Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students

YouthBuild
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About This Manual

The purpose of this manual is to help your program develop a comprehensive plan for the post-program success of your students.

This manual covers the topics of:

- preparing your YouthBuild program to provide effective career development for your young people;
- preparing young people for jobs and careers, further training, post-secondary education, and leadership roles in service to their communities;
- placing young people in jobs, service placements, further training, or post-secondary education after they complete the YouthBuild program; and
- supporting young people to successfully maintain those jobs, service opportunities, or educational placements for a minimum of three quarters after they exit YouthBuild and, ideally, for much longer.

Use of Terms

In the interest of space and brevity in writing, we will use the term “career development” to broadly describe all of these activities. Therefore, the term career development as used in this manual will refer to preparation, placement, and retention in post-secondary education, apprenticeships, full-time service opportunities, the military, and jobs.
Introduction

Building Pathways for Graduate Success

As YouthBuild program staff, our guiding motivation is to contribute to the life-long success of our young people in all aspects of their lives: education, employment, family life, and civic engagement. In fact, the success of our program is dependent on our ability to help our young people succeed. But, more importantly, why would we want to run a program that isn’t helping young people break through the barriers to success?

How do we know if a YouthBuild graduate is successful? What is the definition of success for a YouthBuild graduate? Of course, this is in no small measure defined by each individual young person. They will each have their own dreams, goals, and aspirations.

On a more general level, we can define successful YouthBuild graduates as young people who, at a minimum, have jobs or have begun some type of post-secondary education after YouthBuild and who have faith in their ability to navigate life. More holistically or fully, we can define successful YouthBuild graduates as able to:

- support themselves economically over a sustained period and manage their money;
- keep themselves emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually healthy;
- stay away from criminal activity;
- take appropriate responsibility for their families and personal relationships; and
- actively engage in their communities through service, action, and leadership.

Our graduates’ accomplishments after completing the program are the measure of our program’s success, so we need to consider the following kinds of questions:

- Are graduates successful in obtaining and maintaining jobs that pay a living wage?
- Are they successful in gaining admission to schools of post-secondary education?
- Do these first job and educational experiences lead to the development of further skills, more advanced jobs on a career path of their choosing, increased income with benefits, and lifetime learning?
- Do graduates have access to support that nurtures their continued growth and provides support through difficult periods?
- Do they become strong contributing members of their communities?

The answers to these questions determine the success of our graduates and, ultimately, the success of our program and the value of its contribution to the community and to society as a whole.
Section I: Preparing Your DOL YouthBuild Program to Provide Pathways to Success
Preparing Your DOL YouthBuild Program to Provide Effective Career Development

Planning for and attention to career development begins before the program cycle starts, doesn’t end until long after young people complete the program, and is woven through all elements of the program. This section of the manual will cover activities that your program should engage in before the program cycle starts and very early on in the program cycle. To get ready for an effective program cycle focused on career development, your program must work on both internal and external preparation strategies.

Internal Strategies

Internal elements of this program preparation phase include:

- establishing a program culture focused on career development;
- setting up staff responsibilities for career development;
- initiating career development activities early in the program cycle; and
- creating a system that allows for accurate DOL reporting on career development activities.

These are all activities that you might think of as getting your internal career development house in order before your program cycle starts.

External Strategies

External elements of this phase of program preparation include:

- researching current job opportunities and wage structures in your area;
- investigating post-secondary educational options and opportunities for your graduates;
- setting up partnerships with employers, apprenticeship programs, and post-secondary institutions; and
- establishing an employer and post-secondary education database.

The next part of this section will cover internal strategies and, subsequently, external strategies.
Getting Your Internal House in Order

Before your program cycle begins, there is work to be done internally to set the stage for career development. To begin setting the stage for effective career development in your program, you need to develop a program culture that focuses on career development, that clearly outlines which staff on your team are responsible for career development (hint: all of them) and create a system to accurately capture the information for reporting to DOL and other potential funders and community champions. Your program can demonstrate its effectiveness by letting people know how your young people have progressed since leaving the program.

In addition, if you haven’t already, you may wish to review the section of the manual that covers program culture, since creating a focus on career development in your program will start there.

Start Early and Don’t Ever Stop!

Career development is not a standalone activity that begins two to three months prior to graduation and consists of several specific activities such as writing a resume, learning to write a cover letter, and learning to interview for a job. While these are all activities of career preparation at a YouthBuild program, they should not be mistaken for an entire career development strategy. This approach, which might be described as “too little too late,” results in young people completing the YouthBuild program without having developed the skills they will need to be successful in the workplace, post-secondary education, and long-term leadership roles. It is important to begin career development activities before your actual program cycle starts, during your program’s recruitment and orientation (or Mental Toughness), and in the first few weeks of your program. Career development activities cannot wait until the last few months of the program.

The following paragraphs describe activities that should happen before the program cycle starts and continue into the early part of the program cycle. Activities that happen during the remainder of the program cycle are covered in Section II of this manual.
Recruitment

To be effective at career development, your program should adopt a comprehensive approach that is introduced to young people when they apply to the program. Young people come to YouthBuild with many different expectations and objectives. Some want to complete their education, some are looking for a job as soon as possible, and others are less clear about their objectives and are simply looking for a second chance.

While YouthBuild programs should be a resource for young people with all of these objectives, we need to help youth think and plan for the long term. Youth should know, as soon as they apply for YouthBuild, that the program has as its top priority helping them to develop a career development plan. This career pathway may include a job, further vocational training or apprenticeships, full-time service placements earning college scholarships, post-secondary education, or some combination of these activities.

Recruitment efforts and materials should accurately reflect the career development goals of the program. Materials should emphasize that being part of YouthBuild is similar to having a job and has both the benefits and rules that come along with employment. Career development should be included in all communication about the program. With this in mind, recruitment materials should:

- emphasize that YouthBuild prepares young people for employment, post-secondary education, apprenticeships, full-time service placements, and community leadership;
- stress that, because youth receive stipends, YouthBuild is like a job and requires a commitment similar to that of the workplace;
- highlight the fact that YouthBuild is a partnership between the program and the young person;
- provide information about the rules and high standards relating to punctuality, consistent attendance, and no drug use, reminding them again about how being in the YouthBuild program mirrors being at a workplace; and
- remind youth frequently that YouthBuild is just the beginning of a pathway to define and fulfill their highest aspirations for a career and for contributing to the well-being of their families and communities.
Mental Toughness (Orientation)

Although it is not a required component, many DOL YouthBuild programs include a well-organized orientation session of one to two weeks often referred to as “Mental Toughness” in most DOL YouthBuild programs. Mental Toughness is key to setting the tone and expectations for the year and for making the final selection of young people who will enroll in your YouthBuild program. This orientation period is also a critical time for establishing good relationships with and among the young people applying to the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
For more on Mental Toughness/orientation, please see Chapter Two of the DOL YouthBuild Program Manual: Recruitment, Selection, and Orientation.

Mental Toughness must convey the seriousness of the program while also providing exposure to YouthBuild’s model of high standards combined with love, support, and respect. This is the point at which career development begins. There are many activities that can happen during Mental Toughness that begin to prepare young people for the strong career development emphasis in a YouthBuild program and to set the stage for that work in the coming year.

To get career development off to a good start in your program, your Mental Toughness component should include, at a minimum, the following:

- An explanation of YouthBuild’s emphasis on career development and how the program is designed to prepare students for employment, post-secondary education, further training, and community leadership.
- An outline of program values and the introduction of the program pledge that represents these values with an explanation of how this relates to career development.
- A clear explanation of program rules and standards and how those rules relate to career development.

It is important for students to understand that the program standards have the explicit purpose of preparing them for their next step in life, as opposed to being arbitrary rules laid down for the convenience of the staff. Program rules that most clearly relate to career development are those that help students learn soft skills; i.e., those related to punctuality, attendance, calling in absences, abstaining from drug and alcohol abuse, keeping their word, demonstrating reliability and follow-through, supporting teamwork, and showing initiative.

- A clear explanation of the consequences for not following the program rules.

This explanation should make it clear that behavior unacceptable in the workplace is unacceptable in the program but that enforcement includes structured warnings and opportunities for peer review and remediation. In addition, there should be a discussion about how real success flows from not only following the rules but demonstrating reliability, good relationships, and responsibility. The goal is for each of the students to become a highly respected representative of the program’s explicit values.
- Frequent opportunities during Mental Toughness to learn and practice following program rules and demonstrating consistency with program values.
- A clear presentation of the criteria that students will be expected to meet (i.e., the career readiness competencies) to qualify for placement and graduation with the assurance that skills to meet those criteria will be developed during the program.

In addition to a clear understanding of program values and vision, rules and standards, it is also helpful to build in time during Mental Toughness for students to start some of the career and interest exploration activities that will continue throughout the first few months of the program. These assessment activities should identify the students’ interests, aspirations, qualifications, and capabilities.

This information will form the foundation of the Individual Career Plan (ICP) which will be developed in the early weeks of the program and modified as student interests and plans shift over time. The ICP encompasses career, post-secondary, and life planning. The point of the ICP is to cultivate a career mindset among students early on. Thus, it is more important for students to consider career possibilities in light of their interests than it is for them to make a commitment to a particular career path. Some early interest and assessment activities that can be scheduled during Mental Toughness include:

- **Texas Cares**—A free 180-question online assessment tool developed by the Texas Workforce Commission.
- **The Myers Briggs Type Indicator**—To administer and interpret the Myers Briggs test, someone on your staff must become certified, or you must connect with someone who is certified who can work with you on administering and interpreting students’ tests.
- **Bureau of Labor Statistics**—Provides a resource that allows students to explore careers based on broad areas that they like, such as math, sports, building and fixing things, social studies, art, etc.
- **My Next Move**—Provides occupational profiles including job descriptions, knowledge required to perform duties, skills and abilities needed to succeed and a range of other information for over 900 careers.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information on the Individual Career Plan (ICP) go to p. 52 in Section II.
A more in-depth list of interest and assessment activities can be found on p. 48 in Section II.

**Using Alumni**

Another key career development activity to schedule during Mental Toughness is a panel of YouthBuild alumni from your program who have successful job and post-secondary education placements and community leadership roles. These graduates can talk about their current jobs and schools, their current roles in the community and share how the program’s emphasis on career and leadership development contributed to their current success in school, the workforce, and the community.
The First Few Weeks of Your Program

“Young people don’t have a problem with standards, they have a problem with inconsistency.”

– YouthBuild Director

The first few weeks of the program cycle are a time to continue setting the tone and expectations of the program and carrying through the message introduced during Mental Toughness: that YouthBuild is designed to help youth think and plan for their long-term futures. The standards that your program sets and enforces during the first few weeks of the program cycle will set the tone for the rest of the cycle. They should be standards that prepare young people for life after YouthBuild—whether it is in college and/or a job. Your program should have standards for attendance, punctuality, dress, and abstinence from drug use spelled out in a student contract. The consequences for arriving late, excessive absences, coming to YouthBuild not dressed to work, and otherwise violating the program rules should be spelled out in the contract. They should be fairly and consistently enforced. Similarly, the incentives for perfect attendance and punctuality as well as other excellent behavior should be spelled out in the contract. Many programs give raises to students after the first quarter if they’ve reached a threshold of excellent behavior as spelled out in the contract.

Additional activities that are important during the first few weeks of the program cycle are continuing the interest and strength inventories and career exploration and research begun during Mental Toughness.

RESOURCES
A sample student contracts can be found here.

Focusing on career and post-secondary exploration early on is important in order to engage young people in setting their own goals. For young people to be invested in their own learning and growth, they should participate in career exploration that broadens their thinking about their own potential, sparks their interests, and at the same time gives them a realistic view of labor market opportunities; that is, where they can expect to find work. Students can take what they learned through their career exploration and use this information to build their ICPs (see p. 52 in Section II for more on the ICP). This plan should be revisited frequently, and young people should view it as the road map to their futures.

At the same time, early on, discussions with groups of students about their visions for how their communities could be improved, what they would change if they had the influence or skill, and what they wish the people in charge would change will stir up the motivation to become a person who could make those differences. The vision of becoming a leader in the community often strengthens the motivation to go to college and to be prepared to get a good job.
Creating Your Career Development Program Culture

“We set our program Big Goals. The Big Goals get sent out to everyone. The Big Goals get printed onto poster foam board, and they get posted throughout the building. Everyone knows that we strive for the Big Goals.”

– Suzanne Fitzgerald

The previous sections have talked about the ways in which graduate success should be emphasized from the earliest days of the program cycle—at recruitment, during Mental Toughness, and early in the program cycle—but don’t lose sight of the fact that it must be a part of the overall culture of the program and woven through all aspects of your programming. A strong program culture geared to graduate success unifies the entire organization toward successful education, career, service, and leadership outcomes for graduates. As noted on page one, we can define successful YouthBuild graduates as able to:

- support themselves economically over a sustained period and manage their money;
- keep themselves emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually healthy;
- stay away from criminal activity;
- plan for their future;
- take appropriate responsibility for their families and personal relationships; and
- engage actively in their communities through service, action, and leadership.

A strong YouthBuild program is one in which the culture supports success in all these areas in a holistic and integrated way. Such a culture is geared toward graduate success and is reflected in organizational priorities, program design, staff roles and responsibilities, daily rituals, the look of the facility, marketing and communication, and, most importantly, the experiences of the young people. This holistic and integrated approach demonstrates to youth that the program has a caring stake in their future.1

1 While this manual focuses on the elements of program culture geared toward graduate success, there are additional DOL YouthBuild Program Manuals that provide detailed information on building the education, leadership development, and counseling/case management elements of this culture.
A closer look at a YouthBuild program with a culture of graduate success reveals the details behind these values:

- The organizational priorities of the program are such that the Program Director devotes a significant amount of his/her time developing strong partnerships with employers, apprenticeship programs, service placements, and post-secondary institutions.
- The program design reflects the career development culture through time set aside for internships, supported work experience, college preparation classes, financial aid workshops, visits to service placements, and college visits.
- Daily rituals include items like a career/college moment every day at morning meeting in which a student or staff member describes a different career, area college, or apprenticeship program.
- Program alumni visit regularly to make presentations on their current jobs or educational, leadership, and service endeavors.
- Guest speakers from various colleges, employers, and apprenticeship programs also visit regularly to speak about opportunities for YouthBuild graduates.
- College posters and booklets decorate the walls, as do pictures of young people in various careers.
- Achievement certificates, essays, pictures, and other testimonials to the success of the program’s graduates cover the walls of the space and are posted on social media as well.
- The program has a strong relationship with its local One-Stop Career Center to assist in its ability to effectively link graduates to jobs and further training efforts.
- Recruitment materials stress that YouthBuild is a program that prepares its students for college or a career.

