

nextgeneration

**YOUTH  
WORK  
COALITION**

# Youth Work Counts

A Guide to Collecting and  
Using Local Data to  
Make the Case for Investing in  
Youth Work Professionals

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## A Guide to Collecting and Using Local Data to Make the Case for Investing in Youth Work Professionals

Despite estimates that some three to five million individuals work in this field, the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that of the range of human services professions, "...youth services is the least documented, least understood and probably the most varied...the lack of good information about youth workers and what they do stands in sharp contrast to the documented benefits of youth programs."<sup>1</sup>

The Foundation made a huge dent in this void in 2006 when they funded, through Cornerstones for Kids, two surveys of youth work professionals – a composite eight-city field survey of over 1,000 frontline workers conducted by the Forum for Youth Investment for the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition, and a national survey of more than 2,000 front line workers and managers conducted by the National Afterschool Alliance. These first glimpses inside of youth work profession generated important insights about the professionals who work with school-age children and youth in the out-of-school hours that have sparked national discussion. The Next Generation survey also generated some insights about the state of local youth work advocacy.

*"We had focused a lot of attention on professional development as a way to support frontline workers, but it wasn't until we were invited to participate in the survey that we began thinking about how we could use data to highlight the other issues that affect their lives and, in turn, the lives of the young people they work with."*

Deborah Craig, former President, YouthNet of Greater Kansas City

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition is committed to helping local and state intermediaries, organizations that work with youth program providers and their staff, identify ways to use and collect data on one of their community's most undervalued resources: frontline youth workers. These tools, based on a survey conducted by the Coalition in 2006, were created for those interested in bringing data about the frontline youth worker population into their work. While we do not have the resources to assist you with your own data collection or analysis, a dedicated staff or volunteer who is familiar with excel should be able to use this guide and the associated tools (see page 8 for links) to successfully complete the process.

- Frontline worker survey instrument
- Focus group protocol
- Data-entry and analysis worksheet

Also included are two key resources related to the 2006 study, which may be particularly useful as you develop your own report, especially should you wish to compare your local findings with those from around the country:

- Final report on 2006 study
- Annotated presentation on 2006 study

Two additional resources that could help inform local advocacy efforts include:

- Annotated bibliography of key publications
- The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition's Action Agenda

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<sup>1</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2003). *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform: The Condition of the Frontline Human Services Workforce*. Baltimore, MD: author, page 12.

## WHY collect *this* data given other demands on our time and resources?

Local intermediaries clearly understand the value of good data. But most are hard pressed to find funding to support their work. And most are looking for ways to ease demands on workers, not create more. So why should intermediaries take on this role when they are already stretched thin?

Because we are literally entering the “next generation” of youth work. The after-school and youth development fields have expanded significantly over the past decade, with increased investments on the part of both public and private funders. California’s Proposition 49 generated a groundswell of demand for staff – creating shifts in hiring, screening, training and compensation that may take a decade to sort out. Research increasingly suggests that high quality youth programs can generate significant improvements in academic and social outcomes, but that many programs have little or no effect.<sup>2</sup> Researchers and practitioners have also made great strides in defining high quality programming, zooming in on specific staff practices – what adults do with children and youth at the “point-of-service,” that predict positive outcomes. Because ultimately, program quality comes down to what frontline staff do, the field needs a workforce that is *strong, stable, supported and committed*.

Faced with short supplies and increased demands for qualified workers, intermediaries increasingly see the need to focus on the development and retention of individual workers and not just the organizations that hire them. According to Sue Eldredge of Community Network for Youth Development in San Francisco, “We have been in the business of doing in-service professional development and field building broadly speaking. But the Next Gen work and survey findings have helped us step back and think about how to create traction around the full range of workforce development issues. In California right now there are real opportunities and a sense of urgency that did not exist before.”

The challenge facing many intermediaries is funding. Craig put it this way. “I have no doubt most intermediaries would be pleased to push beyond training and take on the full range of workforce issues if they had the resources necessary to do the work.” These tools do not come with funding, but doing this kind of data collection can leave intermediaries in a better position to advocate for funding to support workforce development research, planning and advocacy.

By compiling this guide and accompanying tools, we have tried to make it as painless as possible to collect, analyze and report on local workforce data. We think this kind of information is critical to informing your planning and advocacy work, and that the act of collecting it can help increase the value and credibility of Intermediaries with practitioners, providers, policy makers and funders. Here are several ways that conducting a local survey of frontline workers can help advance your work. These draw directly upon reasons our eight pilot sites gave for agreeing to participate in the survey in 2006:

- Create a local or state *workforce development agenda* that is informed by data.
- Include specific data supporting your claims in *funding requests* related to workforce issues.
- *Raise awareness* among key audiences (e.g. funders, employers, policy makers) about workforce realities.
- Share findings with survey participants to *raise awareness, motivation and commitment to advocacy*.
- Use the results to *help employers* identify specific steps they can take to stabilize their workforce.
- Share results with *afterschool, school-age or other networks* that may be able to broaden their reach.
- Make the data the centerpiece of a *professional conference* focused on workforce issues.
- Share results with your *Workforce Investment Board* to advocate for support for this growing profession.

