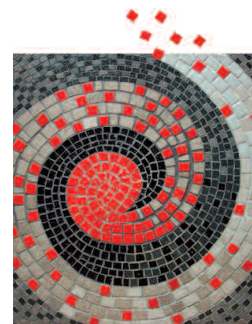


Capturing Promising Practices in
Recruitment and Retention
of Frontline Youth Workers

A Project of the National Collaboration for Youth

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Recommendations for Improving Recruitment and Retention



The promising practice strategies presented in this report represent the efforts of selected organizations but address issues common to many local groups that provide community-based youth services. As such, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by any local organization attempting to respond to the challenges of effectively recruiting and retaining qualified and competent youth workers.²⁶

LOCAL RECRUITMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Identify the demographics: Who is currently doing youth work in your community? What activities are these individuals interested in? What were their reasons for pursuing these positions? What competencies would other potential employees need to have if they were to apply for or accept a youth development job? Identify key factors significant to your workforce and use the information to inform best practices.
- Create innovative organizational recruitment structures that include: referral and hiring incentives; internships and work study programs; and optimal use of technology to attract qualified job applicants.
- Reach out to a diverse population of potential frontline youth workers. Network with individuals and specific organizations that reflect the culture of the community being served. Consider second-career and early-retirement professionals as a likely pool of candidates for youth work.



- Market youth work as a significant profession and respectable career choice. See to it that your organization builds a reputation in the community as a high-quality place to work. Clearly communicate the value of the services being offered to the youth in your area.
- Regularly evaluate and modify your organization's recruitment strategies.

LOCAL RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish clearly defined competencies for staff members and recruit accordingly.
- Offer your staff ongoing professional development opportunities. Make sure that they are easily accessible. Include systems of support such as mentoring and coaching.
- Provide adequate compensation and a clear path for career advancement within the organization.
- Whenever possible, accommodate staff members' needs for sufficient preparation, reasonable workloads, flexible hours, adequate benefits, and a voice in the organization's decision-making process.
- Demonstrate the value of frontline youth workers' efforts by conducting formal recognition activities.
- Regularly evaluate and modify your organization's retention efforts.



Conclusion



Though the strategies presented here were collected from staff at local organizations, they point to a number of tasks that need to be accomplished nationwide. **On the national level**, there is a **need for better data** on who is in the youth service workforce; why individuals enter; why they leave; and what they are looking for as they mature in their careers. There is also a need for intentional strategies aimed at **increasing public awareness** of the complexity and importance of youth work. As a relatively new field, youth development needs to identify successful **strategies in related disciplines** and disseminate them to administrators and frontline workers. Youth service professionals at the national level must also become more **attuned to local needs** and gather and provide the research, guidelines, information, training, and technical assistance required in the field. They must pursue a **policy agenda** that puts young people and those who work with them at the forefront. But the issues on the table do not just concern local or national youth service organizations. They concern the entire nation and its need to commit more resources to the future of youth. Only through a concerted effort on everyone's part can ALL young people in America receive the support and opportunities they need to achieve a fulfilling and productive adulthood.