The result of such a program culture is that young people feel that the program is invested in their future. They know that every part of the program and every staff member in the program is persistently, yet lovingly, pushing them toward defining and fulfilling their own highest aspirations.

Meaningful values and beliefs have to come from the program staff who can translate them to students. It is important that staff talk about what values have meaning for them as a group. This will make it easier for staff to communicate and reinforce these values to students.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information on program culture and exercises to strengthen your program’s culture, see *Chapter Four of the YouthBuild Program Manual: Program Culture.*
Establishing Your Career Development Team

“The staff really cares about you. They call us if we don't show up. They give us individual attention. They make sure we learn what we need to learn. They hold us to high standards without being mean. They help us solve personal problems. It's completely different from any other place I have ever been.”

– YouthBuild Graduate

Caring and competent YouthBuild staff is one of the keys to creating an environment that leads to success for YouthBuild graduates. A staff that is committed to giving students the tools, skills, support systems, and opportunities that will enable students to define and achieve their highest aspirations is one of the most important pieces of a career development strategy. The tangible assistance given to students is essential to creating and building a program with strong career development outcomes. If the students are genuinely surprised—from the first minute and continuing throughout the program—at how consistently and obviously the staff cares about them, they will begin to care about themselves and their own futures in a way they never dreamed of before.

Incorporating Career Development into All Staff Positions

As noted previously, career development cannot be an activity that happens in the last two or three months of the program. Similarly, career development cannot be the job of only one staff person at YouthBuild. The Program Director should set a program culture of career development so that working toward the goal of successful YouthBuild graduates is one that permeates all aspects of the program. In addition, the Program Director must be clear with staff members that career development is a function of all YouthBuild program staff positions. Even if one person is responsible for coordinating career and post-secondary readiness functions, such as organizing college tours, meeting potential employers, and teaching discrete skills like resume writing, significant contributions must be made by other program staff as well. This includes teachers, construction trainers, receptionists, and counselors as well as the director—really, all staff.

There are many ways in which all staff members play a role in career development. For example, all staff should be generally aware of local labor market information and economic conditions in their community. The career development staff can report on this information at staff meetings so that all staff will have a level of knowledge if they are called upon by students to provide informal “guidance” or career counseling.
Additional suggestions on incorporating career development into all staff positions follows.

**Construction Staff**

On the construction worksite, the construction manager and trainers can work with students on how to follow directions, communicate respectfully, come to work prepared (properly dressed with work boots), work cooperatively with colleagues (fellow students), return from lunch and breaks on time, and take initiative in solving problems. These are all crucial soft skills for success in the workplace or in post-secondary education, and the construction staff plays a vital role in helping students master these skills.

Construction trainers should also help students understand the construction industry, its cyclical nature, where work may be located, and other careers that are related to construction such as project management, interior design, or building inspection. They should teach youth to think about how they might charge for their work, how to estimate the costs, or develop a timeline for a project, since some young people may want to start their own construction, maintenance or handy person business. They should help the youth who are not interested in going into construction think about how the skills that they are learning in construction translate into other careers.

**Administrative Staff**

YouthBuild administrative support staff also plays a role in guiding students toward career readiness. Often it is the office managers, receptionists, or administrative assistants who track and enforce punctuality and attendance standards in a program. By being scrupulously fair in their enforcement of these standards, yet enforcing them with respect and concern, they play a key role in preparing young people for success after YouthBuild. The professionalism of the support staff is also an important model for young people. By being positive and personally attentive when greeting students in the morning and communicating professionally and respectfully to students, they provide a valuable example of appropriate workplace behavior. Of course, every staff member should know every student’s name and routinely have personal interactions with them that build a positive relationship. It is this attention that makes students say, “YouthBuild is like a family. The whole staff cares.”

**Instructional Staff**

Academic teachers can incorporate research about various occupations, colleges and local employers into their classrooms. They can use career information as the basis for math exercises; for example, using starting wages or salaries to build budgets. In addition to the concrete information that students learn from these exercises, such learning reinforces the culture of career development in a program where all activities and staff members are moving in the same direction—the direction of graduate success in the workplace, community service, or in further education.
Career Development Staff

We have seen how all staff members play a role in career development and that having a committed, caring staff is an essential ingredient to graduate success, but there also may be specific staff positions that take the lead on career development. YouthBuild programs choose to organize their career development staffing in many ways, depending on the size of their program, their resources, their external environment, and other factors. The most successful YouthBuild programs will have at least one and, ideally, more than one staff member dedicated specifically to career development activities.

The most typical career development staff positions are described below.

- **Career Readiness Instructor/Trainer or Career/College Counselor**
  
  Administers career interest and strength assessments and helps students make sense of their assessments; helps each student develop an ICP; leads post-secondary awareness activities, such as college tours and financial aid workshops; teaches job readiness curriculum; and arranges for guest speakers, including YouthBuild alumni and nonprofit organizational leaders, to introduce students to careers, community service, and college life and provide motivational remarks. In smaller programs, this role is sometimes combined with the counseling/case management function or the leadership development function, which allows the integration of the life skills curriculum with the job readiness curriculum. This arrangement may help students relate the resolution of personal issues to long-term career planning. This person also plays the role of tracking the students' progress in meeting career readiness competencies and coordinating all staff activities related to student progress on competencies.

- **Career or Job Developer, Placement Specialist, or Transitions Coordinator**
  
  This staff member identifies opportunities for employment and post-secondary education and links these opportunities to the needs of graduating students. This person often places students in job shadowing and internship opportunities throughout the program cycle and then, at the end of the cycle, spends most of his/her time placing graduates in jobs, apprenticeships, post-secondary education, or other advanced training. An important part of this role is to market the program to potential employers, apprenticeship programs, community and four-year colleges, and organizations that provide service placements and to work with the Program Director, board members, and the Industry Advisory Committee to identify potential employers and follow up on leads. This person should have also worked with the students throughout the cycle to understand their employment interests and job readiness status.

  An additional and important role often played by the career or job developer is to regularly follow up with youth placed in jobs or college and their employers or teachers to actively assess how they are doing and provide immediate support if things are not going well. Read more on job/college retention and the graduate support function in Section IV of this manual.

RESOURCES

A sample job description for a job developer can be found in here.
Understanding DOL Outcomes, Definitions, and MIS Timelines

“Some staff felt like entering data was not real work, and that data entry was taking them away from what they love and really care about, which is working directly with young people. It’s hard to get people to understand that data is part of the work. It’s not an add-on; it is a core essential function.”

– Patricia Bravo, former YouthBuild Director

As we discussed earlier in this section, our graduates’ accomplishments after completing the program are the measure of our program’s success. If our graduates are successful in obtaining and maintaining jobs or post-secondary education placements and keeping those jobs or staying in college, our program is successful. But how do we communicate that success to DOL, other funders, community leaders, and the public? One of the most important parts of your program’s preparation for effective career development must be to thoroughly understand the DOL outcomes, definitions and timelines related to career and post-secondary success for young people. In addition to a culture of career development, sound management, and a caring, supportive, and passionate staff, understanding the DOL Case Management and Performance Management Information System (MIS) will guide your program’s design so that you are sure to capture the job and post-secondary placements that your young people achieve. Capturing this information demonstrates that your program supports your graduates in placements leading to the development of further skills, more advanced jobs, increased income, lifetime learning, and lifetime contribution to the well-being of their families and communities.

DOL has established five performance outcomes for which all DOL YouthBuild programs are held accountable. Although all five performance outcomes contribute in a very meaningful way to young people’s success in attaining and keeping jobs or educational placements, there are two that most directly reflect their success in this area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Performance Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Placement in Employment or Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Attainment of a Degree or Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Literacy and Numeracy Gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Retention in Employment or Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Recidivism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Placement in Employment or Education

This outcome measures the percentage of young people placed in employment, post-secondary education, full-time paid service placements, military, or long-term occupational training in the first quarter (three months) after the quarter in which the young person exits the program. The number of young people placed is divided by the total number of young people who exited the program in the previous quarter to calculate the percentage placed.
Retention in Employment or Education

It is not enough to simply place our young people in a job or a post-secondary educational institution. In order to significantly reap the benefits of these placements, young people must stick with these first jobs or find another job if the first one doesn’t last, as it often doesn’t. The same is true for education. Unfortunately, our youth may begin post-secondary education but may not complete it. For these reasons, this outcome measures the number of young people who were placed in employment or education in the first quarter after exit and are in a placement in the second and third quarters after exit. They do not have to be in the same employment or education placement in each of the three quarters.

RESOURCES
For more information about tracking outcomes in the MIS system view the MIS E-Learning Video Series.

Outcomes in the DOL MIS

It is important for you to understand these outcomes, how they are measured, and how to accurately enter them into the DOL MIS. The DOL outcomes are calculated directly from the data entered into the DOL Case Management and Performance MIS so it is important to make sure that your program is entering its data correctly into the system. Your staff and partners should also be thoroughly familiar with these outcomes and how they are measured. DOL provides many opportunities for training in the Case Management and Performance system, and you should make certain that at least one (and preferably two) of your staff have attended this training.

To record successful DOL outcomes, you and your staff must also understand the “big picture” of performance outcomes. For instance, since retention in education or employment is collected for three quarters following placement, your program should have a good follow-up plan in place. You should collect several (some programs collect as many as seven) different names and phone numbers for people who will know how to reach each of your students after they exit the program. Having multiple contacts may be the difference between data reporting a positive outcome for the youth and no data at all. It is also recommended that you set up free email accounts for each of your students through Hotmail, Google, or Facebook as a way of keeping in touch with them and helping them stay connected to each other and to a supportive community. It is a good idea to send regular emails to all your graduates telling them of events, successes of other graduates, or opportunities.
Understanding the performance measures related to placement and retention also requires an understanding of how your program design might affect the calculations. For each of these performance outcomes, there are many factors that determine how DOL measures your program’s success. As an example, if a student is placed during the quarter in which he/she exited the program (referred to as the “exit quarter”), he/she must still be in that placement in the first quarter after the exit quarter (referred to as the “follow-up quarter”) for the placement to count in the DOL MIS. It is important to know that the placement recorded during the first quarter after exit does not have to be the SAME placement as the placement made during the exit quarter.

Each of the two DOL performance measures most closely linked to career development have factors like the one highlighted in the example to the right that affect what data you capture and when you capture it. With this many factors in play, it is important to have an intentional program design for each of the performance outcomes.

Additional information on factors to consider around tracking the DOL retention outcome can be found on p. 83 in Section IV of this manual.

**RESOURCES**

The [Factors and Considerations](#) tool, found in the Tool Bench, will help you set up your program design so you are accurately capturing the information you need to report to DOL on placement and retention in employment and education.

To learn more about the DOL performance measures, how they integrate with the calendar, and the factors and considerations necessary for program success, watch the [E-Learning Series #1: Planning for Program Success](#).
Researching Opportunities and Connecting with Partners

This section deals with the type of external activities your program should engage in to support career development for your youth. This external work should be completed, if possible, before the start of your program cycle. In fact, this work is ongoing.

You and your program staff must work to connect with external partners and resources that will help your program realize its vision for successful YouthBuild graduates. Young people need and want to access career and education opportunities that draw on their talents, skills, interests, and experience. Meaningful work on career tracks that provide a path out of poverty empowers young people to live up to their responsibilities, follow their dreams, and give back to their communities. In addition, employers need well-prepared new workers as urgently as young people need economic opportunities. However, our YouthBuild students face a difficult and changing world of work; creating the connection between our students and employers is more challenging than ever before.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2014, 75 percent of all new jobs in the United States will require a post-secondary credential. In fact, 24 out of the 30 fastest growing career fields require post-secondary education. A high school diploma no longer suffices to earn a living wage unless students succeed in obtaining an apprenticeship in the trades that will lead toward journeyman status. Data shows that a young person with some college and no degree earns 18 percent more per year than a counterpart with only a high school diploma. Similarly, young people with associate degrees earn 29 percent more annually, and those with a bachelor’s degree earn 62 percent more per year than their peers with a high school diploma.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Weekly Earnings in May 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree                                       $1,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degree                                   $1,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree                                       $1,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree                                     $1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree                                    $761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree                               $699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate                                  $626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a high school diploma                       $454</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These rapidly changing economic forces demand that YouthBuild programs collaborate with public, private, nonprofit, and education sectors in new ways to build bridges between young people and the labor market. To create career pathways, programs must cultivate strategic partnerships to improve youth outcomes and advocate for their graduates in the labor market and post-secondary education.
In order to achieve these goals, not only do we need to make a commitment within the program but also obtain commitments from outside partners. The following principles, among others, are important for both internal and external commitment:

- **Community connection**—Ensure that each young person sees that the program has connections to organizations, networks, and systems that offer real economic opportunities.
- **Leadership**—As senior leaders, advocate for our young people in the community.
- **Authenticity**—Ensure that our students participate in work-based learning and career development activities that are driven by both the needs and interests of young people and by current workplace demands.

In securing external commitments, it is particularly important to connect with partners in the workforce development and national service systems. These systems touch nearly every sector of society and include a vast array of public, private, and nonprofit organizations providing education, training, research, curricula, credentials, apprenticeships, support services, mentoring, policy development, advocacy, and jobs. You should seek out representatives in the following areas:

- **Workforce development system**—Provides access to the latest research on growth industries and training. This system includes One-Stop Career Centers and your local Workforce Investment Board.
- **Apprenticeship programs**—Provide paid on-the-job training and classroom training in a highly structured setting that includes wage increases as one’s skills increase. The [Department of Labor’s Office of Apprenticeship](https://www.doleta.gov/apprenticeship) can help your program seek out local apprenticeship sponsors in your area.
- **Green professionals, environmental agencies, and public housing authorities**—Help engage in green leadership experiences and community service and expose youth to green careers, an important and fast-growing sector. Public housing authorities are required by law to make a good faith effort to employ housing authority residents and other low-income individuals through their construction contractors and through direct jobs. YouthBuild graduates are ideal employees to meet this requirement.
- **Community colleges and other post-secondary institutions**—Provide paths to attain post-secondary degrees or credentials necessary for many fast-growing sectors.
- **National service entities such as National Civilian Conservation Corps, Public Allies, AmeriCorps, and VISTA**—Provide full-time service opportunities with stipends through which graduates can earn up to $5,300 toward education awards for post-secondary education and receive additional leadership training.
Exploring Labor Market Research and Opportunities

As a first step in fostering external commitments, you and your staff should be knowledgeable about career and post-secondary opportunities available in your geographic area. This section will focus on understanding current labor market research and opportunities and the next section will discuss understanding the post-secondary landscape.

