

NATIONAL Youth DEVELOPMENT Learning Network

Professional Development Series E-Newsletter

August 2007

The National Youth Development Learning Network (NYDLN) is a project of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a coalition of youth-serving agencies that collectively serves more than 40 million youth, employs over 100,000 paid staff and utilizes more than six million volunteers.

Preparing Staff to Work with Immigrant Youth¹

Because first and second generation immigrant youth currently constitute 20 percent of the children growing up in the United States, their healthy development has fundamental long-term implications for our society.²

By definition, youth development is the provision of services and opportunities to support *all* young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and empowerment. In today's society, youth organizations have both an opportunity and a responsibility to encourage and support healthy development for the growing numbers of immigrant youth in communities throughout the U.S.

Making the commitment to serve immigrant youth affects every dimension of an organization—outreach, programming, curriculum, environment, relationship building, and community collaboration. A key ingredient is staff. Youth organizations must recruit, prepare, and hold on to staff who can understand, respect, and work successfully with immigrants. Frontline youth workers who are appropriately prepared will be able to build connections, provide opportunities, earn trust, ensure safety, and provide the hope and support needed by immigrant youth and their families. Likewise, organizational leaders will have a clearer idea of staff requirements and be better able to craft a plan to recruit, hire, prepare, and retain caring and qualified workers.

The Ideal Staff Person

What does it take to work effectively with immigrant youth? The first and most basic requirement applies to all youth work – the staff member must be open minded, empathetic, resourceful, have good networking skills and a positive view of all youth. However, there are additional qualities and skills that are needed to be effective with immigrant children and youth. Though no one person will have every characteristic, an organization can use this list to assess their staff overall.

IN THIS ISSUE

Ideal Staff Person	1
Preparing Staff	3
Leadership & Vision	4

1 For the complete publication and training module – *Preparing Staff to Work with Immigrant Youth* go to <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/workforce/PreparingStafftoWorkwithImmigrantYouth.htm>

2 Suarez-Orozco, C. Todorova, 2003. Understanding the social worlds of immigrant youth. New Directions for Youth Development. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- **Knowledge of Community and Immigrants' Experience.**

The ideal staff person is aware of changing population demographics in the local community and understands the legal and political context of immigration in the United States at both the national and local level. He/she knows the specific circumstances and conditions in the home countries of immigrant participants including an understanding of the cultural customs, norms, and family structures of local immigrant communities.

- **Cultural Competence**

The ideal staff person can relate to individuals who come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and understand and respects the fact that immigrants' basic values, traditions, and beliefs may vary from those prevailing in the dominant culture. He/she avoids pre-judging participants on the bases of cultural backgrounds or treating individuals unjustly and engages immigrant youth and families to get their buy-in, ownership, and input when designing programs and services for them.

- **Language Proficiency**

The ideal staff person provides services in the participants' language and ensures that written materials are translated or adapted so they are accessible to diverse immigrant groups. He/she recognizes that nonverbal communication cues and styles can have different meaning in different cultures.

WHAT IS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES?

“Through its extensive experience in the field, the Casey Foundation has found that a stable, prepared, and motivated human services workforce yields real reform and better results for children and families.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Human Services Workforce Initiative

Any organization's ability to make a difference in a young person's life is dependent upon the people in that organization. Success requires dedicated, skilled and creative people able to lead organizations, manage and implement high-quality programs. The Professional Development Series explores promising strategies in youth development designed to further attract, develop and retain youth development workers. The publications are short, 4-page snapshots of work being done in the following areas:

- **Professional Development Standards**
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/documents/ProfessionalDevelopmentStandards.pdf>
- **Recognition and Rewards**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/profdevelopment/documents/Recognition_and_Rewards.pdf
- **Recruitment** http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/profdevelopment/documents/Recruitment_000.pdf
- **Retention** <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/profdevelopment/documents/ProfSeriesRetention.pdf>
- **Professional Associations**
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/profdevelopment/documents/ProfessionalAssociations.pdf>
- **Certificates, Credentials, Degrees**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews_5.pdf#5.pdf
- **Mentoring Youth Workers**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews3.pdf
- **Blended Learning (E-learning and Classroom Learning)**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews_4.pdf#4%20REV.pdf
- **Recruitment and Selection**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_2_3-19.pdf
- **Competencies**
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Competencies.pdf>
- **Exploring Common Ground**
- **Preparing Staff to Work with Immigrant Youth**

- **Ability to Relate to Immigrant Populations**

The ideal staff person can come from a range of different backgrounds that enable them to relate to immigrant populations.

