (Office Manager/Data Entry Specialist), you will be responsible for entering this information into the DOL MIS every month by the 15th of the month.”



RESOURCES

At the beginning of each year, you should gather your staff and, using the [DOL YouthBuild MIS Data Collection](#) tool, make sure everyone is clear about which data elements they are responsible for collecting.

How Will the Information Be Collected?

How are you going to collect information? For some information, it may be helpful to have paper forms to aid in collection. You should ensure that each form has all required information. You also need to make sure that there is a management plan in place for all data collection that details how often data will be collected and who will enter it into the MIS, which is talked about in more detail in the next section. This management plan will help to prevent data omissions.

Enter

Data that you have collected about your students must then be entered in a timely manner into the DOL MIS and any other data management systems you might be using. While many staff members and staff of partner organizations may play a role in collecting information about students, you may only want a select group of staff entering data into the MIS. These staff members should have the right skill set for the task of data entry and must be properly trained to use the DOL MIS. Below are some suggested roles that could be filled by the right staff members in order to ensure accurate data entry and management in the DOL MIS:



MIS Manager

One way to assure consistent data entry and quality is to assign a single staff member to be the MIS Manager. The Program Director should ensure that someone clearly has this role, which requires Administrative user role access in the MIS. This staff member has the following responsibilities:

- keep track of any staff-wide policy decisions about the MIS (i.e., who enters and tracks data collected, etc.);
- be the primary support person for problems with the MIS and maintain a written record of problems and fixes;
- create and delete user accounts;
- conduct and lead trainings as required;
- enter data into the system occasionally (backup for the data entry staff); and
- work with YouthBuild Program director to check data and prepare reports as required.

The MIS Manager role should be written into the staff member's job description, and plans should be made to hand the role over to a new staff member should the MIS Manager leave the organization or change positions. To fulfill this role, the MIS Manager needs the following:

- strong computer skills and comfort learning new applications;
- formal training provided by the DOL MIS Helpdesk; and
- access to technical support for assistance with the system through the MIS Helpdesk.

Data Entry Staff

The end users are the people who will be entering information into the MIS and running reports on a regular basis. The responsibilities of the data entry staff are to:

- create new records and enter information according to organizational standards;
- update records;
- run reports to check data accuracy and quality; and
- communicate problems with the MIS to the MIS Manager.

To fulfill this role, the end user needs the following:

- basic computer skills (typing, mouse operations, navigating the file system, opening and closing files and programs, proficiency with basic office software);
- formal training provided by the DOL MIS Helpdesk; and
- access to technical support for assistance with the system through the MIS Helpdesk.

All staff responsible for data entry must have easy access to the data that has been collected and time built into his or her schedule to devote to data entry.

The DOL MIS is not just a reporting system. It is also a good tool for data management. In order to get the most out of the system, data entry should be done on a regular basis and not saved for the last few weeks before a report is due. The [DOL YouthBuild MIS Workplan](#) tool, found in the Tool Bench, can help you create a work plan for entering data on a regular basis.

Through the DOL TA Collaborative, you and your staff can access trainings on how to use the DOL MIS. Some of the types of support available include:

- in-person trainings on how to enter data into the MIS, two-hour Webinar overviews of the system, and in-depth reviews of QPRs with individual programs offered by the Helpdesk staff;
- occasional Webinars that go into depth on using the MIS;
- a monthly newsletter to remind program staff of important data entry deadlines and to highlight tools and tips regarding the MIS², and
- phone support through the MIS Helpdesk at 1 (866) 680-0855 or via email at missupport@youthbuild.org.

² All MIS newsletters and Webinars are archived on the Community of Practice. If you do not yet have access to the Community of Practice, email youth.build@dol.gov to request login information.

Check

All data that is collected and entered must be checked for accuracy. Staff who collect and enter data should be checking regularly (weekly for some data, monthly for other data) for errors, and time should be budgeted to review the data that has been entered for accuracy.



There are several ways to check your data:

The first system should be a “gut check.” You, as the Program Director, should review the data and ask yourself if it makes sense at the most basic level. For example, if you know that five of your students passed the GED last month but your MIS shows no certificate attainments, something is not working correctly in your data management system.

The checking process may also entail two staff sitting down together, with one staff person reading test scores aloud while the other one checks the numbers in the MIS, or you may have some other system for checking your data.

Remember that Program Directors are ultimately responsible for the accuracy of the data that is reported to DOL and used to evaluate program performance. DOL strongly recommends that Program Directors check the QPR and other management reports in the DOL MIS monthly to be sure that all data is reflected accurately. It is vital that the QPRs contain accurate data, and the best way to be sure that they do is to monitor them throughout the quarter and make changes as needed. The DOL MIS Helpdesk is available to train all Program Directors and other staff to read and understand these reports.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Advice is available from the MIS Helpdesk at 1 (866) 680-0855 or via email at missupport@youthbuild.org

Using the Data to Improve Program Performance

Leading Staff Discussions of Data

The collect, enter, and check process is only the first step of managing your data effectively. The next critical step is using data to improve program performance.

Beyond simply being a reporting requirement, a strong data management function is a powerful tool for program management, program improvement, and for telling the story of your program's success to all stakeholders in your community, to your funders, and to the young people that you serve. Understanding, using, and talking about data should be a part of life for all staff at a YouthBuild program, not just the Program Director. This section will help you get started with the work of using data effectively.



There are four key steps in using data effectively:

1. Share goals from external funders and set interim goals with staff
2. Educate staff on outcomes and how they are measured
3. Track performance regularly and use data to adjust tactics midcourse, if necessary
4. Communicate outcomes to stakeholders.

1. Share external goals and set interim goals with staff.

If you don't know where you're going, how will you get there? A key step in using your data is to begin each year with a staff meeting (including any partner organization staff who will be working with you regularly) to review the goals for the year. Review both the goals set for you by your external funders, such as DOL, and also set internal goals — some of your internal goals may even be higher than those set by your external funders.

You should begin every program year with a staff meeting devoted to reviewing all the goals (or program outcomes) you are striving for that year and how they are measured. During this annual data staff meeting (some call it an annual strategic plan meeting), lay out what one YouthBuild Program director calls "the big goals" on a white board for your staff to discuss. If the staff have a clear picture of what the program is trying to achieve, they can play a more active, intentional role in how to get there. Staff should also play a role in setting interim goals that represent steps toward achieving the program outcomes set by DOL. Staff will be more invested in achieving goals if they have a role in setting them.

Example of “the big goals” to discuss with program staff:

Anytown YouthBuild [current year] Big Goals

DOL Performance Outcomes	Sample Target Percentage	Number Goal
Number of Participants	100%	35
Placement in Employment or Education	70%	25
Literacy/Numeracy Attainment	50%	18
GED, HSD, or Occupational Skills Certificate Attainment	50%	18
Retention in Employment or Education	75%	Depends on number placed, but would be 19 if 25 are placed
Recidivism Rate	20% or less	Depends on number enrolled with arrest record
Interim Outcomes		
Attendance	85%*	N/A
Program Completion	75%*	23

**These are examples of internal goals, as these are not defined as goals by DOL.*

In addition to the above outcomes which DOL requires you to measure and report, you may have other measures that are important to you or to your other funders, such as:

- the average wage received on placement;
- the number of GEDs or HSDs distinct from each other and from the industry-recognized certificates;
- placements in registered apprenticeships, in the military, in four-year colleges or two-year colleges;
- number of service hours fulfilled and number who obtained an AmeriCorps education award or a Pell grant;
- number trained in green construction skills and number placed in green jobs.

These and other outcomes are important on many fronts, so it is likely that you will develop systems to collect, record, and analyze data in addition to that required by DOL.

After discussing and in some cases setting your program's performance goals for the year with your staff, you can have a conversation about how to reach these goals. If this is not your first year as a program, put up a chart with last year's outcomes. Have a discussion about which goals you reached and which ones you did not reach. If there are some goals you did not reach, open the discussion up to brainstorm about why you did not reach certain goals.