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<sup>2</sup> Durlak, J.A., and Weissberg, R. P. (2007). The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills. Chicago: IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL); University of Illinois at Chicago.

## WHAT does the survey cover? What insights might it provide?

The 20-minute survey and accompanying focus group protocol collects information about five broad topics that can be used to inform capacity building efforts with trainers, employers and workforce professionals as well as to inform broader advocacy efforts. There is no requirement that you use all of the questions (or that you conduct focus groups – they add a richness to the information but are not essential), and you should feel free to add some of your own. Below we summarize why you might want to collect this information, whether your primary focus is to provide better supports for children and youth or to advocate for better supports for professionals. It is always a good idea to keep surveys as brief as possible, but keep in mind that once you have decided to conduct a survey (unless it is administered by phone), the additional cost of adding questions is modest. So think about what information would be useful to have.

Survey Topics	Possible Planning & Advocacy Uses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>The Worker.</b> Demographics. Educational level. Relevant certifications. Previous work history. Length of time in the field.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fine-tuning recruitment strategies</li> <li>▪ Determining the type, format, settings of PD opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Understanding career paths.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Putting a face on youth work.</li> <li>▪ Positioning youth work as a growing field for entry-level workers.</li> <li>▪ Benchmarking against other professions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>The Employer.</b> Type of organization. Type of activities &amp; services. Youth participant profiles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Documenting the diversity of demands on workers.</li> <li>▪ Identifying links between worker and employer characteristics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrating the pervasiveness of youth work.</li> <li>▪ Advocating for policies that reflect more nuanced divisions of the field.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>The Job.</b> Employment status. Job tenure. Roles and duties. Satisfaction. Turnover. Compensation &amp; benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Documenting part time/full time patterns.</li> <li>▪ Pinpointing the characteristics of low/high turnover jobs.</li> <li>▪ Identifying strategies to reduce churn.</li> <li>▪ Identifying high-yield employer benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Estimating the costs of turnover.</li> <li>▪ Documenting equity issues within the field (e.g. part time v full time compensation)</li> <li>▪ Advocating for incentives to increase job stability.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Professional Development (PD) Opportunities.</b> Supervision. Support for PD. Opportunities for promotion. Visibility of career pathways. Networking opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding the relative perceived benefits of different PD activities.</li> <li>▪ Building employer capacity to provide PD supports and pathways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrating the importance of training and supervision.</li> <li>▪ Documenting the need for employer support for professional development.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Field Satisfaction.</b> Intent to remain in youth work. Factors affecting decisions to stay/leave the field. Ways to advance the youth work profession.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifying strategies to increase worker satisfaction.</li> <li>▪ Identifying strategies for improving retention rates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocating for strategies to increase compensation packages (wages, benefits, stipends, etc.)</li> </ul>

It is important to note that should you choose to modify the survey, that in the survey itself, questions are arranged for optimal flow (not always reflecting the above clustering of topics). Also, while it should not be considered “nationally representative,” you may find it useful to compare your local findings to those from our eight-city study, summarized in *Growing the Next Generation of Youth Work Professionals*.

## WHO should complete the survey? What will it take to get them?

This survey was designed for frontline professionals – those who spend at least 50 percent of their time working directly with youth. We focused in on this segment of the workforce for two reasons. First, much less is known about frontline professionals. General survey requests yield higher proportions of supervisors and program managers than frontline workers.

Second, research shows that “point of service quality” – the quality of the interactions that occur between youth and adult staff in programs – is a powerful predictor of youth satisfaction and youth outcomes. The more that public and privately-funded efforts to improve program quality focus on frontline workers, the more critical it is that we understand who these workers are and provide them with multiple opportunities to describe what they do and what they need.

Reaching frontline workers can be challenging. The pilot cities found that the vast majority preferred to respond using paper and pencil vs. an online format. And most respondents were recruited personally through their networks, organizations and trainings. The intermediary plays a critical role in this effort.

- **Confidentiality.** Intermediaries that have good relations with employers can arrange for surveys to be distributed in the workplace but returned (in person or via-mail) to the intermediary, so that confidentiality is maintained.
- **Reach.** A survey of all of the staff in one organization or system (e.g. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center programs) can be extremely valuable to that employer but is less valuable for community-wide planning or advocacy purposes unless that organization/system employs the vast majority of youth work professionals. The well-established intermediary can convey the value of having a broadly representative survey to a wide range of workers and employers.
- **Program Landscape.** However broad the reach, the only way to know whether your youth worker sample is representative is to have a good working inventory or map of out-of-school time programs. If your organization or community supports an annually updated resource directory or a program inventory database, consider recommending that an annual workforce survey be conducted at the same time.