The labor market is a supply-and-demand equation; therefore, successful job placement is dependent on the types of jobs available in the community. YouthBuild programs must balance the interests of individual students with the workforce needs of employers. In order to make these connections, you should understand:

- the wage and benefit structure for different types of jobs;
- the employment market and growth sectors in your area; and
- specific skills and entry requirements of different industries and occupations.

Wage Rate Structure for Different Types of Jobs

The objective of YouthBuild programs is not simply to find jobs for graduates but to find jobs that pay more than minimum wage, provide benefits, and present opportunities for growth. YouthBuild programs should be encouraging students to attain proficiency in academic, technical, and soft skills that will lead to higher paying jobs. Programs should set a target for the average wage that they hope to achieve for students based on the wage structure of the community.

You should calculate the wage standards against the state minimum wage for the purpose of ensuring that wages achieved are at least 15 percent above the state minimum wage or the federal minimum wage, whichever is higher. This could be a minimum goal to aim for at the time of placement. However, because working full-time at an above-minimum wage job can still produce poverty-level income, continuing to work with your graduates to ensure career growth is necessary.

Understanding the Employment Market

In order for your graduates to be successful in the labor market, it is important that your program has a basic understanding of both national and local employment market and growth sectors. Your youth should have a basic understanding of these labor markets as well. This research can guide you in choosing strategic employment partners. Programs can access information on national trends from the following resources:

- **One-Stop Career Centers** offer a wide range of career, employment, and education data as well as web services and tools for job seekers, including salary information and green career options.
- **Green Careers** provides a list of green industry careers and information about skills, wages, and training requirements.
- **Employment Projection Program** develops 10-year national employment information about labor market projections, including information on industries with the fastest growing and most rapidly declining wages and salaries.

- **Occupational Outlook Handbook** provides information on careers from an occupational perspective, such as job descriptions, training, and education necessary for particular occupations, current and projected earnings, job prospects, and working conditions. It also contains job search tips and state-by-state job market data.

- **Bureau of Labor Statistics** provides wide-ranging labor information at the national level as well as some state, regional, and local level information.

- **High Growth Industries Guide** provides information on high-growth industries, including industry profiles and detailed downloadable reports.

In addition to understanding national career trends, your program should conduct a regional or statewide economic analysis and market scan. This will help you determine where local opportunities for graduates reside and allow your program to be engaged in local policy discussions related to workforce development, education, and training. The three key steps to conducting a market scan are:

- **Identify economic trends**—Collect and analyze data to identify trends and promising employment sectors. Data from the Workforce Investment Board, local community colleges, the DOL, or private research firms can provide valuable information on regional economic trends, such as which sectors are adding jobs, which ones are losing jobs, and how the regional economy is changing or creating new business opportunities. Also, investigate if the high-growth industries in your area have entry-level opportunities at a good starting wage and what the prospects for career advancement are.

- **Talk to high-growth sectors**—Representatives from promising sectors can give programs specific information about opportunities and needs in these industries and help identify potential partners for your program. This can be done through interviews or focus groups. When gathering this information, think creatively about what you know about the surrounding regions and ask questions about growth strategies being implemented by these sectors. Also, ask employers what they are seeking in potential employees and how your students can get a foot in the door to the specific sectors.

- **Form an advisory group**—If possible, YouthBuild programs should form an advisory group with new sector partners. Advisory groups can be helpful in revising curricula and advising programs on their occupational skills training. This will ensure that training and mentoring programs are responsive to the needs of the industry and employers.
Local Market Resources

Your program can access state and local labor market information from the following resources:

- [Careerclusters.org](http://www.careerclusters.org) provides tools that can help with a seamless transition from education to career in an era of changing workplace demands. It helps states connect career technical training to education, workforce preparation, and economic development.
- [State Labor Market Information (LMI)](http://www.lmi.gov) offers state-level labor market information and analysis that may be helpful to employers and job seekers as they make career, education, and economic development decisions.
- [Local Workforce Investment Boards](http://www.doleta.gov) provide information on local and regional workforce training resources as well as the needs of the local economy.
- [Local Chambers of Commerce](http://www.chamberofcommerce.org) track local and regional business development and labor market information that can be accessed in public newsletters (to receive more detailed information and explore partnership opportunities, consider joining as a full member).

Sector Research

A sector is a specific industry or cluster of occupations. It is often helpful to YouthBuild programs to focus their research and efforts on one or more sectors. Such a strategy, referred to as a sector strategy, offers effective ways to create pathways to sustainable careers for young people through job placements linked to post-secondary education and career ladders with opportunities for growth. When researching sectors, look for sectors that are large, adding workers, and have significant replacement needs due to turnover or retirement. Also, seek sectors that have advancement opportunities as they may pay for increased skills. And finally, seek sectors which have the particular skill and workforce needs that are a potential match for YouthBuild students because occupations within these sectors are attainable for YouthBuild students, are in demand, and will continue to be so. It is worthwhile for YouthBuild students to spend their energy obtaining the skills and credentials required for such professions.

One of the highest growth industry areas is health care. Figuring out how to access entry-level jobs in health care may be worthwhile for YouthBuild programs.
Green Jobs

Another area for YouthBuild programs to focus on is green jobs and green building. This is an important and high-growth industry that offers promising career pathways to young people. There is a diverse range of career opportunities within this sector that your students can pursue. They can explore training and careers in new green home building construction, weatherization of older buildings, or energy efficiency. The potential job placements are only one reason why it is important that the program use green building construction practices and offer appropriate certifications.

Below is a list of opportunities within this sector:

- **Urban sustainability**—Smart growth projects to stop urban sprawl, green building and infrastructure design, energy-efficient homes and commercial buildings, and development of efficient mass-transport systems.
- **Preservation**—Within water, ecosystems, and agricultural preservation, biodiversity promotion and ecosystem preservation, protection and management of water, improvement of air quality, and practicing sustainable agriculture.
- **Material management and human health**—Reduction of waste and chemical contamination, green product design and manufacturing, green engineering and chemistry, increase the use of recycled and reused materials, life cycle assessment, and remediation of polluted areas (brownfields and wetlands).
- **Renewable energy and climate change**—Build Smart Grid projects to support more electricity from wind, solar, and hydropower, development and use of renewable energy from geothermal, hydro, solar, wind, and biofuels.
- **Transportation**—Efforts to increase efficiency and/or reduce environmental impact of various modes of transportation.
- **Green construction**—Construction of new buildings, retrofitting residential and commercial buildings, and installing other green technology.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more detailed information about green careers, visit the [O*NET Green Economy](#) pages.

Job Profiles

In addition to understanding the labor market, your program should identify careers that best align with your students’ skills and interests. Once your program has identified these sectors, you should speak to employers in the sector to understand the following:

- **Demand and recruitment**—Gather information on which jobs in the sector are in demand and understand their short- and long-term outlooks. Also be sure to identify if employers prefer a specific credential or set of skills.
- **Job characteristics**—Investigate the typical working and lifestyle consideration for jobs and ask employers if there are certain personalities that would be better suited for these types of jobs.
- **Post-secondary considerations**—Determine who provides training for these jobs and if there are opportunities to seek further education or training.
- **Career advancement opportunities**—Learn if there are well-defined career ladders, what they look like, and if employees have the opportunity to advance within an organization.

Once your program collects this information, consider creating job profiles that students can easily access. The profiles should include a basic description of the job with a list of typical tasks, short-term training requirements, growth potential, wage and benefits information, path for growth, and a short description of personalities that would be most suitable for the position. Posting these job profiles around your program's building can be a great way to expose young people to careers they may not have considered.

**RESOURCES**
A sample job profile can be found [here](#).

### Placement Requirements

Once you have become familiar with job opportunities in your area, and have an understanding of your students’ interests, it is critical to become familiar with particular criteria for job placement in the different employment sectors. The following list is a sample of requirements for entry to construction and other high-growth industry jobs:

- **Union apprenticeship**—Minimum requirements include being 18 years of age with a high school diploma or GED. Additional requirements include reliable transportation, minimal construction skill levels, and excellent attendance and punctuality record.
- **Electrical workers**—One year of algebra documented in transcripts.
- **Laborers**—18 years of age with minimum skill levels and a driver’s license or transportation to job sites, but no high school diploma or GED is required.
- **Health care workers**—Many health care jobs require less than four years of college, although most technical jobs require at least a two-year technical degree.
- **Clean energy careers**—Two-year degrees or certificates from a community college or training center for jobs in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- **Green careers**—Require a range of certifications offered by external organizations to demonstrate an individual has attained a certain level of skill in a particular area. Some occupations also require licenses that vary by state.

Obtaining this entry criteria information early can help your program ensure that it is providing adequate training and preparation for your young people. It can also help you educate your students about the skills they need to be placed in specific jobs.
Researching College Options and Opportunities

Most jobs today require workers to communicate effectively and problem-solve using advanced technical skills that typically require some post-secondary education. In fact, 70 percent of today’s jobs, by some estimates, require at least some post-secondary education; that is, education that minimally leads to a professional credential but not necessarily a two- or four-year degree. Every young person’s career plan should include some participation in post-secondary institutions or registered apprenticeships. Otherwise, YouthBuild students are likely to miss the education and training necessary for career advancement.

Post-Secondary Education Options

Similar to the research you would conduct to understand the local labor market, you should research the post-secondary opportunities available to students in your area. Be sure to explore colleges, community colleges, technical schools, and training programs in the area. Of course, some post-secondary education institutions will be more suitable for your YouthBuild graduates than others. Public colleges and universities are more affordable than private colleges and universities. Technical schools may match certain students' skills and interests. Some post-secondary institutions give credit for “life experience.” Some are particularly interested in students who have a commitment to strengthening their communities through service. Be very cautious about for-profit post-secondary institutions; they cost more than public institutions, sometimes persuade students to accept loans they can’t afford, and overpromise results in terms of readiness for good-paying jobs. Similar to partnerships with employers, it is important to research the post-secondary landscape in your region, identify promising partners, and explore opportunities with them. Intentionally building post-secondary education partners will help you make the link between post-secondary education and career success to your students.

You should also have a basic understanding of admission requirements. Some community colleges offer bridge programs that allow students to earn a GED at the community college before entering into a course of study. However, many community colleges, apprenticeship programs, four-year colleges, and technical schools require a GED or high school diploma. Similarly, most four-year colleges and universities require entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT. Since many YouthBuild students may have low high school grade point averages, scoring well on these tests may be even more important to admissions.
Post-Secondary Education Characteristics and Services

In addition to basic research on what programs exist and their entrance requirements, you should look for characteristics at post-secondary institutions that will best support your students. For example, ideal post-secondary partners are committed to engaging non-traditional students and offer credentials that will lead to promising careers. Other characteristics include:

- promising career preparation;
- demonstrated student career success;
- strong student supports;
- willingness to enter formal agreements with YouthBuild programs;
- sharing staffing opportunities;
- strong transfer support;
- innovative teaching;
- leadership development opportunities; and
- opportunities for GED earners.

In order for YouthBuild graduates to be successful in their post-secondary endeavors, it is important that they receive support in their transition to and through completion of their post-secondary credential. Many post-secondary institutions house student service offices that offer a number of supports to help students successfully finance their education, plan their post-secondary and career journey, and receive personalized tutoring and academic and personal counseling. While the specific structures for delivering student support services vary widely across post-secondary institutions, below is a snapshot of some key student service offices/staff that you should consider engaging to offer students support and assistance before and during their post-secondary experience:

- financial aid office;
- educational opportunity centers (e.g., TRIO programs);
- student support services;
- vocational education departments;
- academic counseling;
- career services;
- supplemental instruction and/or academic resource centers; and
- developmental education faculty.
Building Winning Partnerships

After researching the labor and post-secondary opportunities in your area, you should establish partnerships with employers and post-secondary educational institutions that you feel will most directly benefit your graduates. These partnerships can take a variety of forms and relationships. Prior to entering a formal partnership, it is important to consider the following factors:

- **Organizational culture**—Understand and acknowledge differences and similarities in organizational culture and take steps to compensate.
- **Capacity**—Make an honest assessment of the capacity to handle the task for which each organization takes responsibility.
- **Motives**—Be honest about the motives for collaboration.
- **Practicality of implementation**—Determine how realistic and doable the plan is and avoid confusion.
- **Lead entity**—Designate a lead entity, or at the very least a lead person or position, to take overall responsibility for the collaboration.

Who Do You Need As Your Partners?

Contacts outside the YouthBuild program are essential to getting young people into the demand-side of the workforce system where educational and career opportunities exist. Establishing these contacts is uniquely the role of the adults working with young people because students typically have little or no access to this realm. Young people, especially low-income youth, often have none of the social networks so essential to career development that more privileged youth and many adults take for granted. For YouthBuild students, the YouthBuild program becomes the wider social network. In building a network, your programs should consider including the following key partners:

- post-secondary education and training institutions;
- industry-supported training and apprenticeship organizations;
- Workforce Investment Boards;
- unions, trade associations, and other organizations;
- individual youth-friendly employers;
- employment support services (health care, child care, placement service, etc.);
- mentors;
- successful graduates from the program;
- Rotary Clubs;
- particular employers that have shown interest in hiring graduates; and
- nonprofits that support full-time national service placements.
You may also seek influence within the policy realm as a strategy to open career pathways. This policy work typically relates directly to workforce development, but it is a further example of the ways organizations can support the economic prospects of young people. Involvement in policy development requires strong commitment and engagement from the program’s senior leadership.