Work to direct the conversation to variables that you and your staff can control rather than spending too much time on aspects that are outside of the program's control.

We didn't meet this outcome... Is it under our control or not?

WHAT CAN WE CONTROL?

Be creative in thinking about what you can control and what you can't. For example, you may come to the conclusion that your students did not achieve strong gains in literacy/numeracy because they arrived hungry every morning and couldn't focus. One scenario would be to conclude that that is something outside the program's control. Another scenario would be to brainstorm about how you could provide a nutritious breakfast for your students. Programs that have provided breakfast have found that it led to an increased attendance rate.

Remember that you cannot use DOL funds or funds that you use to match your DOL funds to buy food. However, you can use your leveraged funds to provide food for your students. If your program is a charter school or affiliated with the school system in some way, you may be able to be a part of the school breakfast program.

The Tool Bench has a sample template, the [Multi-year Outcomes Tracking](#) tool, you can use to track your program's yearly performance over time. This is a useful document for funders and for staff discussions. For example, perhaps your program met all of its outcomes, except retention in employment or education. Open up a discussion about what might be happening that is leading to non-attainment of this goal. Start with how the goal is measured. Perhaps there is not an accurate understanding on the part of your staff about how/when the goal is measured and that is leading to poor performance on the outcome. If you're confident that you and your staff are measuring and reporting the data correctly for this outcome, move on to the next level of discussion:

- Why are your graduates not remaining in their placements?
- Are they leaving their jobs due to transportation issues?
- Child care problems?
- Disagreements with a supervisor or co-worker?
- Other issues?
- Were you aware of these issues and not able to help or were you not even aware of them?

Your answers to these questions may lead to different solutions to the problem.

2. Educate staff on the program outcomes you are working to achieve and how they are measured.

At the beginning of the year, in addition to reviewing your program's goals for the year, you should include a review of how each program outcome is measured. In order for staff to be able to track how young people are progressing on the various outcomes, staff must understand exactly how the outcomes are calculated. This is especially important because each outcome has a time limitation associated with it, so it is important that staff not miss the window to capture positive outcomes because they didn't understand the time limits.

For example, for a placement in employment or education to count toward your program’s placement outcome, the student must be placed for at least one day after the quarter in which he or she exits the program. A case manager who does not understand this important issue of timing might not understand the importance of finding a job opportunity for a student that graduates in March with plans to attend post-secondary education in July.

3. Track performance regularly.

Once you have set goals for the program at the beginning of the year and are confident that staff understands how each program outcome is measured, you must devote regular time at staff meetings to reviewing where the program is on meeting those goals. These updates should be a regular part of staff meetings and used as a motivational tool and work plan for staff members.

During these data discussions, the focus should be on the young people and ensuring that each young person achieves positive outcomes. Time spent looking at data reports and talking about outcomes can make staff more comfortable in the language of outcomes and address any concerns of frontline staff who may resent feeling like their success is boiled down to numbers. It is important for all staff to understand that each number in a report represents a student and his or her future.

Staff should lead the discussion about outcomes in their area. For example, the academic instructors should present the data on meeting educational outcomes, such as current progress on achieving literacy/numeracy gains and GED attainment.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

[*Using Data for Success*](#) provides data-focused activities for workforce managers to use with frontline staff.

4. Communicate outcomes to stakeholders.

Finally, you should regularly communicate your program’s outcomes to stakeholders. This includes funders, young people in your community, partners, your Board of Directors, staff, and anyone else who is interested in your program.

Communicating your outcomes to DOL is mandated by your grant agreement and is done through the QPR. Other funders will likely have outcome reports or templates that they require as a condition of funding. But don’t stop there. The youth in your community should know how many other youth have earned a GED or high school diploma and moved on to meaningful employment or college through your YouthBuild program. Your partners need to know what your program has accomplished and be appreciated for their role in those accomplishments. Your Board of Directors, too, should receive regular reports on your program’s outcomes.

An information sheet about your program, which includes outcomes for your most recent year, or better yet, outcomes for every year you’ve been in existence, should be available for anyone who visits your program.

Program Design Affects Outcomes

Understanding performance measures is not merely a matter of knowing how they are calculated but of understanding how your program design might affect these calculations. For each DOL performance outcome, there are many factors that determine how DOL measures your program's success.

As an example, let's look at the literacy/numeracy gains outcome. First, you must know that the goal is for students who tested as basic skills deficient at entry to show a gain in the area of their deficiency (either math or literacy). Then you must consider the following:



- The program only has two weeks from enrollment to ensure that each student has at least one basic skills pre-test score or the MIS will lock the youth out and prevent full enrollment of your YouthBuild program.
- Each participant's test scores can be as old as six months before the enrollment date.
- Individual gains in literacy or math must be achieved within one year of enrollment, so potentially, they could be achieved *after* the student graduates.
- The gains of students who exit unsuccessfully can *only* be counted if achieved before the exit date.

Each one of the five DOL performance measures has factors like the ones highlighted above that affect what data you capture and when you capture it. With this many factors in play, it is important to have an intentional program design for each of the performance outcomes. The **Factors and Considerations** tool in the Tool Bench will help you set up your program design for each of the five DOL performance outcomes.



RESOURCES

[Factors and Considerations tool](#)

If your program has other funders, it is likely that they have performance goals you must consider as well. It is important that you consider all of these when designing your data management systems. The framework for data management laid out in this chapter — collect, enter, check — should be easy to apply to any set of performance goals or data reporting systems, so that you are able to satisfy your internal needs and the needs of any external stakeholders to improve the performance and viability of your YouthBuild program.

Additional Considerations

Pressure to achieve certain outcomes may result in spirited discussions about “creaming,” that is, about whether programs are selecting applicants who are most likely to succeed in meeting the particular required outcomes and who face fewer obstacles than other applicants. DOL is trying to avoid this scenario and has initiated some safeguards related to this.

First, academic gains use “growth measures,” that is, the outcome measures how much the youth progresses against his or her initial assessment.

Selecting a student with a low reading score does not make the program less likely to succeed, since the student can succeed on this outcome by moving from a first grade reading level to a third, just as they can succeed by moving from an eighth grade level to a tenth grade level. Second, for students who haven't yet obtained a GED or high school diploma, the award of an industry-recognized credential will meet the measure. Of course DOL considers it important for your youth to obtain a high school credential as well, which is supported by the YouthBuild program design that allows for students to participate up to two years full-time and receive follow-up services for a third year. This should allow ample time for youth to achieve their high school credential and move on to a successful placement. The program design allows the program to stick with its enrollees until they are ready for their next step and then to support them in succeeding at that next step. Creaming isn't necessary to succeed — perseverance and dedication are!

Another challenge is missing the opportunity to capture your graduates' successes. Using the **Factors and Considerations tool** will help you understand how to make sure you are entering data into the MIS properly and, thereby, claiming credit for the success of your young people.

For example, timing the exit with the timing of placement can make a difference. Students do not have to be exited at the moment core program services are completed. Exit can and should be based on the individual and ongoing needs of the participant. Transition services can be provided until the participant is ready for exit and may include college experience, subsidized summer jobs, internships, or other activities that will help the youth focus on post-program goals. It may also be best to have the youth already connected to a post-program placement BEFORE exit to ensure successful outcomes for the youth.



Conclusion

Without data you can't tell DOL and others the successful stories of your young people and your program. And without data, you can't know if your program is on its way to meeting its goals for young people, so you can't know if midcourse corrections are needed. Managing a program without using data is like trying to drive with a blindfold on — you can't see where you're going, and it is unlikely you will get there. Managing and using data effectively is one of the primary responsibilities of a YouthBuild Program Director. Take the time you need to understand and use your data so that you can share your YouthBuild story effectively with DOL and your community.



Chapter 4: Program Culture



YouthBuild

What is Program Culture and Why is it Important?

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) recognizes that young people respond positively to YouthBuild programs with a strong program culture. Therefore, this chapter assists DOL YouthBuild programs in examining, defining, and strengthening their own program’s culture.

