

RECRUITING STAFF



For generations, youth organizations have found it challenging to recruit youth workers because of the low salaries, limited benefits and limited career opportunities being offered, as well as the small number of full-time positions available. These ongoing challenges become intensified when the organization seeks staff members who have the additional skill sets that are needed to work effectively with immigrant youth and their families. The following recruitment and hiring strategies can help focus and streamline this important process.

Identify the Needs

- **Conduct research to identify target immigrant populations and their specific needs.** Consider partnering with national, state, and local research organizations as well as local universities and community colleges to collect this valuable data. Some cities and counties have conducted immigrant assessments that can be very useful to any organization that wants to be inclusive. For example, the Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Service, Research & Planning Division, along with four community partners, published a 2006-2007 Immigrant Assessment because the county experienced a 230% increase in its foreign-born population between 1990 and 2005. The assessment covers issues such as immigrant profile, immigration policy, process and legal rights, public safety, housing, health, and education. For more information visit:
www.co.travis.tx.us/health_human_services/research_planning/.
- **Engage in organizational dialogue about how to best respond to the needs of immigrant populations.** Make an agency-wide commitment to explore these issues and discuss staffing needs. Make sure the topic is on the table at board meetings and strategic planning sessions at the management level.
- **Determine the specific skills staff will need to work with immigrant youth.** Prioritize this set of required skills and use them as a guide to determine whether prospective employees fit the qualifications. The Staff Characteristics Checklist located in the Appendix provides a framework you can adapt to your needs.

Advertise and Make Use of Traditional and Nontraditional Networks

You want to have a good relationship with the Spanish-speaking media in your community. And if you have a Univision or Telemundo affiliate in your market, then you definitely want to be in with them so they can help you post stuff—newspapers, radio, all of that. –Agency Director

- **Advertise in culture-specific media.** Many immigrant communities have their own newspaper(s), gathering places, and radio and television stations. Find out how specific immigrant communities communicate with each other and make sure your organization engages with their media.
- **Enhance your reputation as an organization that serves immigrant populations.** People often assume that an agency does not serve immigrant youth, based on its history and the populations it has served in the past. By taking steps such as including different languages on your website, launching culture-specific programs, and co-sponsoring programs of interest to the target population, you can revise your image and place your organization on the radar screen of potential highly-qualified candidates.
- **Utilize community contacts and networks to identify candidates.** Once you have established networks within immigrant communities, it becomes easier to “cast a wider net” in identifying potential staff members.
- **Arrange college credit for interns and volunteers.** Enlist institutions of higher learning to offer college credit to students who will work part time in your youth organization. Contact such departments as Asian American Studies, Latino or Chicano Studies, or foreign languages. Receiving college credit makes it feasible for volunteers to continue working with a program for many semesters.



Recruit from Within the Organization

The formal way is to advertise in the right places and to try to partner. The informal way works probably just as well, and that's recruiting from friends. Find a good worker and tell that person you're advertising a new position. This will usually pull up five good candidates. Put a lot of energy into existing staff with positive characteristics...work hard to develop them and say "Okay, this is what we're doing here. Now that you understand the bigger context, do you know other people that could help us with this?" –Agency Director

- **Cultivate and hire past program participants.** One organizational leader who has hired several former participants refers to these individuals as “lifers.” These staff tend to be deeply committed to both the work and the organization. And as immigrants and former participants themselves, they are often able to relate exceptionally well to the experiences of the youth they are serving.
- **Recruit effective staff members' friends.** Word of mouth is often one of the best staff recruitment strategies. One program director whose organization serves a large Somali population uses a “friends recruit friends” process to increase his complement of Somali-born staff members.

Interview Creatively and Sensitive

I've learned that some qualified people just don't interview well. The candidate might not have the same sense of humor or respond to the questions in the manner we would expect (coming from a white Caucasian perspective). And then we decide whether to hire the person based primarily on the interview, which is irresponsible. Regardless of how well candidates do in the interview, they are going to need to be trained anyway. –Agency Director

- **Create a sensitive and thoughtful interview process.** Ensure that your interview process does not involve intimidating dynamics. Then get input from different perspectives to gauge whether the potential candidate brings the necessary skills and attitudes to the position. Consider interview questions such as:
 - Was there ever a time in your life when you felt challenged to provide a service to a young person or family member because of a cultural difference?

- How did you approach that challenge?
- How did things turn out and how did you feel about it?
- **Use creative alternative strategies to discover a candidate's qualifications**, rather than relying solely on a traditional interview format.

Offer Incentives

- **Market professional development opportunities as career incentives.** The idea of having opportunities to grow and develop professionally, or to perhaps gain a mentor, can be a huge incentive for taking a new job. Camp Fire USA, Central Puget Sound in Seattle partnered with a national research firm to gather data about local immigrant populations and their needs. This research led to a fundable action plan that laid out specific professional development strategies for working with Latino immigrant populations.
- **Offer incentives to recruit qualified staff who are also bilingual.** Incentive pay makes working for a youth organization more attractive to bilingual individuals, who might have broader options for employment as a result of their language expertise.

Recognizing Bilingualism as an Asset

Often, bilingual employees are asked to do extra tasks without being compensated accordingly. Girls Incorporated of Alameda County corrects this inequity by providing an extra salary stipend for staff whose bilingual skills are used on the job. Prospective employees who speak the languages of the organization's participant populations must first qualify through an outside assessment of their language skills. Once their skills have been verified, the stipend is added to their base salary. The agency has found that this type of incentive and validation is helpful in the recruitment, as well as retention, of bilingual staff. The policy also enables the organization to build "extra tasks" into the jobs of those who speak multiple languages. Tasks such as translating, communicating with non-English speaking parents or youth, and supporting non-bilingual staff are now an explicit part of bilingual staff members' job descriptions, rather than an uncompensated "add on."