**Employer Partnerships**

YouthBuild programs should form intentional and strong partnerships with a range of employers, particularly those in high-growth sectors. Programs should have an employer outreach plan, which includes reaching out to business associations, communicating with potential partners in a variety of formats (electronic, print, and/or in-person), and making the case for the partnership and students. When pursuing partnerships, you should develop a relationship and emphasize the mutual gain for both the employer and your program so that the partnership is viewed as more than a social service. Present your program as a valuable business partner.

When filling an entry-level position, employers are looking for employees who have good work habits and attitudes, who know enough to learn more, and who have basic skills. Therefore, be honest with employers about the skill levels and experience of your students.

A good reputation with employers and a good relationship with employers who have hired past YouthBuild graduates will make future placements easier. If employers are satisfied, they will be sources for other jobs, sources of referrals, and references for new employer contacts. To maintain good relationships with employers remember the following:

- **Do not overpromise.** Programs cannot guarantee the success of every graduate. Graduates may have problems after placement that cannot be anticipated. Some will lose their first and even second jobs.

- **Tell the employer the truth about a graduate’s past history and prospects.** If a student has a criminal record or is still involved with the criminal justice system, be up front about those circumstances and describe the student’s progress in the program. Persuade employers to give these students a chance. Helping students develop an asset-based resume will assist in this regard.

- **Be honest about the young person’s academic and construction skill levels.**

- **Assure the employer that the program will provide follow-up support to both the graduate and the employer to make sure the placement is as successful as possible.** A program cannot guarantee 100% success, but do not be apologetic; employers do not get 100% success in their independent hiring either.
Union Partnerships and Pathways

Additional meaningful partnerships to establish are those with local unions and apprenticeship programs. When you partner with local unions, your students may have a pathway to union-sponsored training and career opportunities. Union training can be some of the most complete training provided in the construction industry. Apprenticeships are available in particular trades so that a graduate accepted as an apprentice works towards becoming a journeyman in that trade.

You should contact your local Building Trades Council to familiarize them with your program and ask them to serve on your advisory committee. This can increase the possibility that your graduates gain access to apprenticeships. It is also recommended that you hire union journeyman as construction trainers, which can create a very good union connection for the program.

Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship program will give your students the opportunity to obtain skills along with on-the-job training with trade-related classroom instruction. On the worksite, apprentices receive hands-on training under the mentorship of a certified journeyman or master tradesman. In the classroom, they receive an education that provides them with technical theory and applied skills that in many cases can be counted as college credit. While apprenticeship programs vary in length of time, building and construction trades’ union-sponsored programs generally take three to five years to complete. Apprenticeship programs are operated by a range of private and public sponsors, including employers, employer associations, and joint labor-management organizations. Apprenticeship programs are ideal for your students because they do not have to absorb the cost of training and they will earn while they learn. An apprentice will earn a starting wage of between 30-60 percent of a journeyman’s wage.

RESOURCES

For more information on partnerships with apprenticeship programs, see the Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship Guide for YouthBuild Programs.
Including Your Board of Directors

If it is possible to influence the composition of the board of directors, you should recruit board members with experience in the construction industry, housing development, and other high-growth sectors. This could include architects, contractors, union representatives, representatives of the green industry, and representatives of social service organizations. Board members with these backgrounds are likely to have a broad range of personal and business contacts. Even board members without these specific backgrounds are likely to have a range of contacts that can help start the job development process. Activities that the Program Director can ask board members to undertake to start the process include:

- identifying a job or internship opportunity in their own organization for a YouthBuild graduate;
- creating a list of personal and business contacts in the construction, green, and other high-growth industries;
- introducing your program to contacts and setting up a meeting for you or your job development staff member;
- attending meetings to explore job opportunities; and
- distributing information about YouthBuild in their own networks to help identify new job and partnership opportunities.

Employer Advisory Committees

If your program’s board of directors does not include significant representation from the construction or other high-demand local industries, or if your program is sponsored by a public agency, it may be helpful to create an advisory committee specifically to help identify job opportunities and review curricula and training offerings. Even if your current board of directors does have some individuals with industry knowledge, it can still be useful to create an advisory committee to broaden the job search network. An advisory committee can include individuals who might not be able to serve on the board, including city officials or representatives of public agencies involved in housing development and construction and other high-demand industries.

While the industry advisory committee’s primary function is to help identify job possibilities, it can also provide your program with assistance in a number of other areas. The advisory committee can:

- review the program’s job readiness competencies and criteria for placement to give an employer’s perspective;
- assure prospective employers of the skills they can expect from YouthBuild graduates;
- provide mentors for students; and
- provide internship opportunities.
Construction-Related Partnerships

Although it is important to pursue a variety of employer partnerships, a natural starting point for many YouthBuild programs is the construction industry. Entry-level positions in construction generally include work in building maintenance, drywalling, carpentry, demolition, painting, and masonry. Lumber yards, hardware stores, brick suppliers, or landscape construction firms may also offer entry-level positions. If the program has provided some entry-level training through an internship program, a graduate might also work in more specialized fields such as a plumber’s assistant.

To the greatest extent possible, you should seek employment opportunities that offer sensitive management as well as further training and advancement possibilities, job security, and additional benefits. Unfortunately, many construction jobs are not permanent. A student may be hired at a construction site for the duration of that project, but it is up to the student to do well and impress the employer in order to be hired again for the next opening. Jobs in building maintenance and repair offer more stability but less room for growth.

Since most residential construction has historically been non-union, construction jobs in this area are generally more easily accessible. Contractors doing residential construction supported by public funding are often required to hire a percentage of neighborhood residents; therefore, YouthBuild students may be a good match for these jobs.

Job opportunities may also be found in infrastructure work (roads, bridges, mass transit), factory-built housing, and housing authorities where construction is contracted out (usually to union contractors) and maintenance is done in-house.

It may be also be helpful for you to contact the local Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to make a connection. The OFCCP is responsible for enforcing the contractual promise of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity required of those who do business with the Federal government. As such, the OFCCP may present a valuable link to employers who are actively seeking minority and female employees.

Under Section Three of the Housing and Urban Development Act, any entity receiving HUD funds for construction activities must provide employment opportunities to local residents, with priority for housing residents. The Section Three requirement applies to all federal housing and community development programs. Since it is designed to create employment opportunities for individuals whose incomes are below either 80 percent or 50 percent of median income for the area, YouthBuild students are a priority group for securing these jobs. You should meet with construction managers of agencies undertaking Section Three-obligated activities before the pre-bid construction meetings to discuss the role of your students in satisfying these obligations. Job opportunities for students may include:

- administrative and management positions (purchasing, filing, bookkeeping);
- service positions (carpet installation, catering, computer service, maintenance, landscaping, printing, photography); and
- construction positions (architecture, engineering, all aspects of direct construction, including subcontractor trades and machine operation).
Non-construction Partnerships

Since many graduates will not want to be placed in construction-related jobs, it is important to partner with other types of employers as well. The following are some areas to explore:

- **Local growth sectors**—Recent business start-ups, reallocations, or expansions may create local job openings that offer young people entry-level positions and opportunities for advancement. Seek out these employers and tell them what YouthBuild can offer them.

- **Health care**—The health care industry continues to grow in most communities. Jobs at hospitals, health maintenance organizations, emergency medical facilities, personal nursing services, and nursing homes can provide a number of job opportunities.

- **Social services**—Some young people will want to help other young people or work for organizations that address community needs. Some decide they want to become YouthBuild staff or directors and need to realize that college is a necessary part of their preparation. Some YouthBuild programs hire graduates to fill positions within their own programs, such as receptionists, clerical assistants, and assistant construction trainers. YouthBuild programs with AmeriCorps grants often hire students for an additional year as AmeriCorps interns. Interns can organize community service activities, help supervise construction crews, or undertake other program responsibilities. Social service agencies that provide services to program participants may also have entry-level jobs available. The Corporation for National and Community Service has made YouthBuild graduates a priority for the residential full-time service program NCCC; and Public Allies seeks YouthBuild graduates for full-time placements in nonprofit organizations. Both of these opportunities provide education awards for service.

Post-Secondary Education Partnerships

Making connections with post-secondary educational institutions is key to obtaining placement for YouthBuild students. Many post-secondary educational institutions may not be aware of YouthBuild and the type of preparation it provides for young people. Making connections is a dual process of finding out about them and letting them know about YouthBuild. Some of the materials developed about your YouthBuild program for prospective employers can be used with admissions officers of post-secondary education institutions. It is critical for you to identify an influential champion within the college or training center. The right champion will ensure the partnership is successful by linking and helping your program engage the right student support services and faculty. However, engaging high-level leaders isn’t the only way to successfully reach out to relevant student support service staff and faculty. Some YouthBuild programs have developed successful partnerships with relevant student service offices by reaching out directly to staff.

Prior to forming a partnership with an educational institution, be sure to explore if it offers certifications or degrees in occupations that are connected to high-growth sectors in your area. In addition, ask yourself if the partnership is:

- meaningful, sustainable, formal, and mutually accountable;
- reflecting local context, student needs, and existing resources;
- strengthened with formal agreements (MOAs, articulation, and data-sharing agreements); and
- incorporating a timeline and process to review and recommit to partnership agreements to ensure integrated and effective services.
Establishing Relationships with Post-Secondary Institutions

Post-secondary technical schools, apprenticeship programs, community colleges, and universities all have one thing in common: they want to recruit students. In their quest to enroll students, they are generally very willing to make presentations, participate in career days, and provide counseling on post-secondary education opportunities. They are willing to provide information to prospective students about admissions and financial aid. In some cases, they will agree to administer academic and career and vocational assessments free of charge to prospective students.

Many post-secondary educational institutions have educational opportunity programs or minority recruitment programs to encourage applications from low-income and minority students. Staff members from these programs are knowledgeable about admissions, financial aid, student support systems, and post-secondary education majors or career programs. They may be willing to visit your program and speak with students.

Developing a Memorandum of Agreement

Upon selecting an appropriate post-secondary partner and discussing the ways in which you can work together to provide supports to YouthBuild students and alumni, we strongly encourage you to collaborate with the post-secondary institution to develop an MOA. An MOA is a formal written agreement outlining roles and responsibilities of your YouthBuild program and the post-secondary institution.

The MOA should reflect the unique context of the partnership between your program and the respective post-secondary institution. The capacity of your program and your partners to address the most pressing needs of your students within the post-secondary environment and overall efforts and resources available to support low-income students at the institution will fundamentally shape the development and implementation of each MOA.

Establishing an MOA with a post-secondary institution represents a promising beginning for partnership work but not a sufficient endpoint. The successful implementation of the roles and responsibilities outlined in the MOA represents an important ongoing scope of work. Therefore, be sure to build in a review process that will ensure there are periodic revisions, renewals, and recommitments to MOAs.

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<th>RESOURCES</th>
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<td>Sample MOAs can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</td>
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Post-Secondary Advisory Committee

Adding representatives from post-secondary educational institutions such as community college representatives to your industry advisory committee can be a meaningful way to create connections with those institutions, obtain guidance for students, and identify post-secondary education opportunities relevant to students. You should select representatives from several different types of post-secondary institutions so that you will have a range of perspectives and assistance. Appropriate representatives from educational institutions might include:

- Director of Admissions;
- Director of Financial Aid;
- Director of Student Support Services;
- Director of Cooperative Education or Extension;
- Dean of Occupational/Vocational Education;
- Director of Student Outreach Services; or
- Department Faculty.

Post-secondary institution representatives on your advisory committee can perform the following functions:

- review the academic and vocational education curricula to insure that they meet standards for post-secondary education acceptance;
- assist in identifying the post-secondary institution in the community most suitable for YouthBuild graduates;
- assist staff in obtaining catalogues, admissions applications, financial aid information, and applications; and
- provide counseling and mentoring to students who have a strong interest and good potential for going directly into post-secondary education after YouthBuild.
Employer and Post-Secondary Institution Databases

Setting Up an Employer Database

Your program can start a database of information on prospective employers with contact information provided by you, the board of directors, or from the job developer’s own knowledge. This will serve as a basic structure for adding data about other employers as the job development process expands. A preparation and outreach work plan for engaging employers can be found here.

A database of employer contacts is most useful if it can be organized both by placement sectors (nonprofit, health care, construction, etc.) and by organization name. The database should include the following information:

- name, address, and phone number of the organization;
- name of the contact person;
- type of organization;
- name of person or source of referral to the organization (board member, personal contact, etc.);
- size, number of employees, types of jobs suitable for YouthBuild graduates;
- indication if the employer is currently hiring;
- name of any graduates previously placed with the company and an evaluation by graduate and employer of that placement;
- record of contacts with the employer and their results; and
- education and skill requirements for entry-level jobs or particular occupations in the organization.

Some communities have job referral networks that have already been created to help youth and adults find employment opportunities. Your program should use this as a resource. Your students can also use it in their own job search efforts.

Your program and students should also use Internet sources and e-networks where job openings are posted, such as Craigslist, Monster.com, Idealist, and Career Builder. For example, America’s Job Bank, a web site sponsored by the Department of Labor contains a list of 2,000 State Employment Service Offices. It has the largest pool of active job opportunities available anywhere. America’s Job Bank has four categories: job seekers, employers, job market information, and search tips, which makes it a useful resource to the program on many levels.
Setting Up a Post-Secondary Education Database

Similar to an employer database, your program should create a post-secondary education database. This will ensure that your students can easily access information on post-secondary education institutions in the area or elsewhere that are suitable for them. The basic information you collect should include:

- sample admission application forms and procedures from post-secondary education institutions;
- publications that describe the types of financial aid available for post-secondary education;
- financial aid application forms;
- contact information of admission offices at key institutions most likely to be of interest to students;
- key deadlines for submission of applications and submission of financial aid applications; and
- basic admissions criteria.

Conclusion

To be successful, career development must begin even before young people start the program and continue long after they transition out of it. A successful career development strategy includes both internal and external strategies.

Internally, you should make preparations so that your program culture is focused on career development, ensure that you have adequate staff to focus on career development, initiate conversations with students about the career development focus of YouthBuild before the program cycle begins, and develop a system that accurately tracks career development activities.

While it is important to prepare your program internally, it is also necessary to work on external strategies that will ensure young people have access to internships, jobs, training opportunities and post-secondary education opportunities. This includes researching the labor market and post-secondary education opportunities in your area, establishing partnerships with employers and institutions, and developing a database of job and post-secondary education opportunities.