Program culture is the pattern of beliefs, values, rituals, relationships, and practices widely shared by a YouthBuild program’s staff and students. At its most basic level, a strong program culture reflects your program’s core values. A weak program culture does not reinforce or reflect your stated values. A strong culture is also demonstrated in the alignment between the program’s statement of values and the actions of the staff and young people.



For example, if one of your program’s core values is respect for young people, a strong program culture might reflect this in the respectful and courteous way that young people are addressed by staff and by each other. Another way this value might be reflected in a program with a strong program culture is in the way that the program organizes and uses its youth policy council; i.e., ensuring that the policy council has real decision-making responsibility, ensuring that the program director meets with the council regularly and is on time for those meetings. At a program with a weaker program culture but with a professed value of respect for young people, one might see young people being addressed disrespectfully by staff, or one might see a youth policy council with no real responsibility and with whom the program director doesn’t meet regularly.

Another indication of a strong program culture is that students are able to articulate the program’s beliefs and values even if they haven’t internalized them yet. For example, students may be able to articulate that all students in your YouthBuild program are treated with respect, even if they haven’t yet learned to fully respect themselves and their peers.

Research on YouthBuild programs¹ shows that students throughout successful YouthBuild programs describe the program in similar ways that arise from the consistency of the program culture. In myriad interviews with researchers, students report that the program is “like a family,” that the “staff care about you and make sure you succeed, and the teachers care that you really learn.”

YouthBuild programs with a strong, positive program culture can be identified through a set of shared values and qualities that permeate the program in the beliefs, values, rituals, and practices of the program.

¹ Hahn, Andrew and Leavitt, Thomas (2004). *Life After YouthBuild 900 YouthBuild Graduates Reflect on Their Lives, Dreams, and Experiences.*

Abrazaldo, Wally, et al. (2009). *Evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender Grants.* Oakland, CA. Social Policy Research Associates.

In such programs you can't escape the culture. It is there wherever you turn. For example, you may **see** the value of celebrating achievement in the colorful posters representing the values of the program, photos of students receiving awards and doing community service, copies of GED certificates, and copies of essays and other student work which celebrate student success, leadership, and service all around the building. You may **hear** the value of respect everywhere you go throughout the building in the way the students address each other and in the way the teachers address their students in the classroom. You may **hear** the value of love and caring as you witness an interaction between a counselor and a student in the hallway, or when you talk with students about what is working for them at YouthBuild and they say, "The staff here care about us, they make sure we learn, they are like family to us." You may **see** the value of accountability in the large poster-size student attendance charts posted in the common area. You may even **smell** the value of respect reflected in the cleanliness of the building. The values aren't just stated in a mission statement, they can be seen, heard, and felt.

In such a program, all the staff will be engaged in communicating values as well as setting and enforcing standards. Messages regarding what type of behavior, attitudes, and relationships are rewarded and what types are not allowed will be communicated daily, minute to minute, by what occurs on the construction site and in the classroom, in the hallways, in the morning meetings, youth policy council meetings, and staff meetings.

If you are a new DOL YouthBuild program, one of your initial tasks will be to begin to develop your program culture. Since your program culture stems from your values, you must start with your program's values. This is best done through a staff retreat. Have a retreat with your staff early on to discuss what each staff member believes the values of the program should be. Let every staff person share what they believe the values of the program should be as well as what their highest aspirations for the young people you serve are. Some of the values that have been embraced repeatedly throughout the YouthBuild network include respect, responsibility, community, knowledge, love, integrity, celebration, courage, and hard work.

After the discussion about values, you can move to a discussion about how those values will be reflected in your program's culture. What are the rituals and practices you will put in place to reinforce and reflect your program's values? It will be helpful to share with your staff examples and common elements established in other programs so that you do not have to start from scratch. It is also a key role of leadership to communicate the values of the program to new staff as well as to new students. Balancing creative input from staff with clarity from leadership is an ongoing art form!

Common YouthBuild Program Culture Elements

Each YouthBuild program develops its own program culture, stemming from that program's values. Factors that might influence a program's values and, thus, its culture, include such things as the history of the neighborhood, the type of organization running the YouthBuild program (i.e., is it run by a city agency, a school district, a community-based nonprofit, etc.), the area in which the program is located (i.e., is it in a rural area, an urban area, a Native American reservation, etc.), and other factors.



Nonetheless, there is a set of qualities that are core to all YouthBuild programs. These qualities are not easy to measure but they are the philosophical core and spirit of YouthBuild. In a successful YouthBuild program, the program components must be suffused with these qualities, and staff must be trained in the meaning of them. They are designed to provide positive experiences that are directly opposite to the previous negative experiences of YouthBuild students. The essential YouthBuild program qualities are:

1. Respect for young people

- Respect for young people's intelligence
- A level of control for young people over their immediate environment
- Real concern and action to change the conditions that have affected the young people and the people they love
- Patient caring for young people's development

2. Focus on a successful future

- Teaching of academic, employment, and social skills
- A path to future opportunity
- Heightened awareness of the present-day world and young people's important place in it

3. Strong and supportive staff

- Staff members who have overcome similar obstacles who can serve as inspiring and caring role models
- Staff who provide support for young people so that the young people can avoid, to the extent possible, adversity, and, when that is not possible, the staff support necessary to cope with adversity

4. High standards and expectations

- Meaningful and important work for both students and staff
- A firm and loving challenge for young people to stop self-destructive behavior and change negative attitudes
- An expectation that all students can succeed academically
- Respect and appreciation for physical labor

5. Strong and supportive community atmosphere

- Consistently positive values (e.g., respect, pride, caring, integrity, compassion)
- Family-like support and appreciation from peers and adults
- An understanding of the proud and unique history of their own people and respect for people of different cultural backgrounds
- Fun!

Different YouthBuild programs have expressed, modified, or elaborated on the above qualities in different ways, but there has been remarkable underlying consistency over a long period of time. YouthBuild students from all over the country usually describe their programs in remarkably similar ways.

1. Respect for Young People

Perhaps the most essential aspect of YouthBuild program culture is the emphasis on respect for young people. One of the ways in which this respect is expressed is through leadership development. Young people entering YouthBuild are not accustomed to being seen and treated as **potential** leaders with the ideas and **potential** to improve their communities. When the YouthBuild program includes them in important decision-making, elicits and respects their ideas about how to improve the program and the community in regular and systematic ways, this expression of respect surprises and brings out the best in them. Some students will eventually become permanent leaders for the program and the community, determined to give back and to help others as they have been helped. This respect for the intelligence of the students expressed by staff and directors increases the feeling of mutual respect among the students and assists in creating a positive organizational culture. The ideas of the young people about the program and the community often turn out to be extremely valuable since youth are in touch with present-day realities that may be outside the staff's awareness. This, in turn, often improves the quality of the program's policies. ***(Further information on concrete strategies for engaging young people in a leadership role in the program and their community can be found in the toolkit.)***

2. Focus on a Successful Future

The YouthBuild program culture should stress overall career and academic advancement for young adults, not just during the program but throughout their life. Through career counseling, interest inventories, and exploration of training options, students can learn about various careers and career pathways. In addition, program staff should encourage and support continuing education and training for young adults who may not have thought they were capable of entering and succeeding in higher education. Staff can assist them in obtaining financial assistance and with the application process to colleges, apprenticeship programs, or technical schools.

The increasing recognition in society of postsecondary education as a key to future workforce-earnings has resulted in many programs putting an emphasis on the students' ability to go to college, to join registered apprenticeship programs, to achieve beyond their initial expectations from day one of the program. Students may enter the program hoping for a GED, but they quickly learn that the staff believe and expect that they can go much further than that, that the GED is only the first step. The value placed on education is internalized by the students. When they go on to college, many of them will be the first in their families to do so. At the same time, programs need to explicitly value the pathways that lead into the trades, not necessarily to college, but to good paying jobs in responsible roles. All pathways to responsible adulthood are respected.