- Reflects the immigrant population being served and shares the experience of being an immigrant.
- Is bicultural and bilingual, though not necessarily an immigrant or
- Has international experience that makes them particularly effective in working with immigrant youth and families.

- **Connections with Families and Communities**

The ideal staff member accepts immigrant youth and families as participants who have a right to be here and receive services. He/she can make initial connections and build trust with participants' parents and caregivers and networks effectively with members of the immigrant community.

Preparing Staff

Very few youth workers begin the job with 100% of the knowledge, attitudes, comfort, skills, and experience they need to be effective with immigrant youth, families, and communities. By recognizing this at the outset, leaders of youth organizations can create an overall plan to help staff develop professionally and gain increasing levels of awareness and competence in an organized and coherent fashion.

Although many youth organizations think of training as a primary vehicle for preparing staff, it can be more helpful to view professional development as a larger comprehensive system of staff preparation, of which training is only one component. Professional development involves designing, implementing, and evaluating a series of learning strategies that will enable staff to gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to work effectively with immigrant populations.

- **Incorporate a Focus on Immigrant Youth in the Orientation Process**

Incorporate services to immigrants into the organization's mission, goals, standards, and practices. Right from the start, when you orient new staff to the organization, you can establish work with immigrant youth as an organizational norm. This kind of introduction to the issue will have a lasting effect and includes an opportunity for staff to learn about the specific community they will be working with and a clear understanding of the organization's policies of inclusion.

- **Encourage Individual Learning and Self-Reflection**

Communicate the expectation that staff members will make a personal effort to learn about the agency’s immigrant participants, and to do whatever is necessary to become comfortable serving diverse populations. Provide staff with resources such as books, culture-specific newspapers, field trips, and other relevant resources. Sometimes this requires developing your own planning tools, curricula and materials to meet specific needs.

- **Implement Training Sessions**

Incorporate immigrant issues into “cultural competence trainings” and offer specific training on working with immigrant youth. Include training content and activities on topics such as legal concerns, inclusive environments, coping with family separations, cultural and linguistic competency, and negotiating unfamiliar institutions. Invite leaders, elders, and others from the immigrant community to educate staff. Inviting the participation of the leaders and elders speaks to your belief that the community really does have something to offer your organization. It sends a strong message of respect and honor, and can build strong bridges to future relationships and work.

- **Set Up Staff Dialogues**

Hold a dialogue session in response to a specific issue or challenge. Putting the issues on the table can be a great way to address concerns and questions related to the work with immigrant participants. It is critical, however, to first establish a group contract to ensure there will be safe space for open and honest dialogue. These can be incorporated into regularly scheduled events like staff meetings. Provide regular opportunities for staff to discuss an issue, ask questions or brainstorm ideas and solutions.

Begin With Leadership and Vision

Knowing what you need in ideal staff, hiring the right staff and developing their skills to be as successful as possible are all key ingredients to working effectively with immigrant youth. Yet this work is next to impossible unless there is strong leadership and vision to determine the direction of the organization and prioritize necessary resources. The leader sets the tone by creating an organizational climate that supports and honors this work. When the right internal environment gets established, the organization’s image shifts accordingly and it becomes easier to attract and retain qualified staff.



*National Youth Development Learning Network
is funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc.*

**National Human Services Assembly
National Collaboration for Youth**
1319 F Street, 402 • Washington DC, 20004 • (202) 347-2080
www.nassembly.org • www.nydic.org

*Tools for collaboration, nonprofit
management, diversity, and more.*