Overview

The program will be enhanced if certain organizational procedures and relationships are in place prior to orientation. This chapter describes these items, including:

- Case-management record-keeping systems,
- Collaborative relationships with service agencies,
- Orientation plans,
- Rough schedules for the counseling program,
- Life planning tools and curricula,
- Confidentiality policies, and
- Policies on the rights of participants.

Some of these items will be developed by the director or the program manager, some by the counselor, and some through collaboration of several staff members.

This chapter assumes that the recruitment and selection of students will have followed DOL guidelines (see Eligibility Guidelines on the Community of Practice), as well as information provided in the basic YouthBuild Program Manual. Income, age, and school status will have been verified, and demographic information collected on an application form. A contract as well as attendance policies will have been developed. (See Sample Policies on the Community of Practice).

Contract and attendance policies are especially relevant to the counseling component, since the counselor will play a key role in helping students overcome obstacles to high attendance and positive performance.
Preparation for Keeping Records

YouthBuild requires documentation of eligibility. It does not require extensive records of individual students’ lives. There should be no records kept that the counselor would not be happy to have the students read. The files should be set up to include certain records for each student:

Survey form of background information, if one is used

- The overall goals and objectives of the student, the plans made for reaching them, and progress against these plans
- A record of each counseling meeting with a student: the dates, times, issues presented, actions agreed upon by student and counselor, and follow-up
- Home, hospital, or court visits
- Institutional issues that required follow-up, and a record of the follow-up
- Contacts with other organizations made on behalf of the student
- Descriptions of disciplinary issues and outcomes
- Regular evaluations of student performance from the school and construction site

The director or other reviewer should be able to open a student’s counseling file and find a clear, concise record of steady goal-oriented contact between the student and the counselor or case manager, as well as an ongoing record of the student’s performance.

Thus, prior to orientation, the staff should collect and prepare various forms that will be useful during program implementation, including forms for the following purposes:

- Initial assessment interview
- Referral to other agencies
- Excused absences
- Life planning
- Reporting on counseling meetings and necessary follow-up
- Recording infractions
- Assessing ongoing performance and progress in school and on construction site
Identification of external resources

Depending on what service the program itself will provide, there is likely to be a need to identify and build relationships with external providers of certain resources. The case manager needs to determine in advance what these might be, so that he can identify organizations that provide such services and work with the director to build relationships and cooperative arrangements with them. These services should include the following:

- Substance abuse treatment centers
- Childcare
- Housing for homeless students
- Health and dental care
- Mental health care, including professional counseling
- Parenting and family planning counseling
- Legal assistance

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Please see Part B of this Manual for more information on record keeping.

Orientation plan

Programs may have developed their own student orientations or they may have adapted orientations already developed by other YouthBuild programs. The entire staff will be involved in planning and implementing the orientation. The quality of the orientation will set the stage for the entire year and is worthy of very careful planning.

“Mental toughness” is one approach to preparing the students for the rigors of the YouthBuild program. For additional information, see the mental toughness orientation available on the YouthBuild Community of Practice.

Organization of schedule for counseling activities

Counselors and directors need to decide what type of personal development activities will take place and develop a schedule with the rest of the program staff that ensures that this component will not be shortchanged by the needs of academic education and construction training. The schedule should allow time for whatever activities the counseling component requires, which are likely to include the following:

- **One-on-one counseling sessions.** These sessions, usually held once every two weeks, provide the opportunity for the counselor to focus on specific, short-term problems that the students may have or develop. These sessions can also be used to work on goals and objectives that the counselor and student define together through the life-planning process.
• **Group sessions.** Various types of group sessions are typically held on a variety of issues for those students who are at the school or program site. Group sessions take place in a safe atmosphere that builds a sense of family, a commitment to common goals, and a sense of trust.

• **Life-skills workshops and seminars.** YouthBuild programs typically hold regular weekly classes on life skills such as healthful living, positive relationships, or career preparation. These are usually taught by staff. Sometimes, programs conduct one-of-a-kind life-skills seminars or workshops on topics such as conflict management or improving communication. Staff may decide to invite someone to the program to conduct one of these life-skills seminars or workshops.

• **Excused time for students for court hearings or probation meetings.** Programs build into their expectations that students must fulfill any court-related obligations and that doing this is part of their fulfillment of the YouthBuild program. The time they spend fulfilling these obligations may be counted as program time. Often staff need to support students in these activities, even attending court hearings with them to demonstrate community involvement to the judge, and to demonstrate to the students how much they care.

• **Community celebrations.** YouthBuild programs hold celebrations regularly. Celebrations are held to acknowledge high attendance, raises, completion of parts of the academic program, GED achievement, construction completion, and other milestones. Celebrations may be held to recognize engagements, marriages, and births. These celebrations foster a sense of closeness within the group and also make individuals feel special.

**Life-skills curriculum and tools**

Life-skills curricula are a key part of the students’ development. Sessions should be scheduled at regular times. Programs may select, adapt, or develop a curriculum to cover a wide array of life-skills issues. There are several comprehensive curricula that have been developed for youth development and workforce training programs and may prove useful to YouthBuild programs. DOL does not specifically endorse any particular curricula but leaves it to local programs to select what would be most appropriate for their students. For information on Life Skills curricula please see the Resources listing at the end of this manual.

**Confidentiality policies**

A major concern of students as they begin to open up is to determine the degree of confidentiality that they will be afforded. Violations of confidentiality are naturally very damaging to trust. Students are extremely sensitive to any feeling that staff are talking about them casually, spreading from one person to another what they shared in confidence. They are equally sensitive to any perception that other students have somehow learned confidential information from staff. Staff should be extremely careful to respect confidentiality and never carelessly reveal students’ personal information.

On the other hand, students need to be informed that there are certain types of issues that counselors will discuss with their supervisors in order to get guidance on how to handle them. There are certain issues that counselors will discuss with other staff as part of pooling their resources on behalf of the student’s reaching her goals, and there are certain issues that state laws often require staff to report, such as certain crimes, indications of child abuse, and sexual harassment of minors. Programs need to review and follow these state laws.
There is no common confidentiality policy being used across programs at this time. However, programs will be more successful in building the necessary trust with students if there is predictability for the students about how their information will be treated, and clarity for the staff about how to handle the confidential information they are given. It is therefore strongly recommended that each program develop its own policy, taking into account the type of supervision given to counselors and the laws of the state (for an example of a confidentiality policy, please see Sample Forms in the YouthBuild Community of Practice).

**Rights of participants**

Having a policy that outlines participants’ rights in relation to the counseling and program requirements may also contribute to trust between students and the program. Possible elements of such a policy are:

- Every participant’s personal dignity will be recognized and respected
- Participants will be afforded counseling and case management regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, national origin, physical challenge, or sexual orientation
- Participants’ privacy will be maintained within the constraints of all applicable laws and program policies, and they will be notified of these laws and policies
- Counseling and case management will occur in an environment conducive to privacy
- Participants may ask for clarification on any matter pertaining to their counseling and case management—or the records kept of their interactions—and are entitled to a clear and truthful response
- Participants will be asked their permission before they are included in any research, and participants know that they are allowed to refuse such inclusion