These strategies will ensure that your program begins the cycle with a strong career development plan, which will help your students to meet their long-term goals.
Introduction

The first section of this manual focused on the activities and partnership building that you should engage in before the start and in the first few weeks of your program cycle to ensure that young people are well grounded in the YouthBuild principles of career development and that you have partnerships in place to support them when they transition out of your program. Remember, our definition of career development includes placement in post-secondary education as well as jobs, and it includes helping young people retain those educational or workforce placements, working steadily toward their own highest aspirations. This section will focus on the activities that your young people will engage in throughout the majority of your YouthBuild program cycle—activities such as soft skills development, academic skill building, college- and career-readiness classes, and leadership, internship, and job-shadowing opportunities.

Integration of Readiness Throughout All YouthBuild Components and Soft Skills Learning

As noted previously, career development isn’t the job of only one staff person at YouthBuild, nor can it be an activity that happens one hour a week on Friday afternoons. Instead, the Program Director is responsible for establishing and nurturing a program culture that brings all staff and students together to work toward student success. The Program Director must be consistent and clear that career development is a function of all YouthBuild program staff positions. There are many ways in which all staff play a role in career development, some subtle and some more obvious. One of the most important things that all staff can do is to help students master basic soft skills. Soft skills are skills related to interpersonal relationships and workplace behaviors as opposed to technical knowledge needed to perform on the job. Examples of soft skills include:

- communicating clearly and respectfully;
- being punctual;
- being able to work effectively on a team; and
- taking initiative.

Soft skills, as opposed to technical skills, are most often cited by employers as crucial for employees in entry-level jobs.

In a Job Outlook 2008 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE), the top characteristics looked for in new hires by 276 employer respondents (mostly from the service sector) were all soft skills: communication ability, a strong work ethic, initiative, interpersonal skills, and teamwork.
Helping students master soft skills is one of the most important career development strategies that your YouthBuild program can implement. Public/Private Ventures (PPV), a research, policy, and program development organization that evaluates programs serving low-income populations to discover models that work, has done research in this area. In PPV’s publication *Hard Work on Soft Skills*, PPV identified six strategies that it found instrumental in creating a “culture of work” in employment training programs.² Adopting such a “culture of work” is extremely valuable to YouthBuild programs in helping students master soft skills.

1. **Recreate the physical environment of work to the fullest extent possible.**

   Your YouthBuild program should be structured so that young people are expected to speak and behave as if they were in a real workplace. This gives them the opportunity to adjust to and imagine themselves at work and gives them practice with such crucial skills as “code-switching,” which involves switching between the language one might use at home or on the streets and the language and behaviors one uses at work. For example, many YouthBuild programs have a time clock that students use daily upon arrival and departure. This not only simulates many workplace environments, but also helps to resolve any disputes about student attendance and punctuality records and provides backup materials for audits.

2. **Establish the discipline of the workplace in all aspects of the program.**

   By expecting your students to dress professionally (this can be as simple as khaki pants, a belt, and a collared t-shirt, or a program uniform if you have one) and get to work on time every day, you are helping your students absorb the norms of the workplace in a supportive environment so they are ready for a similar environment in the workplace. Responding to criticism professionally and being able to communicate respectfully with colleagues (other students) and managers (YouthBuild staff) are also crucial skills that should be incorporated into the day-to-day life of your YouthBuild program so that students have ample opportunity to practice these skills in a supportive environment.

3. **Give participants lots of opportunities to get to know successful people.**

   While the relationships that students develop with program staff are crucial to their success, it is just as important for your program to help them cultivate relationships with people other than program staff. You should establish a regular alumni speaker program so that alumni of your program can share their successes and challenges in the workplace and in college and provide motivation to your students. By regularly inviting alumni to speak at your program, you allow your students to see people of their own age and socio-economic backgrounds who are successful in college and the workplace. This is important to demonstrate their own ability to achieve positive outcomes.

   In addition to alumni guest speakers, you should invite employers with whom you have partnerships to come in and make presentations about what they are looking for in employees and how they make their hiring determinations. Such guest speakers can help young people see employers as more approachable and even see things from a manager’s point of view.

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² This section adapted from *Hard Work on Soft Skills*, published by Public/Private Ventures, Ted Houghton and Tony Proscio, 2002.
4. **Create work-like tasks and establish teams to complete them.**

Fortunately, YouthBuild is set up so that all students have the opportunity to work on a real worksite, usually in teams. On the construction site, students have the opportunity to practice responding to constructive criticism and feedback, communicating respectfully with co-workers and supervisors, working under pressure, and completing work tasks that may be less than enjoyable. Having the opportunity to work on these skills day in and day out is much more valuable than just hearing about how important the skills are in a classroom lecture. Students also have the opportunity to practice all of these skills in teams, thus learning how to work with people who may be different from them or whom they may not like. This is a valuable opportunity that helps students realize that in the workplace one must work with many different people and put aside differences.

5. **Put students in the employer’s role from time to time.**

YouthBuild provides many opportunities to allow students to see things from an employer’s point of view. One way to accomplish this is by rotating students through team leader positions on the construction site or in the classroom. In addition, students on the Youth Policy Council get to experience some of what a program manager experiences if they work on budgeting issues, student discipline issues, and programming choices. These opportunities to take on a leadership role within the program allow students to better understand the requirements and expectations of their future employers.

6. **Provide support services so students can focus on learning.**

Young people need supportive services from child care to health care to housing assistance in order to be successful at work. Helping students put these services in place during their time at YouthBuild will help them avoid having to miss work in the future. It is also important to help students learn how to advocate for themselves and seek services that they need early, before their problems become severe.

In addition to the soft skills associated with the workplace, there is a similar set of skills associated with a post-secondary environment that is valuable to YouthBuild students.

For example, attending class regularly, arriving to class a few minutes early, participating actively in the activities of the classroom, and following up with the teacher afterwards with questions are all skills that are important to success in a post-secondary environment. Your program can also mimic college to the extent possible by assigning regular homework, having students work together in study groups, and assigning rigorous writing assignments. By establishing and reinforcing these norms in your YouthBuild program, you will be preparing your students for success in the post-secondary world as well as the world of work.
Academic Readiness

A crucial piece of the readiness puzzle is academic readiness. Incorporating rigorous instructional practices into your YouthBuild program is an important element of career development that will ensure your young people are ready for post-secondary education and the workplace. Strategies that will help your program in the area of academic readiness include:

**Writing**

Ensure that students have opportunities to engage in all stages of the writing process, from brainstorming through revision and editing, while also exposing them to more expository, persuasive, and research-based writing. Throughout all of these writing opportunities, your instructional staff should provide explicit teaching of grammar, conventions, word usage, and sentence structure. There are few skills more valuable in life than good writing skills; yet few YouthBuild students enter with these skills, so programs must intentionally emphasize them.

**Literacy**

Increase your program’s instructional focus on literacy activities by providing more silent reading time, reading out loud more frequently, diversifying types and genres of reading materials, conducting more one-on-one reading conferences, and asking more questions to assess reading comprehension. Surround students with interesting and exciting books that are relevant to their lives.

**Numeracy**

Create a more consistent culture of numeracy by reinforcing, assessing, and remediating foundational math skills, such as relating math concepts to real-world situations and building math content knowledge so that students will be able to complete college-level algebra. Of all the areas of academics, math is the one that lends itself most easily to connections at the worksite where youth participants are building or renovating houses or apartments. Your classroom teachers and construction site trainers should meet regularly to plan how to reinforce math concepts in the classroom and at the worksite.

**Critical thinking**

Critical thinking is the practice of thinking about one’s own thought processes while applying standards (e.g., clarity, accuracy, precision) to improve them. A classroom that emphasizes critical thinking provides students with important real-life issues to think about and address while making the standards and processes for quality thinking as explicit as possible.
Reasoning and logic skills

Students’ reasoning and logic skills are supported when students have the chance to analyze real-world problems while learning the processes for understanding these problems and applying relevant solutions. Project-based learning, when designed with clear learning outcomes in mind, helps students develop reasoning and logic skills while strengthening their ability to problem-solve in group settings. Many project-based learning resources can be found through the Buck Institute for Education.

Exciting subject matter

YouthBuild students tend to be interested in their cultural history and the history of their communities, the issues that face their neighborhoods and how to solve them, the leaders who have been successful in the past, and the methods they used to resolve community issues. Integrate current events and real-life social studies into the curriculum.

Learning environment

As much as possible, your program should reinforce a college-like learning environment by using syllabi for courses, assigning research papers, creating critical-thinking opportunities and collaborative group work, and assigning regular homework.

A strong emphasis on academic readiness cannot be stressed enough as an important element of any career development strategy. Whether your graduates enter post-secondary education, an apprenticeship program, or move directly into the workplace, their career trajectory depends on their strength in this area.
High School Diploma, GED and Other Industry-Recognized Credentials

GED or High School Diploma Completion

Attaining a high school diploma, GED, or industry-recognized credential goes hand in hand with academic rigor as a stepping stone for young people to higher education, higher earnings, and more meaningful careers. In addition, the attainment of such a credential is one of the five outcomes that Department of Labor-funded programs are expected to meet. This section addresses credentials as a crucial part of student readiness.

No single achievement will affect a young person’s economic future more than gaining a secondary school credential. Without it, economic sustainability is extremely challenging. Numerous studies demonstrate that the lack of a GED or diploma vastly undercuts a person’s ability to succeed in the economy. In fact, among jobs with the most anticipated openings, those that require post-secondary training or an associate degree pay, 65 percent more (or nearly $15,000 more annually) than those that require only work experience or on-the-job training. All your students must understand the importance of completing this cornerstone of their career development strategy.

Because many of your students’ experiences in school may not have been positive, your challenge is to create rigorous academic programming that is innovative, engaging, and relevant. It may be helpful to have youth think and talk about what their previous experiences have been and how, as a class, they can be supportive of one another. One of the goals for instructors is to instill a “love of learning” and the recognition that learning is a lifelong experience that will enrich and empower a person not only in terms of employment opportunities, but also spiritually and emotionally.

Your program must provide a variety of ways for students to gain their GED or high school diploma. Your program can assist students by scheduling regular tutoring sessions and study sessions after program hours. In instances where your program does not have the resources to continue GED education for students who have completed the program, you should identify other GED programs, evaluate their compatibility with the YouthBuild approach, and contact those agencies to inform them about YouthBuild and the potential need to refer your graduates to their programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on building a strong education component at your YouthBuild program, download Education at a YouthBuild Program.
Industry-Recognized Credentials

Lack of experience is an obstacle to career development for any young person. In the absence of work experience, credentials are an important way for young people to document their skills and abilities. Industry-recognized credentials demonstrate discipline, focus, and persistence as well as tangible competence in particular skills. Young people tend to respond well to the short-term focus required for many credentials. In addition to their value in the workplace, industry-recognized credentials can be used throughout the program as motivators.

The Department of Labor uses a specific definition for what constitutes an industry-recognized credential. Credentials are awarded in recognition of an individual’s attainment of measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation. These technical or occupational skills are based on standards developed or endorsed by employers. Certificates awarded by workforce investment boards are not included in this definition. Work-readiness certificates are also not included in this definition.

By providing opportunities for your students to earn an industry-recognized credential, you are giving them an edge in the workforce. Below is a sample list of credentials that satisfy the Department of Labor’s definition of an industry-recognized credential:

- **Home Builders Institute (HBI)**—Through the Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (PACT) curriculum, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) aims to train individuals in construction for the home building industry. An HBI credential will prepare your students to work in residential construction and facilities maintenance. The PACT curriculum also integrates green building skills. Students that complete this training will receive a pre-apprenticeship certificate.

- **National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)**—This curriculum will offer your students training in commercial construction, commercial building maintenance, and pipeline construction and maintenance. In addition, your students will receive a complete line of safety and management training modules.

- **Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET)**—Your students can pursue a credential to become a Rating Field Inspector. Upon receiving this credential, students can evaluate homes for flaws that cause high utility bills, moisture problems, and indoor air quality issues. In order to receive the accreditation, your students must complete and pass a National Rater Test administered by a RESNET-accredited Rater Training Provider.

- **Building Performance Institute (BPI)**—This certification will prepare your students to properly diagnose energy problems and take appropriate repair actions. There are four training and certification areas: building analyst, air conditioning/heating, envelope, and multifamily. Your students should receive training from a BPI Affiliate and gain experience prior to taking the online exam and field test for certification.
- **North American Board of Certified Practitioners (NABCEP)**—The Entry Level Certificate of Knowledge is a good fit for students interested in pursuing a career in the solar energy field. The certificate will provide students with basic knowledge and understanding of key photovoltaic (solar electric) system terms and operational concepts. The certification does not qualify students to install photovoltaic systems, but it will prepare them to pursue further NABCEP certifications needed for employment in the field.

- **Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3)**—This is a certification based on a core curriculum created by the Building Trades Council of the AFL-CIO. It is a gateway certification for post-secondary education, apprenticeship, or a career in the building trades. The 120-hour curriculum does not focus on a particular craft, but additional trade-specific training is available. The MC3 curriculum must be offered in partnership with your YouthBuild program’s area Building Trades Council, which creates an excellent opportunity for partnership with the building trades and apprenticeship programs in your area.

Please keep in mind that these are just a sample of the credentials that satisfy the Department of Labor’s definition of an industry-recognized credential.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information on credentials, please go to *Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 17-05, Attachment B*. 

### Additional Certifications

There are certifications that are valuable to employers, although they do not meet the standards of being industry-recognized credentials by the Department of Labor. Your program may want to consider offering the OSHA-10 and First Aid/CPR certifications. These are very basic safety certifications that are useful to students.

- **OSHA-10 Training**—Through this training, your students will recognize and learn to prevent safety and health hazards in the workplace. Students will also learn about their rights as workers, the responsibilities of employers, and the process for filing a safety hazard complaint. The OSHA-10 training is designed for entry-level workers, so it is appropriate for YouthBuild students.

- **First Aid/CPR Certifications**—These certifications are provided through the American Red Cross and delivered through a combination of lectures and interactive video demonstrations. The certifications are valid for two years. The training focuses on these areas:
  - **First Aid** – Students will learn to recognize and care for a variety of first aid emergencies.
  - **CPR Adult** – Students receive training to perform CPR and care for breathing and cardiac emergencies in adults.
Individual Readiness

Another aspect of the career planning process is gauging personal readiness. Your students might be struggling with personal barriers that must be overcome in order for them to be truly ready for a career and post-secondary education. Some common challenges that young people face include:

- **Child care**—Students who are parents of young children may have made child care arrangements for the time they are in your YouthBuild program, but those arrangements may not be suitable or adequate once they are employed or attending a post-secondary institution. During the individual career planning process, your staff should work with students to evaluate the current arrangements to determine if they are adequate in the long term. You should also work with students to identify both primary care arrangements and backup care in the event that their child is sick.

