

Getting the Right Start- **Clarify Vision, Mission and Role**

Youth development training and technical assistance resource centers provide the necessary services for local agencies to provide the highest quality support to all youth. Given their scope, they must be exceptionally clear about vision, which constituents are being served, how, and why. By doing a community needs assessment, community research, identifying the organization's strengths and being responsive to identified gaps in service, a training and technical assistance resource center can be clear about what it can do to make a difference in the community.

"It is very hard to combat the perception that you don't DO anything—but don't give in and start up your own [direct service] program just to prove your worth!"

Understand the evolution of the organization

Know where the impetus for the organization began in order to identify potential audience(s) and partners. Like other similar organizations, the idea could have begun with a group of people, a funder, an individual, or a government agency. Often it is the understanding that having a coordinated set of resources provided by one agency would prove more effective for the community.

Identify the possibilities

Every center has the potential for an expansive reach. It involves many stakeholders and the geographic range is often considerably larger than the local organizations involved. Embrace the possibilities that this affords.

Begin by looking at a whole systems approach and then determine the needed niche. (*See Tools and Resources: Roles and Services Checklist.*)

- Focus on short, intermediate, and long term goals.
- Imagine the growth potential in 3-5 years.
- Lay out the possibilities and test where there is energy to move forward.
- Be opportunistic. Ask "What if?" questions, name the roadblocks and strategically address them.
- Be clear about the organization's relationship to the competition.

Be aware that the expansive reach of the youth development training and technical assistance resource center may threaten participating organizations that are worried about already tight funding resources being drained by the publicly recognized and well connected training and technical assistance resource center. Address this issue by defining the sustainability plan. Communicate the plan to constituents and reach beyond local and direct service resources. (See *Securing Funding: Sustainability Self-Assessment; Tools and Resources: Clarifying Vision, Mission and Roles.*)

"I have found that over the long haul it is easy to get side-tracked and seduced into quick fixes and false issues, especially when crisis happens or leadership changes. While we have nuanced our vision, (the words change somewhat as our grasp of things grows) we continue to stay on point and the community knows what that is."

Know the needs of your target audience(s)

Youth development training and technical assistance resource centers exist for their constituents. They are conveners, brokers, advocates, inspirers, and contributors to new thinking. Be keenly aware of the needs of the target audience.

- Talk to as many youth development organizations as possible and listen carefully.
- Survey them for their struggles and achievements and the gaps in knowledge, materials, and public policies.
- The best relationships are those where both parties are seeking to meet each others' needs. Find the commonalities.
- By discovering and attending to the needs of the community constituents, the training and technical assistance resource center's mission to enhance the quality of services to young people will be met.

Articulate your vision in a way that can be heard and understood

A crucial skill named by successful leaders of existing youth development intermediaries is the ability to articulate the vision and mission and inspire others to share in it. In addition, the vision needs to be held by a variety of partners that intersect with the work. (See *Tools and Resources: Sample Mission Statements.*)

- Understand what it is that needs to be impacted.
- Articulate a theory of change and the ways it can be achieved. What is the youth development framework that will be used to reach these results? (See *Tools and Resources: Tools for Establishing Vision and Mission.*) What is the training and technical assistance resource center's approach to building the field?
- Discern how the work is making a difference.

“Success breeds success” and constituents will want to actively participate in a course of action that they understand and trust will make a difference.

Understand the distinction between role and services

An example of an organization’s role would be to increase attention, awareness, and clout of the youth development field—to be a catalyst. The services are the activities that constituents can buy, such as training, onsite consultation, assessment, or evaluation. First, clarify the function that is necessary to reach the organization’s mission and second, discern the necessary services. (*See Tools and Resources: Roles and Services Checklists.*)

Stay the course!

Expect frustration and don’t be discouraged. Be persistent. Demonstrate enthusiasm for the field and constituents, and remember that the work is a vehicle through which the youth development field grows, not an end in itself.

CASE STUDY

Fund for the City of New York, Youth Development Institute

The Youth Development Institute (YDI) works with schools and school districts to support the development of new high schools and middle schools, and to improve existing schools by applying youth development practices and helping them to build partnerships with non-school organizations.

Through technical assistance and program development for schools, YDI supports the creation of New Century High Schools and strengthens other schools in New York City. YDI develops programs, trains school and community partner staff, and facilitates effective communication between schools and community-based organizations. Through this assistance, YDI seeks to help schools and districts develop incentives, training, school structures and assessment strategies that result in more caring and personal environments, high expectations, engaging learning activities, and other youth development features.

<http://fulton.ecc.fcny.org:4242/portal.php/syd/ei/>