3. Strong and Supportive Staff

When asked what is different about YouthBuild, young people often answer, “The staff really cares about you.” YouthBuild students quickly see that the adult staff is committed to giving them the tools, skills, support systems, and opportunities that will enable them to define and achieve their highest aspirations. The concrete assistance given through caring and competent staff toward achieving these goals, and the caring assistance offered by staff to deal with personal obstacles, are essential to creating and building this element of the program culture.



A caring and **committed** staff clearly **committed** to student success is a key feature of high-quality youth development programs, and YouthBuild programs are known for adhering to the principles of youth development.

Another value that students frequently mention as being central to their programs is that the staff does not judge them for what they have done in the past. Staff take them for who they are now and support their aspirations for who they want to become. The past is the past. The future is the focus.

4. High Standards and Expectations

There are additional elements of program culture that reflect the need that all human beings, and especially young people, have for clarity and consistency in program structure, rules, accountability, and consequences. Ongoing high standards and expectations, believing that every young person can learn and achieve, expecting that young people will attend regularly, be on time, and act respectfully are core to implementation of this aspect of culture.

For example, the development of the “Mental Toughness” orientation, which emphasizes the need for students to step outside their comfort zone, do hard physical tasks that force them to exert themselves toward a goal, respect authority and push themselves, has shown itself to be an important component of establishing a strong program culture.

5. Strong and Supportive Community Atmosphere

The YouthBuild program culture is one in which young people quickly feel safe, respected, and cared about. When asked why YouthBuild worked for them, YouthBuild students and graduates invariably say, “Because they cared about me, they cared enough to ask me what I wanted to become and helped me make the right choices and follow the right path to my own goals.”

Through the community service element of YouthBuild, young people often deepen their sense of connection to the larger community in which they live. YouthBuild students are often heard to say things like, “Building these houses for low-income people allowed me to give back to my community. I had spent so much time in my life tearing down my community that it feels good to give back to it.” This “giving back” allows young people to become an integral part of the larger community.

Additional YouthBuild Program Culture Elements

The increasing value placed by society, by local YouthBuild programs, and by DOL on energy efficiency and renewable energy has led to the emergence of a strong new set of values in many programs, those of preparing youth for employment in a green economy and protecting the environment.

In addition, many programs have explicitly developed a value of multi-culturalism and bilingualism, reflecting the populations that they serve and the need to explicitly create bridges and mutual appreciation.



Building a Strong Program Culture

Establishing and communicating the program's values and culture is an intentional activity, beginning with initial contact with students, continuing through orientation, the program year, and through graduation and follow-up services and opportunities. It is the ongoing responsibility of the organization's leadership.

It will take many forms, starting with selection and orientation of staff, and continuing with ongoing discussions with staff and with students.

YouthBuild staff, ideally, see individuals in the program as untapped resources whose ideas and vision for a better world are important and whose development as leaders and role models is essential for the well-being of the community, as well as for the fulfillment of their own potential. Young people notice immediately whether their potential is valued or not. This may well be part of why they have not succeeded in more traditional educational and social service environments. This "youth development" approach helps students become competent adults by focusing on their positive characteristics rather than their deficits. YouthBuild programs stressing youth development strategies can assist students in building internal and external assets that enable them to develop the resilience and strengths necessary to transition into adulthood and recognize their potential for contributing to their community.

When staff communicate a belief that everyone has an opportunity and an obligation to make a difference for other people, that everyone can "take responsibility to make things go right for oneself, one's family, program (or workplace or school), and community," and when they demonstrate this viewpoint through their own behavior, then students become motivated to move in this direction. When the students are surrounded by the language and expectation of leadership responsibility, they internalize it.

The sections below provide some suggestions on building your own strong program culture.

Community-Wide Meetings and Events

- **Morning meetings**

Just as athletes don't show up to a race or a big game without warming up and stretching, YouthBuild students shouldn't be expected to start the day – a day full of mental challenges – without an adequate warm-up. For this reason, morning meetings are scheduled at many YouthBuild programs. Morning meetings are meant to be an enjoyable group process to "get the day off on the right foot" and reaffirm program values and culture. Individuals may share important events they experienced since leaving YouthBuild the day before. They may appreciate each other for achievements of the previous day. They may need to address a problem from the day before. They may read and reflect on an inspirational quote, tell appropriate jokes, sing a song, or pose a riddle. People may share information about the upcoming day. Sometimes physical exercises are included. The meetings often conclude with two processes. The first is to have everyone say what positive objective they have for the rest of the day, such as a specific task to be completed or skill mastered. The final activity is often a group recitation of a daily pledge, such as that presented on page 11.



- **Rituals, rites of passage, and community celebrations**

One of the things that makes the YouthBuild program unique is its commitment to fostering a sense of community and a positive peer group among its participants. Values transformation takes place as part of the personal transformation process. The new values need to be reinforced through peer group acceptance and through various forms of repetition endorsed by the most respected adults in the program. Programs have developed various forms of ritual and rites of passage that reinforce positive values and strengthen the bonds among students and with the staff.

Community celebrations of individual and group accomplishments are a wonderful way of fostering the sense of closeness and friendship that the YouthBuild program is meant to create among its participants.

ONE PROGRAM DIRECTOR DESCRIBES THE USE OF RITUAL AS “RITES OF PASSAGE” AT THE END OF ORIENTATION:

When students complete the mental toughness two-week orientation period, we believe that it is important to acknowledge their accomplishment. We do a rite of passage at the end of the orientation to give them something very special to participate in.

We know that real successful transformations sometimes take years. The challenges our young people face are scary. So much of the life we explain to them is absolutely foreign to them. Like most people in society, they fear change, even when they know that changes are good for them. They have to learn to feel fear and overcome fear. Once they experience feeling fear, meeting the challenge, and overcoming the fear anyway, their self-esteem is boosted tremendously. Once they learn to successfully navigate the first set of challenges they feel empowered and look for new challenges to overcome.

The reason for the rite of passage is recognition of success. Successful completion of the Mental Toughness program is the first of many challenges. The young people learn that if they apply themselves the same as they did in Mental Toughness, they will be successful. We believe that it is critical that the young people see accomplishment as a “group accomplishment,” not only as an individual accomplishment—an accomplishment that serves to further connect them in positive ways to the community. We teach them to work to try to build something in the community and to stick together as a community.

During the ceremony, they are all asked to hold hands. This signifies that accomplishment can come from working together. The ceremony is accomplished with the lights down low, holding hands in a circle. Drumming is going on outside the circle. Speakers’ voices are low and poetic, perhaps reading a piece of poetry pertaining to what they have accomplished as a group. We give out African necklaces, placed around each student’s neck along with a personal message for each individual marking his or her particular success and transformation. This has been a tremendously successful event for students.

- Community service and civic engagement events**

Beyond building housing, events that serve the community in other ways build community, pride, and positive values. These events may include taking the whole program to witness a presidential or mayoral debate, bringing with them their own questions and solutions; inviting a corporate sponsor to participate in service for a day; traveling to the state house to give their opinions to their elected officials; building ramps for disabled people; holding a fair for neighborhood children—the list is endless. A wonderful learning and leadership opportunity for young people is to have young people identify and design service projects for their community.



- Regular award ceremonies, cheers from peers**

Regular award ceremonies throughout the program’s progression are extremely important. Many programs hold them at least every two months to acknowledge high attendance, raises, completion of parts of the academic program, GED achievement, excellent work in leadership roles, and any other progress of note. Applause, praise, hugs, and cheers from peers make a difference. Being noticed and acknowledged by the staff is also highly valued.

Including parents and other external community members (local elected officials, journalists, probation officers, etc.) in celebrations of students’ successes provides an extra boost. Many of the students have received a great deal of disapproval from parents and others in the community; important healing and reinforcement of the new positive identity comes from parents’ and grandparents’ deep pride in a student’s graduation or a letter of congratulations from an elected official or the chairman of the board of directors.

Celebrations do not have to be for program-based events only. If a student becomes engaged, gives birth, has a positive anniversary (e.g., marriage, sobriety) or a special event, it can be used for a celebration. In addition to the good this does for the program’s sense of closeness, it makes the student feel special. The YouthBuild program is about making sure that young people feel their own worth. This feeling gives the energy for the personal transformation that the program is helping them make.