- **Transportation**—Your staff and students should determine the students’ transportation needs and options. An important work-readiness step is for students to obtain a driver's license. Although your students may not be in a position to own a car in the immediate future, having a driver's license will enable them to use other cars, if available, and will serve as a state-issued identification card, which is required by most employers at the start of a job. For graduates employed in construction, a driver’s license increases their employability and value to the contractor. Public transportation and carpooling options should also be thoroughly researched. It is important that your students discuss and identify multiple transportation options.

- **Child support**—Some students, usually young men, may be facing child support payments that make it feel as if there is no point in seeking employment. These young men may care deeply about their children and offer them support “under the table” when they can, but they may have a distrust of the child support system. Working with these students so that they fully understand their options is an important step in their individual readiness to work. [Navigating the Child Support System](#) is a resource from PPV that can guide YouthBuild programs as they work with young parents who are struggling with child support payments.

- **Debts**—Just as in the case of child support payments, having outstanding debts may make a young person feel that there is no point in seeking employment. Work with the young person to contact the company or companies to whom money is owed and to develop a payment plan with each of them. This is an opportunity to underscore the importance of a good credit rating for the purposes of buying a car or a house and, in many cases, for seeking employment.

Your program can also offer financial literacy training to your students, so they are not just managing debt, but also have the skills to make sound financial decisions. [Money Smart for Young Adults](#) is a financial literacy curriculum developed by the FDIC. The eight instructor-led modules are designed for young adults between the ages of 12 and 20. Instructors can teach each module as a standalone or as part of a financial literacy series. FDIC also developed a free training for instructors that will use this tool with young people.
- **Stable housing**—A housing plan that you develop with your students is a crucial part of any Individual Career Plan (ICP), especially for students struggling to identify stable housing. Help students to set short- and long-term goals for housing. Short-term goals should be one year or less. Your staff should work with students to identify interim steps and services and document the progress they are making against the housing plan. If they qualify for housing assistance, help them identify the resources.

- **Substance abuse**—Substance abuse is a barrier to successful employment. Clear policies and alignment among your staff can make a big difference when it comes to discouraging your students from abusing drugs and alcohol. Successful programs have reached out to community-based organizations specializing in substance abuse to provide assessment and support services. Your program should understand that simply ignoring the issue is not an option. Your program should work with students early on to address substance abuse issues and help young people understand that being drug-free is not just a good work-readiness competency but also leads to a better life that is within their grasp. Programs that are successful at working with young adults on this issue provide guidance and resources along with clear messages about the unacceptable and destructive effects of drug abuse. Many programs administer drug tests on a random basis and require counseling of students who test positive for illegal substances while not allowing them to work on the construction site. Having a clear, progressive policy to help students move from drug dependency to being drug-free is immensely helpful to the future success of all students.

- **Criminal histories**—Young people who have been involved with the justice system face unique challenges to finding a career pathway, but with a strong developmental plan, appropriate employer partners, and lots of support, they can overcome these challenges. A young person with a juvenile or adult record must focus intensively on building a new track record of success, productivity, and responsibility. As such, work-related credentials such as the GED, PACT, NCCER, MC3, and other industry-recognized credentials in receptive industries or appropriate occupations for court-involved youth are especially important. Community service and volunteer activities that demonstrate responsibility, leadership, and a work ethic will also help show future employers that the young person has begun a new chapter in his or her life. Mentors who can support these students both in the program and after graduation may be especially helpful to young people struggling to re-establish themselves in society. Staff should be knowledgeable about the rules in your state governing the elimination of criminal records and assist graduates in eliminating their records, if this is possible. Also, graduates must be well-prepared to communicate honestly with potential employers and coworkers about their criminal record. *Going to Work With a Criminal Record* is an excellent resource from PPV, a research, policy, and program development organization. This resource can guide YouthBuild programs in their efforts to effectively serve young people with a criminal history.

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**Federal Bonding Program**

Your program should also educate employers about the Federal Bonding Program, an incentive program for employers to hire individuals with a criminal history. The Federal Bonding Program offers employers a business insurance policy to protect against any loss of money or property due to employee dishonesty. The U.S. Department of Labor sponsors the Federal Bonding Program and offers it to employers free of charge.
• **Interpersonal and communication skills**—Students must also possess appropriate behavioral and attitudinal skills, including effective communication skills and mechanisms for coping with stress, anger, and other emotions. All staff must be engaged in helping youth learn and practice good interpersonal and communication skills. An effective counseling and case management system can help your students with these skills and track their progress in this area.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information on building a strong counseling and case management component at your YouthBuild program, see the *Counseling, Case Management and Program Culture*.
Interest Inventories and Career Exploration

Career and post-secondary exploration should begin during Mental Toughness and continue in depth and throughout the core YouthBuild programming. Through this process of exploration and planning, young people begin to create long-term career strategies that reflect a clear understanding of the educational and technical skills necessary to achieve their goals. This is the time to help students explore their interests and aspirations and help them learn about the wide range of career opportunities that exist. Every student's aspirations, no matter how ambitious or seemingly farfetched, should be respected and cultivated and should be accompanied by a realistic step-by-step outline of what the student must actually achieve to reach his or her career goal. You should encourage students to become passionate about their career ambitions, while also gaining an understanding of what will be required of them to realize their dreams. Most YouthBuild students were not accustomed to being supported in planning their futures prior to entering YouthBuild, so the role of staff in engaging in one-on-one conversations that respect, encourage, ask questions, and help students identify their own interests and goals is critical.

Students should participate in career classes, research various career options, and visit local workplaces and community colleges as a means of gaining exposure to future opportunities. They should explore career options that match their skills and interests, paying special attention to careers in local high-growth sectors that can offer long-term career advancement. Through this process, they may also become convinced of the importance of post-secondary education in achieving their career goals and ambitions.

The entire career exploration process can be linked to the classroom by assigning research projects to students on different industries and having them present their research, both in writing and orally, to their classmates. As part of construction training, students can gain a greater knowledge of related careers in construction, such as designers, project managers, and inspectors. Students can also learn how to transfer the skills they learn in construction to other careers. Youth are often unaware of the variety of careers that exist. For example, many young people may express an interest in a career as a performing artist. They may not realize the full range of careers that exists within the music industry that could provide them with an entry-level position to help them realize their lifelong dreams or develop a career in another aspect of the music industry.
Interest Inventories and Readiness Assessments

The first few months of your YouthBuild cycle is the time to help your students take stock of their interests and aspirations as well as their current qualifications and capabilities.

After the staff have engaged in personal conversations encouraging young people to define their interests and goals, it may be helpful to use various interest inventories. Helping your students know themselves will assist them in discovering a career that is a good fit for them personally. Most interest inventories are surveys of self-reported interests, skills, and personality traits. These early inventories and assessments will form the basis of the student’s Individual Career Plan (see p. 52 in Section II for more on an ICP), and can help students explore their personalities, interests, skills, and work values. Once students identify these traits, they can research career options that are best aligned with their traits and values.

The following web sites offer a variety of free and fee-based assessment tools and other resources for career exploration and self-assessment:

- **What Do You Like? (Bureau of Labor Statistics)**—Provides a resource that allows students to explore careers based on broad areas of interest, such as math, sports, building and fixing things, social studies, art, etc.
- **Texas Cares**—This product from the Texas Workforce Commission provides various self-assessment tools.
- **O*NET Resource Center—Work Importance Locator (WIL)**—This web site is a self-assessment career exploration tool created by the Department of Labor. It will allow your students to identify characteristics that they would find important in a job. It helps individuals identify potential careers by exploring sectors based on their work values and characteristics of the occupations.
- **Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)**—This assessment tool measures strengths, weaknesses, and potential for future success. The ASVAB also provides career information for various occupations and is an indicator for success in future endeavors: college, vocational school, or a military career. Although armed services personnel administer the survey, it is a national survey and is not primarily used by the military. In fact, most participants in the ASVAB program were not interested in joining the military. Unlike the other tools we recommend in this section, the ASVAB requires a lengthy administration process, including working with a specialist to determine the most efficient way to utilize the survey with your students. Furthermore, the ASVAB is more than an assessment; it is a program that can be integrated throughout your YouthBuild program.
Once students have spent some time thinking with staff, with each other, and on their own about their personal interests, personality traits, strengths, and weaknesses, it is time to move on to readiness assessments. An early assessment can help your students understand the gap between their aspirations and their qualifications, which can help them to stay focused, motivated, and ultimately more successful.

Most programs conduct formal testing of academic skills at the start of the program, using such tests as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) or the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS). These tests are measures of reading, writing, and math skills that can be used to help identify students’ academic needs and to track progress. In addition to these academic assessments, it is useful to conduct tests of vocational and attitudinal skills that can then be used to develop ICPs. The results of these assessments also help students focus on areas for improvement as they become career-ready. Below is a sample list of readiness assessments:

- **O*NET Ability Profiler**—This assessment, developed by the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, will help your students identify their strengths and areas that may require further training and education. It is also a career exploration tool that can help students identify occupations that fit their strengths.

- **Students and Career Advisors**—This assessment tool, also developed by the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, will allow your students to identify their interests and talents and match them to a career. They can also explore specific information about potential careers, including wage information, the level of education required, and the potential growth for each industry sector or career that interests them. Once students identify careers, they can plan their job search by exploring internships and using resume writing tools. Your students can also find education options for careers that require post-secondary education.

Once students complete these interest inventories and readiness assessments, you should share the results and provide feedback on how the results of the tests correlate with their goals. This leads to a direct discussion of the types of training and education students will need to achieve their goals. This discussion should provide the student with answers to the following questions:

- What do the assessments show about my academic preparation?
- What did the assessment show about my abilities, interests, and knowledge as they relate to specific careers?
- Overall, what do these assessments show about a career I might want to pursue?

This is the time to help your students understand the skills, training, and education needed to pursue various careers so they can include this information in their ICP. Also, share with your students that, although career assessment testing should provide helpful information to them, the test results are not definitive prescriptions for students’ futures. The ultimate choice will come from their own hearts and minds, their own experiences and goals.
Career Exploration

Once students have spent time thinking about how their interests match to various careers, they can begin to explore these careers in depth. Career exploration is not the same as job searching. Job searching is the short-term pursuit of an immediate position that meets your financial needs. Career exploration is the lifelong, progressive process of choosing education, training, and jobs that fit one's interests and skills and desires about the role a person wants to play in the world. There is a distinct link between leadership development, where young people are respected for the difference they can make in the immediate context of the program and community, and career selection, where people choose the long-term difference they may want to make in the world.

During this career exploration phase, your staff will assist students in gathering information about potential careers in order to make educated career decisions. Your staff can help students tie the research in this phase to occupations that are in high demand in your local area and the levels of education needed for these occupations. Students should also consider how various occupations match their skills, interests, goals, and values. Helping your students create realistic timelines and expectations will help them stay motivated. It is also important for them to understand that over time they will acquire new skills and new interests, and their values and priorities may change as their lives change.

The following resources can help your students explore long-term career options:

- **CareerOneStop**—This is a comprehensive career exploration web site sponsored by the Department of Labor that provides a range of information on career pathways, qualifications, including educational requirements for specific careers, and opportunities to assess skills and identify potential career matches based on interests and/or skills. The web site also provides information through a variety of formats, including online occupational videos. Sub-links within CareerOneStop include:
  - **CareerInfoNet**—This section of CareerOneStop provides career information in a variety of formats, including customizable occupation and industry profiles. Users can scan careers by occupation, industry, or state labor market information. The occupational search provides individuals access to information on wages, educational requirements, and cutting edge tools and technology used in specific occupations. Users can build occupational profiles as well as compare and contrast jobs in order to identify high-growth and high-wage occupations. In the industry search, users can create employment profiles by industry. The information in the profiles includes employment and wage trends, largest employers within an industry, and national, state and metropolitan employment information. The state profiles provide information on state demographics, employment information, and services data. The section also includes links to various state-level agencies, including local labor market information offices.
  - **Testing and Assessment Page**—This section of CareerOneStop provides pre-employment skills testing. Job seekers can use this site to assess areas of strength and weakness. Users can also use the assessment results to match their skills and interests to potential careers.
- **O*NET Resource Center**—The O*Net Resource Center contains several online interactive career exploration tools. These self-directed tools will help young people consider and plan career options as well as prepare and transition into a career effectively. The tools include several assessments that are based on a “whole-person” concept. The assessments will help students assess their interests, identify work values and abilities, and match them to job skills and occupations in their local labor market.

- **My Next Move**—With this tool, students can explore career options by keyword or browse careers by industry. The database contains over 900 career options. Each occupational profile provides a basic job description, knowledge required to perform the duties, skills and abilities needed to succeed, a description of personalities that would enjoy a particular occupation, technology used in the field, educational requirements, and job outlook with salary information. Students that are not certain about their career options can complete an interests and skills survey that will be used to match them to best career options.

- **Mapping Your Future**—This online resource is best suited for students who are interested in pursuing post-secondary education. The tool helps students explore career options through skill and interest assessments. Students also have the option of developing a career plan that may include post-secondary education. The web site provides tools to prepare for college by helping students identify and hone skills needed to succeed in college and providing information on selecting colleges and applying for admission. Students can use this web site to learn about their financial aid options and search for scholarships. Finally, the web site offers financial management resources that range from helping students create a budget to understanding student loans.

An exercise that you may want to do with your students is to assign teams to research each of the career exploration tools above and do a presentation on them.
Individual Career Plans

One of the most important tools you will develop with your young people is an Individual Career Plan or ICP. This is part of the broader Individual Development Plan (IDP) that is described in the YouthBuild manual for *Counseling, Case Management, and Program Culture.*

ICPs guide young people to:

- identify their interests, goals, capabilities, and qualifications;
- research, identify, and pursue opportunities that align with their interests, goals, capabilities, and qualifications;
- explore post-secondary education, training, and credentialing to build qualifications over a lifetime; and
- secure, sustain, and change jobs to create a positive work history and income growth.