## HOW do we get started?

### Phase One: Planning

- **Review *Growing the Next Generation of Youth Work Professionals*.** Links to both this report about the 2006 study and an annotated presentation of the findings are included at the end of this guide. Pull out three to five “ah ha” slides that you would like to share with your peers and key local stakeholders. Share them. Get people (including you and your staff) excited about having local data.
- **Review the survey instrument and the “topics and uses” chart.** Share the survey with workers and managers and get their reactions. Decide whether you are going to use the full survey, add any questions or modify any questions. No restrictions apply, but keep in mind that modifying the survey will also require modifying the “ready-to-use” data-entry and analysis worksheet. The “topics and uses” chart on page 4 of this guide will help you identify nagging questions or ongoing concerns that having this data would help address. If you had this information – what would you do with it? Would it make a difference?
- **Decide how large and representative your sample needs to be.** Are you using the data to start a conversation or recommend policy changes? Obviously, you want to distribute and collect the surveys in the most responsible way possible. But you also want to get started. Know your needs and your limitations and document them. Don't oversell the data you collect. Pretty good data, accurately presented, will generate the hunger for more.

### Phase Two: Data Collection and Analysis

- **Decide how you will collect your data.** Hard copy or in an online format? At an annual conference (\$5 dollars off registration fee for those who complete the survey)? At youth worker network meetings or using a network mailing list (with a teaser about what kind of data will be collected and presented to employers and funders)? Through employers (with firm assurances of confidentiality)?
- **Decide how you will enter and analyze the data.** Staff member? Interns? Grad student? The data entry and analysis process requires accuracy and comfort with Excel, but is very straightforward. If you do not add, eliminate or rearrange the questions, you can enter the data directly into the pre-formatted Excel worksheet we have created, which will generate charts that you can then cut and paste directly into a report. Remember, if you change questions, you will need to modify the worksheet.

### Phase Three: Interpreting and Sharing Results

- **Think about how you will present and use the data.** In addition to a basic report, you may want to create shorter derivative pieces (issue briefs, handouts, fact sheets, presentations) that speak to specific issues and/or audiences. The annotated presentation of the 2006 study findings (see link on page 8) can serve as a template for building your own presentation. Think about who your target audience(s) are and consider picking an event (board meeting, conference, meeting of provider CEOs or funders) and announcing that new data will be available. This survey is important, but so are many other things. An anchor event can help ensure this marks the beginning or expansion of your community's conversations about workforce development priorities.

## WHERE do we go to learn more?

Whether you were intrigued by the national data or got hooked by your own, we hope you'll sign up for updates from the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition by visiting [www.nextgencoalition.org](http://www.nextgencoalition.org). The Coalition brings together individuals and organizations dedicated to developing a strong, diverse after-school and youth development workforce that is stable, prepared, supported and committed to the well-being and empowerment of children and youth. We believe that this entails progress in at least five key areas: standards and competencies; professional development and training resources; learning delivery systems; career ladders and compensation guidelines; and research and evaluation systems.

The primary role of the Coalition is to inform and support ongoing discussions about the public policy, institutional, organizational and individual changes needed to create a stable, prepared, supported workforce. National discussions can generate heat, but real progress is made at the state and local levels. The Next Gen Coalition is committed to creating authentic learning loops with state and local intermediaries, task forces and coalitions.

- In 2006, the Coalition supported eight communities in data collection efforts that culminated in the findings reported in *Growing the Next Generation of Youth Work Professionals*.
- In 2007, the Coalition convened more than 40 national, state and local youth work leaders to review the data and develop an action agenda to advance the field.
- In 2007, the Coalition kicked off the Clear Policies for Career Pathways project, its second major field project focused on helping specific states and localities build comprehensive workforce development systems that link compensation, education and training.
- In 2008, the Coalition is supporting three mini-projects developed by its working groups: a federal policy scan aimed at identifying existing resources, guidelines or opportunities that could help support youth workers, the development of communications tools for engaging the business community as advocates, and a database of higher education opportunities related to youth work.

Each one of these projects has generated or will generate research, policy analyses or case examples that we hope will help you make the case for investing in youth workers or inform your current strategies for supporting them.

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition is supported by Cornerstones for Kids, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Lilly Endowment.

## LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES IN THE *YOUTH WORK COUNTS* TOOLKIT

### Tools for conducting your own survey

- Frontline worker survey instrument  
<http://www.nextgencoalition.org/files/Next%20Gen%20frontline%20worker%20survey%20final.doc>
- Focus group protocol  
<http://nextgencoalition.org/files/Next%20Gen%20focus%20group%20protocol.doc>
- Data-entry and analysis worksheet  
Coming soon...

### Resources related to the 2006 survey

- Final report on 2006 study  
<http://www.nextgencoalition.org/files/Next%20Gen%202006%20Survey%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- Annotated presentation on 2006 study  
<http://www.nextgencoalition.org/files/2006%20Next%20Gen%20data%20-%20annotated.ppt>

### Additional advocacy tools

- An annotated bibliography of key publications related to the youth work workforce  
<http://www.nextgencoalition.org/files/Next%20Gen%20Annotated%20Resource%20Guide%20-%201.08.doc>
- The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition's Action Agenda  
<http://www.nextgencoalition.org/files/Action%20Agenda.pdf>