Program Pledge

Another very useful element in establishing program culture is the development and daily recitation of the program pledge. Most YouthBuild programs have developed their own pledges around the themes of rebuilding the community, cooperation, leadership, self-improvement, respect, responsibility, knowledge, caring, justice, equality, and dignity—in one wording or another.

Once it has been adopted, students learn this pledge, as do staff, and recite it daily at the morning meeting, steadily internalizing these values. Here are examples of two different YouthBuild pledges:



- **From the Youth Action Program in Harlem in New York:**

We, the members of the Youth Action YouthBuild Program, pledge that we are working together:

To improve and rebuild our community,

To relate to each other in cooperative ways,

To achieve our personal and professional goals,

To develop our potential as leaders,

To educate and improve ourselves and help others along the way,

To respect our peers, neighbors, and all life; and

To be part of a great movement for justice, equality, and peace.

All this we do with love and dignity.

- **From YouthBuild McClean County in Illinois:**

I am YouthBuild.

I proudly accept the challenge YouthBuild offers me to transform my life through education, leadership development, construction of affordable housing, and service to my community. I gladly receive the opportunity to develop my independence, work history, and personal integrity. I make this pledge now to myself and to the world.

I am YouthBuild.

I Do Make the Difference

Students memorize and recite their pledge at morning meetings or other gatherings. When they go on speaking engagements, they recite it as a group, making a powerful impression on listeners.

Mapping Your Values to Your Practices

The values of a program are the backbone of its culture. How do you know whether what you believe to be your program’s values is known by others on staff? by students? Students and staff should be able to tell you what your program’s values are. You must develop strategies for making sure you are consistent with your values and reinforce them in all components of the program.

One approach to checking the strength of your program’s culture is to give staff and students the opportunity to evaluate your program through anonymous questionnaires. Ask how students feel about the program. Do they feel respected? Are teachers prepared for class and on time for class? Is the work they are doing at the construction site meaningful? Ask how the staff feels about the program. Does the staff have ideas for how to improve the program? Does the staff feel the actions of the program are aligned with its values? These are just some ideas to get you started.

Another exercise you can do is to intentionally map the beliefs, rituals, and practices of your program to your program’s values. Use the template below with your staff to do a self-check on how your program’s activities align with your values. In a staff meeting, list the values that you all believe to be your program’s values. Then fill in the boxes to the right as a group. The top row is an example. Are there some values that don’t have many practices associated with them? Is there disagreement among staff about whether your program really does engage in the practices you think you are engaging in?

Developing a Strong Program Culture			
Values	Beliefs	Rituals	Practices
High expectations for academic achievement	All students are capable of learning	Community wide celebrations of academic achievements such as grade-level increases, passing GED practice test, passing GED or obtaining high school diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Teachers are prepared for class -- Students are expected to be prepared for class -- All students are expected to participate in class -- Student work is displayed around the facility -- Plaques or other items celebrating GEDs and diplomas
Fill in your own			

Closing

Program culture is an organizing activity from which all decisions and activities flow. There has to be alignment between the stated culture and the day-to-day operations of the program. If done well, this will permeate every aspect of the program—you will see it, hear it, feel it . . . even smell it! Having a strong program culture does not just happen. It is something you build intentionally and pay attention to day in and day out.

Sometimes program culture can best be expressed by a song, a picture, a poem . . .

Imagine a child captured in his rage, anger,
Violence, it seems to be the only way.
When he feels down... it's as if no one's around.
When the world closes in on him,
He only breaks down.
To live in a world where ignorance nourishes a baby,
Death is given by the handful,
And sanity seems to be crazy,
Searching and searching.
It seems to never end.
For what, no one knows until it's found, my friends.
That's why I'm glad YouthBuild is made of family and friends.
In an unstable world it gives me stability.
YouthBuild, my extended family.
I'll love you until infinity.
This infinite love—the exact opposite of violence and despair—is waiting in the streets of Harlem and Roxbury, in the backwoods of West Virginia and Maine, and in every low-income community we have touched. It rises with awesome predictability and passion whenever caring and opportunity replaces emptiness and terror on those streets.

— *Anonymous YouthBuild student*

Chapter 5: Program Integration

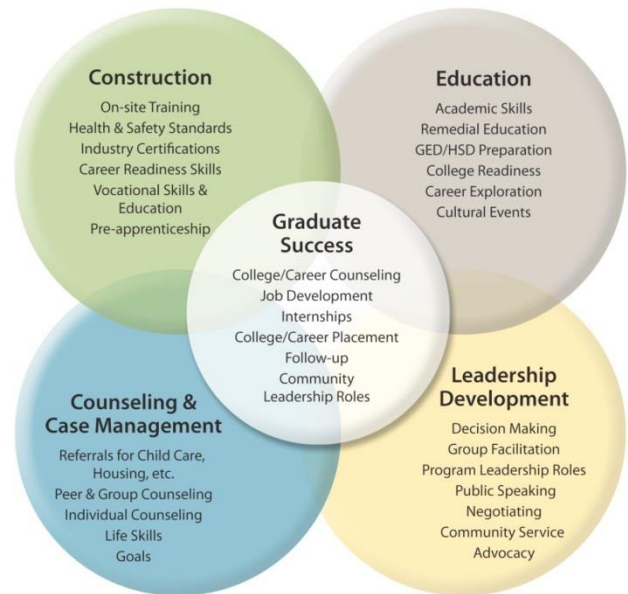


YouthBuild

What is Program Integration?

Program integration means that young people in the program experience YouthBuild as a smoothly running, complete environment in which they can learn, feel valued and cared for, make good decisions, and grow in their self-development, knowledge, skills and leadership. In a well-integrated program, all staff and all components (i.e. education, construction, counseling/case management, leadership, and job development) are working together toward a set of common goals for students. Program integration provides youth with learning opportunities that are relevant to their lives and more closely aligned with how the real world works.

YouthBuild programs operate most effectively when all program elements work together as a comprehensive whole, each reinforcing and supporting the work of the others. For example, the academic piece supports the construction training element and vice versa. Similarly, the elements of job readiness, youth leadership, and counseling/case management should support and reinforce the academic and construction training parts of the program. Successful program integration is a reflection of the core beliefs and goals shared by the entire YouthBuild staff. Young people respond positively to YouthBuild programs with strong systems of program component integration.



Sometimes it seems that there are an overwhelming number of things to do to make a YouthBuild program run smoothly. But whether we are in the classroom, on the worksite, in a Youth Policy Committee or staff meeting, there are a few key processes that always help create the conditions in which groups of people do their best thinking, learning, or decision-making. This chapter will assist DOL YouthBuild programs strengthen their program’s component integration.

The Foundation for Successful Program Integration

The foundation for successful program integration is a set of core beliefs and common goals that are supported by all YouthBuild staff members. As we saw in the last chapter on Program Culture, the common goals should be based on the staff's core beliefs about student success and shared by all staff. For program integration to be successful, these goals should include measurable objectives and competencies that are openly shared with students and consistently communicated by all the staff.

GETTING STARTED

Some quick ideas to get your YouthBuild program started on the road to program integration.

- ❖ Have a staff retreat where staff state their beliefs about the YouthBuild program and students. (See Chapter Four on Developing Program Culture.)
- ❖ Discuss how those beliefs translate into concrete goals and how each YouthBuild component plays a role in reaching those goals.
- ❖ Brainstorm on two or three things that could be easily integrated right away.
- ❖ Set up a monthly “walk in my shoes” day where staff, who may not work closely together, shadow each other for a day to learn about the other person’s daily responsibilities and the accompanying rewards and challenges.

Activities for Integrating Your Program

Integrating your YouthBuild program so that it is a coherent program, with staff and students working together toward the same goals based on shared beliefs, does not happen automatically. As with developing a strong program culture, it is an intentional activity.