An ICP is a dynamic document; you should encourage young people to “own” it and refer to it frequently to make sure they are still on track. A young person’s career plan should be detailed and consist of the following parts:

- **Basic information**—Include entry and exit dates, parental status, and emergency contact information.
- **Background information**—Create categories for educational information such as TABE scores (pre- and post-test scores) and pre-GED scores and work experience, including names and contact information for previous employers and supervisors.
- **Issues and barriers**—Identify and list issues and barriers to career and college goals, such as legal issues, lack of driver’s license, etc. In addition to identifying barriers, you should work with the young person to create a plan that addresses the barriers by identifying solutions, with steps and deadlines to remove or resolve the barriers and issues.
- **Career goals**—Have the students list the qualities of a career that are important to them. Also, help the students identify their primary career goals, alternative career goals, and a survival plan (a job students can pursue if their career plans fall through). For each career goal, identify initial steps students should take that will help them advance towards their goals. For example, it may make sense for young people to participate in a job shadow or internship to make sure that the career they have identified is indeed something that truly interests them. If they are planning to attend post-secondary education, they will need to begin preliminary steps such as identifying which colleges offer their program of study. If they are interested in an apprenticeship, they will need to explore the entry requirements. Have your students develop an action plan that you can review and work with them on throughout the cycle.
- **Education**—Include all educational components in this section. Your program should include students’ educational history, assessment scores, gains in literacy and numeracy, and certifications or credentials completed during the program. It is also important to list educational goals, specifically the degree or credential programs students are applying for or considering pursuing. Be sure to also include steps needed to get into the program along with deadlines.

- **Community service activities**—Create a section in the career plan to track community service activities. Be sure to include the dates and hours of service. Help students understand how community service activities fit into career development and what types of skills they are learning as a result of their community service activities. Community service activities should be included in student resumes.

- **Job-shadowing/internship experience**—Work with your students to describe and rate the work experience. Also include the name of the placement organization and contact information for an individual that can serve as a reference. For more information on setting up job-shadowing and internship experiences for your students, see p. 66 in Section II.

- **Life skills/leadership**—Describe activities students performed in this area, such as serving on the policy committee or attending conflict resolution training. These accomplishments should be included on the young person’s resume.

- **Post-graduation plan**—Include a follow-up plan that includes benchmarks for completing goals students did not attain during the program, set a path for the year after graduation, and establish dates for regular follow-up to review progress and barriers. By the end of this process, young people should be well-skilled at researching and managing their own career paths. This plan should include a strategy around a student’s first job, including a plan for leaving their first job, when that time comes, without burning bridges. This is the exit strategy for the first job.

When working with students to develop their career plans, keep in mind that career plans should:
- be student-directed and staff-supported;
- be introduced early in the program and revisited often;
- integrated into both the academic and skills-training portions of the program;
- reflect the student’s needs, aspirations, talents, and goals;
- identify specific short- and long-term career targets; and
- include a “first job” entry and exit strategy.
It is critical for both your staff and young people to remain focused on meeting the benchmarks outlined in the ICP. While the ICP will give definition to your students’ career aspirations and strategies, it is the incremental progress they make that will motivate them to continue working toward their long-term goals and aspirations. Therefore, it is essential that your program use regular check-in meetings and assessments to ensure that students are progressing along their plan. The Department of Labor’s Case Management and Performance System will allow you to set e-mail alerts to remind you to check on specific benchmarks or goals.

Self-assessment should be a part of this process. Such assessment helps your students document the progress they are making and honestly identify their shortfalls. Often young people are unflinchingly accurate in their self-assessments, so regularly revisiting this process will be invaluable for your students as they move through their ICP.

**RESOURCES**

Samples of ICP templates and a completed ICP can be found in the [Tool Bench](#).

### Post-Secondary Education Plan

Part of a student’s ICP may be plans for post-secondary education. Post-secondary placement requires very concrete actions by students throughout the program year. No more than midway through the program cycle, you should help your students develop a specialized plan that identifies the institutions to which they intend to apply, the application procedures and costs, entrance examination schedules, interview process, and state and federal financial aid deadlines.

Your program staff can help students understand and navigate this process by also obtaining information and creating a master time schedule for the post-secondary education placement process. This time schedule should include:

- application deadlines for a variety of local post-secondary education institutions;
- SAT/ACT and/or COMPASS testing dates;
- open house dates at a variety of local post-secondary education institutions;
- financial aid application deadlines; and
- GED testing dates, if applicable.

If your program places the master chart in a prominent location, it will remind students of these dates and enable them to keep track of the actions they need to take to complete the process. The completion of these tasks will ensure that your students have access to information to encourage them to consider and plan for post-secondary education. It will also ensure that your staff has the resources necessary to assist and support students in this process.

In addition to the above strategies, your staff should consistently highlight the post-secondary success stories of alumni and staff. Creating a dedicated space for post-secondary materials (postings, scholarships, applications, pennants, etc.) that your students can access easily is helpful in keeping college front and center in student thinking.
Financial Aid

Whether or not your students think they want to attend post-secondary education, it is a good idea to have them complete financial aid applications. That way, if they decide later in the year that they do want to go to college, the doors won’t be shut as a result of not having completed financial aid applications in time. The financial aid process starts with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All federal grant and loan awards are determined by the FAFSA, and nearly all states and colleges use the FAFSA as the basis for their own financial aid awards. The majority of your students will be eligible for Federal Pell grants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
For more information on the FAFSA, go to www.fafsa.ed.gov.

Deadlines, particularly state deadlines, for completing the FAFSA are often at the beginning of the calendar year. Therefore, it is a good idea to encourage all your students to complete the FAFSA ahead of state deadlines, regardless of the student’s post-program placement plans. Another reason to encourage your students to complete the FAFSA early is that many state and school-based funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Your program can ensure that students complete the FAFSA early on by committing blocks of program and staff time to support students’ completion of their financial aid applications. YouthBuild programs can also encourage students to complete the FAFSA by making the application a part of their intake process or their final program portfolios. Many single, non-parent students under age 25 are considered “dependent” and need their parents’/guardian’s personal, income, and tax information to complete the FAFSA. It is critical to inform and engage students’ parents and guardians in the financial aid process early on to ensure that students and parents submit their completed applications before critical deadlines.

Mistakes on the FAFSA are easy to make and can be costly. Your YouthBuild program can prevent this by having your students fill out a hardcopy worksheet and gather appropriate documents before completing the online application. Students will not be eligible for any FAFSA-related financial aid until their applications are complete and accurate. While completing an accurate FAFSA is important, some of your students may have to submit an incomplete FAFSA to meet certain deadlines. These students will have to work with the Office of Student Aid to make corrections at a later date. Your students can also take advantage of many resources that will help them complete the FAFSA. These include:

- **Completing the FAFSA**—Helps students complete the FAFSA and explains the purpose of each FAFSA question.
- **Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC)**—A free helpline that answers student questions and provides information about all federal student aid programs, offers help completing the FAFSA, and helps make corrections to the Student Aid Report (SAR), which contains the FAFSA results.
- **College Goal Sunday**—Provides professional assistance in completing the FAFSA and information on financial aid resources, statewide resources, and admission requirements.
YouthBuild students typically receive a substantial amount of financial support to cover the costs of tuition, books, and living expenses.

Following are some of the financial aid sources that students may qualify for upon completing a single FAFSA form:

- **Pell Grant**—A need-based grant offering between $400 and $5,350 per school year.
- **Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant FSEOG**—A need-based grant designed especially for students with the greatest financial need. Eligible students can receive awards between $100 and $4,000.
- **State Aid**—Many states provide additional financial aid to support students through college. Typically, students’ FAFSA information is used to determine eligibility. Keep in mind that your state may require students to fill out additional applications. Learn about financial aid opportunities in your state and find out about state deadlines and award amounts.
- **Institutional Grants**—Many schools also use the FAFSA as means to determine students’ eligibility for school-based loans, grants, and scholarships. Contact the financial aid offices at students’ potential post-secondary institutions as early as possible for more details.

Aside from receiving federal, state, and school-based aid via the FAFSA, students are strongly encouraged to apply for additional scholarships. You should also be prepared to help students obtain certification of AmeriCorps awards for students who earned them.

Following are websites linking students to additional scholarship resources:

- College Board Scholarship Search
- Fast Aid
- Fast Web
- Department of Education Scholarship Search
Establishing Readiness Competencies and Assessments for Students

As discussed earlier in the section on soft skills, the fundamental values of employability can be taught in every area of your YouthBuild program and emulated by staff to consistently convey the importance of punctuality, attendance, attitude, preparedness, responsibility, initiative, and respectfulness. But how do you assess whether a student has mastered these skills? In this section, we will look more closely at readiness competencies and assessments.

Establishing readiness competencies and assessments is important so that your students and staff are clear about the criteria used to determine whether or not a student is ready to be placed in a job or post-secondary education. Completion of the GED or diploma, achievement of construction training competencies, or even completion of the program cycle itself may not be enough for successful placement. Readiness for a career or college includes more than technical skills; it includes behaviors and attitudes (soft skills) essential to securing and holding a job and/or succeeding in a post-secondary institution. For these reasons, most YouthBuild programs have developed a list of competencies that students must master in order to be placed in a job, training program, or post-secondary education.

Below is a list of soft skills that may be translated into work-readiness competencies for your program to use to determine whether or not a young person is ready to be placed in a job or post-secondary education after graduation from YouthBuild. This list is not exhaustive. You may have others to add to it. You could develop this list through a participatory process with your students, because collectively they are undoubtedly aware of these skills. These skills should be reinforced throughout the program by all staff members and discussed in depth in leadership development, life-skills training, or counseling sessions. Your program can develop an assessment form that staff can use to demonstrate students have shown mastery of these readiness competencies and could provide awards or other public appreciations when students exhibit them. A culture of recognition and appreciation often works much better than a culture made up solely of negative consequences.

- **Attendance**—Understand work expectations for attendance and adhere to them. This includes notifying supervisors in advance in case of absence.
- **Punctuality**—Understand work expectations for punctuality, including arriving on time, taking and returning from breaks on time, and calling supervisors to notify them in case of tardiness.
- **Appropriate appearance**—Dress appropriately and practice personal hygiene appropriate for position and duties.
- **Initiative**—Participate fully in tasks or projects from initiation to completion. Upon completion of a task, speak to a supervisor for assignment of a next task. Suggest ideas for improving any aspect of the approach to the work.
- **Quality of work**—Give best effort, evaluate work, and utilize feedback to improve work performance and strive to meet quality standards.
- **Communication skills**—Speak clearly and communicate effectively—verbally and non-verbally. Listen attentively and use language appropriate for the workplace.
- **Response to supervision**—Accept direction, feedback, and constructive criticism without defensiveness and with a positive attitude. Use information to improve work performance.
- **Teamwork**—Relate positively with co-workers; work productively with individuals and teams; respect diversity in race, gender, and culture; and offer assistance to other members of the team as needed.
- **Respectful behavior**—Speak courteously and act respectfully at all times while at school or work.
- **Problem-solving and critical-thinking skills**—Exercise sound reasoning and analytical thinking. Use knowledge and information from the job to solve workplace problems.
- **Workplace safety, health, and policy**—Demonstrate an understanding of workplace culture and policies. Comply with health and safety rules. Exhibit integrity and honesty.

Your program can help your students develop these work-readiness competencies by encouraging professional behavior in the program through simple and replicable strategies.

- Set clear attendance and tardiness policies. Make sure these policies are in writing and that your staff consistently enforces the policies. Students who follow them and achieve outstanding attendance should be noticed, praised, and rewarded appropriately.
- Ensure that students and staff are aware of all workplace rules and that the rules are consistently followed and enforced.
- Require preparedness for all job functions, such as having proper tools for the job site or paper and pens for class.
- Promote professional language and a work environment that is free from sexual and other harassment.

**RESOURCES**

Sample competency forms can be found in the [Community of Practice](http://www.academicinnovations.com/report.html).

Another tool for thinking about work-readiness competencies is the SCANS (Secretary’s Commission on Necessary Skills) tool that was developed by the U.S. Department of Labor to help teachers adapt their instruction and curricula so students develop skills required in high-skill and high-wage employment sectors. The SCANS tool can help you select, design, and evaluate work-readiness curricula as well as help you evaluate student readiness. The SCANS tool divides skills into a three-part foundation of:

- basic literacy and computational skills;
- thinking skills necessary to put knowledge to work; and
- personal qualities that make workers dedicated and trustworthy.

**RESOURCES**

More information on the SCANS tool can be found at: [http://www.academicinnovations.com/report.html](http://www.academicinnovations.com/report.html)
Readiness Curricula

There are a variety of curricula available that teach life-, career-, and college-readiness skills. In this section, we will look at how programs can evaluate curricula and select the one that is best for your students and your program. As you consider which curriculum to use for your program, keep the readiness competencies you have developed in mind. The readiness competencies serve as a guide for the skills your students are expected to develop. In addition to your staff emulating and rewarding these competencies on a day-to-day basis, your readiness curriculum should support those competencies. In addition, your career-readiness curriculum should be responsive to the needs of employers and colleges. An employer-responsive curriculum focuses on skills that employers have told you are important to them. A college-responsive curriculum focuses on skills you know are important for students entering college based on information from your college partners. Focusing on these career-ready skills will open opportunities for greater involvement from community businesses, colleges, and other partners.

Career-Readiness Curricula

YouthBuild programs across the country successfully use a range of career-readiness curricula, some of which are listed below. You may decide to purchase an existing curriculum if your staff does not have the time or expertise to develop one and the curriculum can be modified to fit the particular needs of your program. As you consider whether a particular curriculum is suitable for your program, look for the following elements:

- suitability for use with youth;
- development of skills and concepts from introductory concepts about work and careers to practical skills needed to find and maintain employment;
- emphasis on generic and transferrable skills applicable to various careers or post-secondary institutions; and
- ease of adaptability to your YouthBuild program, including time available in the schedule for using the curriculum.

Your career-readiness curriculum should help your students not only identify and pursue career goals, but also develop specific job-readiness skills. A career-readiness curriculum typically has the following components:

- introduction to the work world;
- career exploration;
- job-searching techniques;
- resume writing and interviewing skills; and
- strategies for gaining experience on the job.
Below is a list of curricula that YouthBuild programs across the country have successfully used in their programs:

- **Empower Your Future**—The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services Bridging the Opportunity Gap Career Readiness Curriculum Guide—This curriculum helps students develop educational, social-emotional, and employment skills to support personal and professional achievement.

