

Action Agenda

The Next Generation Youth Work 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.

On November 8-9, 2006, the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition hosted a meeting of 45 key local, state and national stake holders to review the data from *Putting Youth Work on the Map*¹, discuss its implications, and identify potential opportunities for action on those items identified as priorities for developing a strong, stable and supported workforce. Those gathered agreed that progress is needed on several interconnected challenges that emerged from the data.

Increasing awareness of youth work and the central role its worker play—or “legitimizing” the field—was seen as the single most important undertaking the Coalition could pursue, followed by addressing **compensation**. Although these two challenges were considered high priority in terms of importance and were viewed as strategies that could have a profound impact on the workforce, few felt progress could be made on them quickly. Areas that were identified as ripe for short-term progress were improving **support systems**, strengthening **pathways into youth work**, and developing **career ladders**.

Preliminary recommendations that were identified include 1) opportunities to influence policy (both legislative and regulatory and on the state and federal levels), 2) strengthen organizational capacity, 3) increase consensus within the field and 4) improve external positioning. They vary in terms of the locus of action, spanning national, state and local levels and implicating different stakeholder groups including youth workers, employers, intermediaries, funders, researchers, national networks, policy makers and advocates. Many are systemic in nature—meaning their successful implementation would result in progress for the entire youth work “system” as opposed to individual organizations or networks.

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WORK
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¹ http://www.forumfyi.org/Files/Putting_Youth_Work_on_the_Map.pdf

YOUTH WORK WORKFORCE GOALS

STABLE:

Reduce turnover by improving recruitment, increasing rewards, expanding career paths.

PREPARED:

Increase preparation by providing multiple professional development opportunities and delivery systems.

SUPPORTED:

Increase job satisfaction and performance by addressing needs for recognition, supervision and work/life balance.

COMMITTED:

Increase youth benefits by making the values, principles and goals of youth work clear and rewarding those who demonstrate them regularly in practice.

The Coalition will use these recommendations to support and document action implemented by a range of community, state and national organizations and partners. We hope these ideas spark continued action by a range of people and organizations around the country that work on different aspects of the issue and bring different areas of expertise.

As you review the ideas that follow, think about which you feel are most important, which could have the biggest impact, and which you feel you could take on or contribute to. Use this list to generate additional dialogue within your organization, with key partners, and across stakeholder groups.

1. Influence Policy

- ❑ **Analyze federal policies.** Review existing legislation pertaining to youth-focused or youth work-focused federal departments to identify workforce-related programs, guidelines or requirements (related to certification, human resources, compensation, support, or professional development) that advocates could promote and/or influence.
- ❑ **Influence implementation of the Federal Youth Coordination Act.** Ensure that workforce issues become a priority for the Federal Youth Development Council that this newly passed legislation calls for. The Council's role is to assess and make recommendations concerning the improvement of the quality, coordination, accountability and youth/family engagement of the federal programs for disadvantaged youth *and those who work with them*.
- ❑ **Expand pathways/incentives for youth work.** Pursue discussions with key federal government stakeholders about opportunities to insert youth work, by name, into existing legislation that affords students opportunities for loan forgiveness, educational stipends, credit union membership, etc. These could be especially useful avenues for upping the attractiveness/compensation for part-time work.
- ❑ **Influence current expenditures.** Develop and disseminate guidance about how to effectively use existing technical assistance or professional development set asides, such as those that exist within 21st CCLC allocations to states, to address workforce challenges.

2. Strengthen Organizational Capacity

- ❑ **Provide guidelines and incentives** to local organizations to strengthen supervision and support for youth workers and to identify and address gaps identified in supervisor training, time on the front line, etc.
- ❑ **Influence funder practice.** Document/assess any expectations or requirements funders have for grantees related to human resources, compensation etc. Document promising funder efforts to support workforce development beyond professional development/training.
- ❑ **Explore strategic alliances with the corporate community** to strengthen the human resources capacity of youth-serving organizations. Explore relevant models or approaches from business as well as cost-sharing opportunities.

3. Increase Awareness/Consensus in the Field

- ❑ **Document promising state practices.** Identify promising state practices (e.g. Pennsylvania's Keys to Quality) that demonstrate how incentives to sustain, support and prepare youth workers can be built into definitions of program quality that are then subject to monitoring and improvement.
- ❑ **Identify opportunities for innovative use of public funds.** Assess the extent to which existing public funding streams related to prevention, youth employment and after-school could be used to pilot tiered reimbursement systems that link compensation to experience/training levels.
- ❑ **Explore linkages between youth worker associations.** Partnerships among associations could lead to expanded services for members and the diffusion of effective models and practices for local associations and networks.
- ❑ **Educate and engage key decision-makers.** Develop focused conversations with the National Conference of State Legislatures, state after-school networks, children's cabinet directors and other key decision maker groups about policy opportunities to address workforce gaps. Create a youth workforce lens that policy makers can bring into their analyses of youth program legislation.

DEFINITION OF A YOUTH WORKER

A youth worker is an individual who works with and on behalf of children and youth to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society as they make the transition for dependence to independence.

4. Improve External Communications/Positioning

- ❑ **Engage the business community.** Engage business leaders, through partnerships with organizations like Corporate Voices for Working Families and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, as advocates for strengthening the youth work field because of its key role in preparing young workers (both as program participants and staff).
- ❑ **Explore social marketing strategies.** Work with a social marketing research firm to test language, messaging and public perception of the field. Make sure the purpose is to position youth work, not youth programs. Explore potential for a national campaign in collaboration with the Ad Council.
- ❑ **Create cross-system learning opportunities.** Developing a system for supporting youth workers will require that a diverse, charged group of leaders engage in deep critical analysis of other systems in the U.S. (e.g. child care) and in other countries (e.g. the U.K) which we can learn from.

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition is committed to providing a forum and a vehicle for interested individuals and organizations to discuss, refine and act on the above recommendations, in order to develop a workforce that is strong, stable, supported and committed to the well-being of children and youth.

To learn more about the November convening, data collected on frontline youth workers and the Coalition's action agenda, or to sign up to receive future bulletins, visit www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/workforce/nextgen.htm.