As mentioned earlier, the foundation of program integration is clarity about beliefs and goals. Chapter Four discusses how this can be started at a staff retreat or meeting where staff state their beliefs about the YouthBuild program and students. In addition, you will want to talk about the different roles and responsibilities of staff as well as ways to communicate effectively.



Understanding Staff Roles

An important aspect of a well-integrated YouthBuild program is regular communication and mutual respect and understanding for the roles of all staff. At times, YouthBuild staff in different components of the program can become segmented and fall into the trap of not respecting or appreciating the work of the “other.” Sometimes staff may not fully understand what other staff do. For example, there may be a perception on the part of construction staff that the counselors’ jobs are “soft” or easy because all they do is sit behind a desk and talk to students with no hard deadlines to meet. Counselors may have a perception that construction staff do not understand or empathize with the problems that students may have and are focused solely on housing production schedules. This is just one example. Similar misperceptions may be apparent between teaching staff and construction staff, between job developers and counseling staff, etc. Take a minute to think about other misconceptions about roles that may exist among staff members.

There are a number of ways to help break down these stereotypes or misperceptions. One of the easiest is to increase contact and appreciation for one another's roles by providing opportunities for staff to "walk in each other's shoes." Counselors can spend one day a week or one day a month on the construction site meeting with students and even doing some construction work. This is an effective way to build camaraderie among staff and for students and construction staff to know that the counselors fully appreciate how tough it can be to work on the construction site. Similarly, counselors can meet with the construction staff to do a specific training on topics such as developing good listening skills, conflict resolution, what to do if a student talks about suicide, etc. The counseling staff can ask for suggestions from the construction staff for helping certain students with difficult problems, thereby demonstrating their respect for the construction staff's understanding of students and their challenges.



These activities can go a long way towards building appreciation and respect for one another's work, and especially how that work fits into helping students achieve their goals and meeting the overall goals of the program. Your staff will undoubtedly come up with other ideas for ways to learn about each other's roles.

Once you have accomplished this, your program is ready to begin thinking about how program integration can occur. For example, how might leadership development activities be built into and reinforced in all aspects of your program?

Let's talk about a few possible examples that may help you as you begin to brainstorm:

One of your program's core beliefs might be that all students are capable of learning. From that belief, one of your program goals might be that all of your graduates will be *accepted* into college. Now keep in mind that this is not the same goal as having all graduates *attend* college. Some graduates may choose to work after graduation rather than attend college. However, knowing that they have been accepted to college, should they choose to attend at a later date, has a substantial positive impact on their future decision to attend college.



So, how can this belief and goal be integrated into your program? Take a few minutes to jot down some ideas and then go to [Getting Started With Program Integration](#) to see some of our suggestions:

[See some ideas on the next page]

Ideas for Program Integration, using Acceptance Into College as an Example

1. Posters from colleges are posted around your building.
2. As part of English class, students write a personal statement which can be used for the college application process.
3. Youth Leadership Council plans a visit to a college.
4. Construction supervisor reviews other occupations that are construction-related but require additional education (e.g., drafting, interior design, project management).
5. As part of math class, youth learn how to complete an income tax withholding form and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is the form you must complete to determine if you qualify for any federal financial aid for college – filling out forms is an important part of being an adult!
6. As part of instruction on technology, youth visit the following websites to look at careers, the salaries they pay, and the education they require:
 - <http://www.myfuture.com/>
 - <http://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/ExploreCareers.aspx>
 - <http://www.mynextmove.org/>
 - There are many others that your young people can find by exploring the Internet.



What are some other components of your program that could be easily integrated? Take a few minutes to jot down some ideas and then go to the [Getting Started With Program Integration](#) to see some of our suggestions:

[See some ideas on the next page]

Additional Program Integration Ideas

- Community service learning and academics and leadership
- Construction and math skills
- Construction and leadership
- OSHA training and CPR linked to health classes
- History and voter registration
- Substance abuse prevention and health instruction
- Placement in employment connected to use of technology to find open positions and trips to the One-Stop Center
- Public speaking skills linked to youth leadership

Common Planning Time as a Tool for Program Integration

One of the most important tools for integrating your program is common planning time. This planning time provides an opportunity for all staff to come together to work toward common goals, plan collaborative activities and lessons, and discuss individual students and their current successes and challenges. It is also an opportunity to work together to ensure that standards of behavior are enforced consistently across all components of the program and that staff are alerted to issues that various students may be facing at any given point in time. Common planning time ensures that students experience the YouthBuild program as a complete whole, not a series of disjointed services. In this way, common planning time can create a YouthBuild program that is more than the sum of its parts.



Common planning time is especially important so that staff can collaborate on curricula and lesson plans across components. Staff need regularly scheduled time to brainstorm, gather materials, plan collaborative activities, evaluate lessons, and plan anew after the evaluation. For example, construction staff and academic staff must have time to plan the content of collaborative units and decide who will be responsible for each lesson. After collaborative units, staff should review student progress, review the success of activities together, and plan for the future based on their evaluations of the past. This holds true for other staff teams such as case managers and construction staff, academic teachers and job developers, etc.



RESOURCES

For more information on Interdisciplinary Curricula, see page 12.

Case Conferencing as a Tool for Program Integration

Another effective tool for program integration is case conferencing. Case conferencing is regular, weekly or bi-weekly, conversations that staff have about each individual student. It can be based on the student’s own “Life Plan” or Individual Development Plan (IDP) that will have been developed with the counselor/case manager as a statement of the student’s goals and objectives. The staff then unites around helping the student achieve those self-defined goals. One of the features of programs with good outcomes is the ability to have a real-time understanding of the accomplishments and barriers of each student and to build collective commitment to his/her goals.



Case conferencing promotes program integration by facilitating alignment among the staff around the youth. Each staff person may have a point of view about how each individual student is progressing through the program and toward his/her goals. Case conferencing provides an opportunity for staff to share data about students and clarify their collective intention towards the students’ development. Case conferencing also assists the program in maximizing its leverage to promote personal change. This provides a meaningful experience for each student.

There are several preconditions for case conferencing that are also preconditions for program integration:

- **Staff must have mutual respect for one another.** They may not always agree, and they may interpret the behaviors of students in different ways. However, they need to listen to each other and describe exactly what they are experiencing in relation to each student. Descriptive discussion builds shared meaning, and, of course, careful listening builds understanding among staff.
- **As mentioned before, the program must be clear on what its core beliefs about student success are.** These have to be openly shared with the students and consistently communicated by all the staff.
- **The program must be explicit about turning the program’s core beliefs about student success into competencies** (What does the program believe is essential for student success in the world? What set of beliefs is the program promoting with students?).
- **Staff expects that each student’s behavior can change.** This belief is a critical part of creating a transformational environment where students can develop.



RESOURCES

For more information on case conferencing, see the [Case Conference Protocol](#) tool.

TO DO WITH YOUR STAFF



- Assign staff to team teach one or more units a year to encourage cross-collaboration, or have staff “trade jobs” to teach a specific day or week’s material.
- Have staff present at a staff meeting how, in their component of YouthBuild, students are working toward each of the goals you have identified for your program and for your students.

The Physical Environment

Another element of a program that can contribute to successful program integration is the program’s physical environment. For example, a program that has adequate physical space to run all of its elements (besides the worksite) from the same location and have its staff located together is likely to find that program integration comes more easily. Even the layout of the building itself can contribute to program integration if it does not partition people off into “silos.”



In addition, posters, signs, reading material about colleges, future careers, vocabulary words, etc. should adorn the space. Reading material should be everywhere and in a variety of formats. Newspapers, magazines, books should fill not just the classroom but also be in the lobby, the lunchroom, etc. The building should reflect the beliefs of the staff about the students’ ability to achieve success and how knowledge from all facets of the program are integrated.

Community Service and Leadership as Tools for Program Integration

Leadership Development is one of the five components of YouthBuild and should be woven into all elements of a DOL YouthBuild program. In addition, all YouthBuild programs should have a leadership policy committee made up of current students. The policy committee and leadership component provide additional means through which your YouthBuild program can be integrated. For example, if your program has a set of leadership competencies that students are expected to master before completing the program, these competencies will likely cross through all the YouthBuild components – construction training, academics, case management, and job development. Assisting students in mastering these competencies and documenting that mastery will require an emphasis on leadership from all YouthBuild staff and communication among staff (during case conferences, for example) on how each student is doing on the competencies.



RESOURCES

For more information on integrating leadership development into all elements of your program, see the *Leadership Development YouthBuild Program Manual* at <https://youthbuild.workforcegps.org/resources/2014/08/21/10/08/leadership-development-at-a-youthbuild-program>

All YouthBuild programs engage in community service through the rehabilitation of low-income or transitional housing in their communities. Many programs also engage in additional community service projects, such as tutoring elementary school children, building or cleaning up playgrounds, or doing home repairs for senior citizens. These community service projects can be another tool for program integration.

Usually, all staff are involved in the community service projects, so this can be a way to incorporate learning into the projects. For example, by having students choose and design community service projects, students will be able to develop and practice reading, research, and communications skills as they investigate various projects. This might be done with guidance from the case manager. Once the project is chosen, the academic instructor may be able to explicitly point out to the youth how they are using math, writing, or reading skills to prepare for and implement the project. If the community service project involves construction, the construction team will be involved in the planning and preparation for the project and can incorporate that work into the learning as well. Job developers can work with each student to describe what types of community service activities they have done and how to best describe those activities and the skills they demonstrate on their resumes, as well as how to discuss them in a job interview. The fact that all staff and all students are involved in community service projects makes these projects excellent tools for program integration.



Below is an example of how one YouthBuild program used a community service project as a means to integrate various program components.

Beautifying Our Community

Here is an example of how a YouthBuild program used a recent community service project to strengthen and integrate all of its five components. The project involved affixing large wooden panels to a chain link fence around a vacant lot and painting murals on the wooden panels.

A local community organization approached the YouthBuild program about taking a leadership role in the mural project. The community organization had hired a muralist to work with the YouthBuild students and others in drawing and painting the murals.



Leadership Development – The Youth Policy Council and program director met with the leader of the community group to hear the details about the project and what was being asked of the YouthBuild program. As a group, they decided that the YouthBuild program should participate in the project.



Construction – The construction manager worked with students to measure the chain link fences, order the materials, and affix the panels to the chain link fence.



Academics - The academic instructors worked with the students to research the history of the various personalities who appeared on the murals and what their respective roles in the history of the community were.



Counseling/Case Management – The case manager visited the site twice a week to meet with individual students about challenges they were having in their lives at that time, such as child care challenges, health care issues, etc.



Graduate Success – The job developer worked with the students to translate the work they did on the murals into concrete activities and skills that could be listed on their resumes and worked with them on how to describe the mural project in job interviews as an example of leadership.

Strengthening Program Integration Through Project-Based Learning, Theme-Based Learning, and Interdisciplinary Curricula

Although this chapter isn't about education, YouthBuild's unique blend of construction training and academic instruction make it a perfect environment to utilize various experiential or hands-on teaching methodologies while integrating various components of the program. In addition to being a way to strengthen program integration, these types of activities also help our youth become successful learners by presenting instruction in a non-traditional way and making learning relevant to their lives.

Project-Based Learning¹

One effective way to increase YouthBuild program integration is through Project-Based Learning (PBL). PBL organizes learning around projects. A project involves a number of activities leading to an end point and resulting in a product or presentation. Simply doing a project does not guarantee that learning is taking place. In order to ensure that learning is taking place, projects need to be carefully selected and designed to cover the content needed. As with other approaches discussed in this chapter, PBL requires an investment in staff common planning time. PBL is a natural fit between learning that takes place on the worksite and learning that takes place in the classroom.

PBL begins with a real problem or issue that can be addressed through a project. YouthBuild students can identify the problem or issue from the:

- **School** (e.g., issues the students want to address, new programs the students want)
- **Content area** (e.g., real-life applications of concepts being covered)
- **Worksite** (green construction or energy efficiency lend themselves to science and math projects in the classroom)
- **Community** (e.g., ideas from the local newspaper or from students' experiences might be addressed through community service learning and can become a project that connects all academic disciplines)

After identifying the problem, students develop an "essential question" – a large, important question that frames the problem and focuses the students. Finally, the students, with adult support, identify a set of activities and tasks that will lead them through addressing the essential question, learning the desired content, and coming up with a final product. Effective PBL includes as much student involvement in and ownership of each of the elements of learning as possible.

By its nature, PBL promotes program integration because the "essential questions" that students work to answer don't fit neatly into one box or component of YouthBuild. Students' work will likely need support from staff across YouthBuild components.

What types of projects can you think of that might reinforce the learning that takes place on the worksite with the learning that takes place in the classroom?

¹ The Project-Based learning section was adapted from materials presented by William Diehl at the DOL YouthBuild Learning Exchange held in Chicago, Illinois, May 25-27, 2010.



RESOURCES

For more information and ideas see the [Project-Based Learning Modules](#).

Here are some additional suggestions for incorporating PBL into your YouthBuild program:

- There should be a cross-walk between the project activities and the YouthBuild competencies or content standards being covered.
- The project should be finite and result in a tangible, useful product, outcome, or presentation.
- The final product (this could be a presentation, written paper, video, dramatic performance, invention, scale model replica, etc.) should address the question and demonstrate the learning that took place.
- Assessment must be built into the activities, the process, and the final product.
- Expectations regarding accomplishments, outcomes, and academic skills or competencies to be mastered should be made clear in advance.
- Projects usually include some combination of group and individual work.
- Reflection should be incorporated into the work on a regular basis; students reflect on what they are doing, what they are learning, and where else in their lives they might use these skills.
- Projects may be best driven by a “workplan” (devised by the student with teacher or other facilitation).

Used effectively, PBL can be an effective means of program integration, which increases not only student learning but YouthBuild outcomes across the board.

Theme-Based Curricula

In traditional schools, students learn the disciplines in separate and discrete (usually 50-minute-long) blocks. Social studies has nothing to do with science; geometry and language arts don't interact. But in real life, in the workplace and at home, we draw on the underlying concepts of the disciplines in interrelated ways to address real problems. YouthBuild programs have the flexibility to engage students in learning skills through several disciplines at once.



Students have real questions about their lives, societies, neighborhoods, and their futures. These questions can inform the learning that takes place at a YouthBuild program and can make learning more relevant and engaging for youth who may not have been successful in traditional academic environments. In planning the curriculum, you can choose themes of study that focus discrete skills learning on a particular topic. You can choose topics that are interesting to students, relevant to their life experiences, broad enough to encompass information related to all of the YouthBuild components, and accessible enough to make it possible to find a wide variety of multi-level learning materials.

To develop a theme-based curriculum, take time with students and staff to brainstorm themes that address the questions students most often ask and that serve program goals.

Possible themes to consider include:

- The Local Community
- African-American History and Culture
- Latino History and Culture
- Housing
- Careers
- Who I Am: Finding Personal Identity
- Money: Where it Comes From, What It Means
- Expressing Yourself: The Arts
- Communication
- Health and Safety
- Healthy Relationships
- Family and Parenting
- Problem Solving
- Negotiating

The themes you choose can be a starting point for building a cross-disciplinary curriculum.

Interdisciplinary Curricula

Various *interdisciplinary curricula* can be designed as collaborative efforts among the academic, leadership, job/college readiness, and construction components of the program. In this model, all components of the program or several of the components work together to teach different aspects of the same goal; for example, *the acquisition of competencies that will prepare students for successful participation in the world*. The underlying competencies that you want your students to achieve can be taught in a number of ways that cut across subject areas. As a staff, look at the competencies you have identified as learning objectives and discuss how they can be fostered in the various subject areas; explore how reading, writing, math, and GED or high school diploma preparation study skills can be integrated into construction training, leadership, job/college readiness, and cultural history classes.

Below are some examples to get you started:



The Integration of Writing Skills

Writing skills can be integrated into the course content in a way that demonstrates to students that writing is a tool for expressing ideas and gathering and communicating information. For example, students can be asked to *reflect in writing* about the skills they have learned on the construction site; they may *fill out forms or applications* in which they need to describe construction-related experiences or skills; they may be asked to *write instructions* for doing demolition, mixing cement, or framing a wall; they may *interview a tradesperson* about the skills needed to perform a particular job, then present the written interview to the class. They may *write questions* before meeting a speaker or visiting a construction site or learning a new skill. They may *write minutes* of a meeting, *write an agenda*, *write articles* for the program newsletter, or *write letters* to the editor. Students come to see writing not as a separate academic exercise, but as an essential life skill.



The Integration of Reading Skills

Reading skills can be similarly integrated. Teachers and instructors should make every attempt to use clear, well-written reading materials to present information rather than rely on lecture or demonstration alone. They can use a variety of handouts and worksheets accessible to low-level and high-level readers. Students learn during the course of study that reading well enhances and supports good performance on the job, such as:

- Students learn that leaders need to *read rules* in order to run a meeting.
- Construction workers need to *read instructions* for mixing a bag of mortar or operating a screw gun.
- Construction workers need to *read warning labels* on products.
- Students may *read a variety of reference materials* about jobs they are interested in, in order to present the information to the class or pursue a particular trade.
- Students may *read and follow instructions other students have written*, checking them for clarity and correctness.
- Students may *read newspapers and periodicals* to present information on current events and local and national issues in social studies class.

- Students may *read a driver's manual* to achieve a goal.
- Students may *read children's books* to teach their children.
- Students may *read poetry or personal histories* in order to get more information about the work world and the issues they will confront.
- Students may *read biographies* in order to understand the history of their people.
- Students may *read the instructions* for a board or video game.
- Students may also *read construction blueprints and construction curricula* to be able to take leadership on the worksite and prepare themselves for the possibility of work in the construction field.

As students become better readers and more aware of the relationship between reading, work, and leadership, they will become more independent and more capable of seeking information that is beneficial to them. They will have more control of their work lives and will not be easily manipulated.



The Integration of Math Skills

Mathematical thinking is essential to living fully in the world and is especially important in construction. Students need to be introduced not only to measurements, the use of a ruler, and formulas for finding area and perimeter, but also to the logic of estimation and calculation. Students should be given opportunities to think mathematically about common problems that occur in daily life and in the life of a tradesperson. Students should be guided toward understanding what they need to do in a given situation, and what tools will be needed to solve the problem. Examples of this are estimating the amount of sheetrock needed to cover a wall, the amount of time it will take to do a job, whether or not a paycheck is accurate, how to figure a restaurant bill, which price for a material is more reasonable, and whether someone else's estimate is reasonable. Students need to be acquainted with "math language," the standard terms used in daily life to figure, order, save, and spend.



Learning Games

A less formal way of integrating learning in your program is to use learning games such as trivia quizzes, riddles, math puzzles, ethical dilemmas, spelling competitions, physics demonstrations, guessing games, and stories. These games can become an important teaching tool because they convey different kinds of information simultaneously. Games teach students that hard work can be fun while helping to keep the atmosphere in the program lighthearted. They also enable the staff to present information repeatedly in different ways to reinforce the students' learning. From a theoretical standpoint, games allow instructors to teach students who have different learning styles. Most importantly, learning games teach that learning can be fun.

Integrating On-Site Construction Training and Academics

One of the easiest means of integrating your YouthBuild program is the integration of the construction training component with the academic component. These two components are filled with opportunities for integration. Teachers and construction trainers should meet at least monthly to review their upcoming plans for integration, including planning collaborative activities, developing lesson plans, and, gathering materials.

The construction training component of YouthBuild can provide and reinforce a practical application for many of the social and academic disciplines that are also a part of the YouthBuild program. Math, reading, writing, history, sociology, public speaking, and research are a few of the areas that can be integrated into construction training and presented in a way that is relevant to students.

Math

There is a fundamental correlation between math and construction. Students need to understand fractions in order to read a tape measure and to accurately mark to length studs, drywall, and other materials; to determine the areas of floors, walls, and roofs and the volume of foundations. Formulas need to be determined for estimating materials, diagonal measurements of walls and floors need to be compared and adjusted to be square, and the cost of the job in materials and labor needs to be monitored and compared to a budget. Presenting lessons in a way that incorporates various methods of presentation (lecture, hands-on identification, videos, handouts) and visits to construction sites in progress can help the students understand these concepts.

Reading and Writing

Reading comprehension and composition are critical skills that are easily integrated into construction training. For example, selecting a “dream house” from various periodicals and describing why it was selected and what design principles it incorporates or, following a lesson on the nature and function of design, can motivate and provide a realistic application of design principles. Vocational lessons that incorporate handouts can be used to generate vocabulary lists and additional questions that are based on real applications.

Incorporate reading opportunities by having students:

- Read diagrams, instructions, ingredients, and narrative descriptions
- Use their own student writing as text for the class
- Refer to wall charts, posters, or reference books to get information

Incorporate writing opportunities by having students:

- Write instructions, ingredients, and narrative descriptions
- Create wall charts and posters to use for reference
- Write quizzes and tests for other students
- Interview workers about their jobs and write a report on their findings

Writing in personal journals can be an excellent way for students to integrate and reflect on their learning. Many programs establish a time each day for students to write entries in their personal journals about the day’s activities and events. Journals can assist students in documenting the skills they are learning on the construction site and can also provide raw material to develop further in a classroom writing class. Teachers and counselors can work with students to use journal entries as information for self evaluation, and many programs use personal journals as a log of individual development that gives students a record of their achievements.

History and Sociology

Studying the history of a neighborhood or of a building the students are working on is an excellent way to use project-based learning techniques in the integration of academics and construction. For example, with effective planning, the entire staff can develop lesson plans that relate to the history of the construction site and integrate skills from many different disciplines.

Students can begin by conducting a historical “inventory” of the neighborhood: counting and categorizing buildings, businesses, inhabitants and systems and reading about the history of the area. At the same time, the construction trainers can work with students on analyzing the architectural elements of the neighborhood’s buildings. As the construction planning progresses, the students can learn the elements of project management that involve budgeting, proposal writing, real estate financing, and negotiation. A local history professor can be brought into the program as a guest speaker to discuss with the students how their rehabilitation of the building is playing a role in the history of the neighborhood. With project-based learning, individual students and groups of students can create multi-media exhibits using photos, writings, drawings, models of buildings, maps, performances, and videos that incorporate and document their learning across several disciplines.

Public Speaking

Visiting construction sites around the area can provide a tremendous learning opportunity. Divide a large group into smaller groups of three or four students and have them be responsible for finding the answers to questions specific to the site. Having the groups present their findings to the larger group for verification will reinforce their findings and build oral presentation skills.

Another way to build in oral presentation skills when integrating construction training and academics is to have students present to the academic classroom or to their colleagues on the worksite the information they gathered through their study of the history and sociology of the neighborhood in which they are working.

Students can also serve as tour guides and presenters when visitors come to the construction site, explaining the work that the students have done to date, work remaining to be done, who will occupy the building when it is done, and how they themselves feel about being a part of the work. Similarly, visitors to the academic side of the YouthBuild program can be led through the building by students who will use that opportunity to hone their public presentation skills as they explain the YouthBuild model, what is currently happening in the classroom, and how the program is affecting their own life.

Research

Researching or reviewing deeds, obtaining permits, and getting zoning variances are all projects that are related to the construction site and the vocational education class. In some instances, if the project site is a historic building, there is an opportunity to present the basic principles of historic restoration. For projects, the students can make timelines of the construction of the building; identify, photograph, and categorize different architectural elements of the structure; and compare them to other buildings of that era.

Conclusion

The intentional activity of strengthening program integration within your YouthBuild program can make a big difference in how your program is experienced by young people. Students will experience the program in a more relevant, dynamic, and interactive way if staff has used a set of common goals and beliefs to integrate all components of YouthBuild into a comprehensive whole.