- **Career Coach Curriculum**—Although not specifically designed for youth, many YouthBuild programs have had success with this curriculum that guides students through exploring career options, choosing a target career, and selecting the education or training needed to attain the career.

- **Adventures in Education**—This public-service program helps students plan and complete their journey through higher education. Although it is not a readiness curriculum, it offers many resources, including lesson plans on various topics. Students can also access a range of free resources. This resource primarily focuses on post-secondary education, but you can use it in conjunction with workplace skills and career exploration lessons.

**Post-Secondary Education Readiness**

An important part of any career development curriculum is post-secondary education readiness. If the career-readiness curriculum you have adopted does not already contain this element, you should supplement it with additional post-secondary readiness activities and resources. As you work with your students on post-secondary readiness, be sure the following components are included:

- post-secondary exploration;
- application process (i.e., college application, financial aid application, etc.);
- goal setting and career planning;
- soft skills (e.g., time management, organization, problem-solving, etc.);
- academic behaviors (e.g., note-taking, test-taking, reading a textbook, etc.); and
- adjusting to and navigating the college culture (e.g., how college operates as a system, norms of interaction with peers and professors, challenge of college-level courses, etc.).

**RESOURCES**

A sample post-secondary education planning document can be found in the [Community of Practice](#).
Other Pathways

Union and Apprenticeship Pathways

Union and apprenticeship opportunities are an excellent career pathway for YouthBuild students. For this reason, if it is not already a part of your readiness curricula, you should arrange for visits to local apprenticeship programs or union halls for students who are interested in these career opportunities. See p. 27 in Section I for more information on setting up union and apprenticeship partnerships. Apprenticeship programs have entry tests just as post-secondary education institutions do. Make sure you are familiar with the testing schedules and requirements for the apprenticeship programs your students may want to enter so you can assist them in taking these entrance tests at the appropriate time. You may want to have current apprenticeship members tutor/mentor young people who are interested in entering apprenticeship programs.

RESOURCES
For more information on linking young people to apprenticeship opportunities, see the Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship Guide for YouthBuild Programs in the Community of Practice.

Entrepreneurship Pathways

Another pathway of interest to many young people is entrepreneurship. As with the union and apprenticeship exposure, if entrepreneurship is not already a part of your readiness curricula, you may want to include it as part of your job-readiness training to provide an introduction to entrepreneurship and to enable students to understand the difficulties involved in establishing a business. Three forms of entrepreneurial training that may be helpful to your students are

1. **Exposure**—Provide an introduction to the basic skills needed to start and run a business. You can provide this type of training in classes or workshops and involve field trips and guest speakers.

2. **Economic development**—This is a more intensive training in business ownership and start-up with the intent of creating an actual business or developing a viable business plan. This training should focus on business planning, fiscal responsibility, organizational development, and marketing strategies. This type of training is classroom-oriented and requires a substantial amount of time to complete.

3. **Industry-specific**—Entrepreneurial training can be defined as industry-specific, whereby students are trained to start, or work, in one type of industry. For example, a YouthBuild program might choose to create a program specifically to help students create construction-related businesses such as painting or cabinetmaking. These programs are narrow in focus and allow for a combination of workshops and intensive training.
You should decide which type of training to undertake based on the resources of your program, time, and the interests of your students. If your objective is to expose graduates to the possible challenges of entrepreneurship, a level of training that simply exposes them to entrepreneurship is appropriate, and you can provide the information to all students in the context of the job-readiness curriculum. However, if your objective is to more deeply assist motivated students to create businesses, an industry-specific training program related to construction might be organized for a small group of students. This level of training may be difficult to offer during the program cycle. Some programs have undertaken this as part of the graduate resource program.

The following YouthBuild resources may be of help to students interested in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities:

- **YouthBuild Asset Trust for Graduates**—Funded and administered by YouthBuild USA, the YouthBuild Asset Trust makes gifts to outstanding graduates of YouthBuild to seize opportunities to advance careers and education, build assets to achieve economic independence, overcome unexpected setbacks, and enhance their leadership roles in their communities. These gifts are typically less than $2,000 and are designed to assist graduates in a variety of ways, including college tuition and other expenses, buying a home, career advancement, entrepreneurial ventures, or in response to an opportunity or obstacle that would make a decisive improvement in a graduate’s life.

- **YouthBuild National Individual Development Account Program (IDA)**—The IDA provides YouthBuild graduates sponsored by local YouthBuild programs with matching funds for individual savings accounts. The funds are matched at a ratio of 5:1, providing a participant who has saved the maximum amount of $800 with $4,800 in total available funds. Each local site contributes $1,000 to the match for each of its sponsored graduates. These funds can be used for higher education, first-time home ownership, or entrepreneurship. The IDA program also provides financial literacy training for participants. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other private funders and administered by YouthBuild USA.

- **Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)**—This organization provides curricula to teach all aspects of entrepreneurship from the bird’s eye view to very detailed aspects, such as how to manage money, create a budget, and plan for start-up costs.
Readiness Portfolios

An end product of career-readiness training is the creation by each student of a readiness portfolio that includes items such as a resume, sample cover letter, financial aid and college applications, and other tangible career-readiness documents. The portfolio has several functions:

- It provides students with an organizing tool for documents related to career readiness.
- It can be one element of assessment of a student’s readiness.
- It provides your students and job developer with concrete documents to be used in job and post-secondary education placement.

The readiness portfolio should be developed over the course of the year and is often developed as part of career-readiness classes. Items to include in the portfolio are:

- Generic Application—A neatly printed or typed application form with all the basic information required to complete an application requested by an employer.
- Resume—An up-to-date, professional-looking resume that gives information on name, address, phone number, job objective, educational background and special training, work experience with job titles and dates of employment, achievements, and community service activities. Remember to have young people update this as they gain skills through community service or leadership development activities.
- Sample cover letters.
- Sample employment e-mail inquiry.
- Sample thank you notes.
- Occupational or work-readiness certification.
- Proof of acquired workplace competencies.
- A list of at least three solid references, including their phone numbers, e-mail, and mailing addresses, who will confirm dependability and character of the student.
- A copy of the driver’s license, if available, should be kept in the portfolio.

In conjunction with the readiness portfolio, students must be able to identify the skills they have acquired through leadership development, community service and volunteer work, and education and communicate those skills to potential employers. This will take some coaching and practice. This could be incorporated into weekly meetings as a game, with students making lists of what skills they have learned and practiced throughout the week.

Many programs provide a time near the end of the program cycle for young people to present their readiness portfolios to a panel made up of YouthBuild staff, peers, and mentors or volunteers. If your program includes this component, young people should be made aware of this from the outset. Portfolios should be perceived as a working, living document that can help youth plan and demonstrate their competencies to prospective employers and colleges.
Real-World Readiness Activities: Internships, Mentoring, Job Shadowing, Community Service, College Visits, and Other Post-Secondary Readiness Activities

In addition to the readiness curriculum that you use and the constant reinforcement of soft skills that your students will receive in your program, there are a set of real-world experiences you can set up for your students that will greatly enhance their readiness for the next steps after YouthBuild. These real-world experiences mimic the tone and expectations of employment and allow youth to explore possible careers and gain hard and soft skills in a safe environment with additional supports necessary for the post-program transition.

Internships

Internships are a valuable part of a larger strategy to support the post-program success of your YouthBuild students. Internships allow students to apply work-readiness skills they are learning in the program while still receiving support and guidance from your staff. To offer rewarding internship opportunities to students, your program should develop rigorous and relevant internships for the world of work that relate to your students’ career interests and prepare them for the world of work.

Internships can benefit both your students and their potential employers.

- Your students will have the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience with professionals and a chance to transfer and refine the skills they are learning in your program. Internships provide exposure to all aspects of an industry or career path of interest. Your students will have a unique opportunity to create professional networking contacts that may result in future employment opportunities. The job experience will also expand the confidence of your students and broaden their range of experiences.
- Employers will have a potential pool of qualified candidates for paid positions. Employers get the opportunity to evaluate how potential new hires fit in with company culture. Interns free up other staff to do more advanced or higher priority work. Employers report greater retention of newly hired employees who started as student interns.

Structuring an Internship

The success of your internship program depends on careful planning, employer preparation, and, most importantly, thorough student preparation. Here are some suggestions for the planning process:

- Before placing any student in an internship, ensure that they have demonstrated readiness for the workplace through such competencies as attendance, punctuality, and communication skills.
• Research employers in the area that might make good partners and think about employers that would be a good “match” for your students. Also, focus on finding partners in local high-growth sectors. You can collaborate with your local One-Stop Career Center, check local college job boards, look for employers familiar with the YouthBuild approach, and use your employer advisory boards to identify and develop internship sites.

• Develop an internship agreement with the employer. This is a written contract between the employer and intern that defines expectations, learning goals, schedules, and responsibilities.

• Help prepare internship site supervisors who will directly work with your students and ensure that they have adequate supervision. Provide each employer with a detailed orientation, including:
  • summary of your program, including student profiles;
  • policies and expectations of your program, as well as a clear purpose for the internship program;
  • a point of contact at your program; and
  • strategies for providing ongoing feedback to students to facilitate learning.

• Help the employer design and manage a process of structured progress reports to ensure the young person's success and the employer's satisfaction.

• Have a post-internship meeting with both the student and the employer to learn what worked, what did not work, and how to strengthen future internship opportunities.

**RESOURCES**

See the [Community of Practice](#) for an internship tip sheet and sample internship documents such as an internship site agreement, intern timesheet, and intern evaluation that can help you set up your internship program.

**Internship Expectations**

For your students to be successful in their internships, they need support from your program staff. Your staff should not only secure internship opportunities, but also support them before, during, and after their internships—helping them reflect on the skills they are learning during the experience and ensuring that these insights are incorporated into future career planning.

Your program should clearly define expectations for the internship to students and employers. Your program should:

• **Prepare students for their internship experience**—Your staff should identify and share with your students the learning objectives, daily responsibilities, and short- and long-term projects on which they’ll be working. Students should also understand the industry in which they will be doing their internships and have done some research about the organization or company for which they will be interning.
- Temper expectations for post-internship placement—Depending on the nature of your partnership with the employer and the fluctuations of the local job market, placements at the end of the internship may or may not be an option for your students. Nevertheless, internships provide valuable training and career-preparation experiences, helping students build their resumes.

- Prepare employers for their intern—Employers need to understand what is expected of them and how to handle issues that arise with their interns. You should work with employers to make certain there is substantive work available for the intern or ask if the intern will be working on a specific project. As with any employee, there should be clear objectives and expectations for the period of time that the youth will be employed.

Job Shadowing and Mentoring

Job shadowing and mentoring can give students valuable training and information on the world of work. A beneficial precursor to a mentoring relationship is job shadowing. The student is given the opportunity to spend a day or more with someone working in his/her area of interest. During this period, the student follows the person through the course of the workday, observing and later discussing the experience with the person being shadowed. If the job-shadowing experience works, it might lead to the establishment of a mentoring relationship. Even if it does not lead to a mentoring relationship, job shadowing is a valuable way to expose a student to a potential area of work.

You can prepare your students for a job-shadowing experience by working with them to develop a series of questions. These questions can range from the type of training required to enter the specific field to the career path of the person being shadowed. After the job shadow, you should debrief your students. In the debriefing session, ask your students to provide a summary of what they did during the job shadow, what they liked and disliked about the job, whether they still want to pursue the career after the experience, and a plan to achieve their career path. America’s Promise provides resources for structuring effective job-shadowing experiences, including a guide for students and information for employers on job shadowing.

Sometimes job-shadowing can lead to a work-based mentor. Mentors can provide direction, encouragement, and inspiration in addition to information about the work world, specific jobs, and careers. Mentors can provide critical support to young people as they transition from school to work, and they can help graduates transition into post-secondary education where they often face the challenges of working and studying at the same time.

If this is the case, a formal arrangement should be established between the program and individuals who agree to become mentors. This should indicate the expectations for mentors, including the amount of time for the mentoring experience. It is important for individuals serving as mentors to visit the YouthBuild program and be familiar with the program’s values and philosophy. In addition, all mentors should receive training in how to be a mentor.

RESOURCES

Please see the Community of Practice for mentor training resources.
The relationship between a mentor and a young person who wants to learn from an adult's experience can be immensely satisfying and enjoyable. Although the initial connection may be arranged by YouthBuild, the quality and length of the relationship cannot be prescribed. A mentoring relationship may last a few months or become a lifelong friendship. Whatever the length, a successful mentoring relationship becomes a mutual exchange that both parties find rewarding.

**Community Service**

Building affordable housing is a profound service to the community, and awareness of this role tends to inculcate enormous pride and the ethic of service in YouthBuild students. Furthermore, many YouthBuild programs have become YouthBuild AmeriCorps programs so their students can receive college scholarships to and increased respect that comes with being a part of the national service movement.

Many YouthBuild programs provide additional community service opportunities above and beyond the service provided through the construction worksite. Community service learning helps students further develop the ethic of service, practice work-readiness skills, and begin to think about careers in the non-profit service sector. Service learning is experiential. It recognizes that many people learn best when they learn by doing and when learning is integrated with places of work.

Community service learning is directly related to career readiness in that it provides YouthBuild programs with:

- a continuing mechanism for youth to learn and practice the leadership skills that will help them succeed in the workplace, on the campus, and in life, which ultimately leads to increased success in the workplace;
- an ability to offer students the opportunity for increased personal development, a means to acquire new skills, job references, and networking opportunities; and
- a value system related to service and “giving back,” which orients students to careers in the social services and to being active, engaged members of their communities.

There are two community service placements that have been found to be extremely effective for YouthBuild graduates interested in continued service. One is with the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. It is a service corps that responds to natural disasters, cleans up streams, helps communities build infrastructure, and addresses other local needs. Through the NCCC, YouthBuild graduates receive room and board, a monthly stipend, and an education award worth over $5,000. The other is with Public Allies, where members are placed in local non-profits in internships through which they will gain leadership skills. Other graduates have become full-time AmeriCorps members where they can earn a full-time education award. Youth should be encouraged to develop particular projects they would like to undertake in their community. There is likely to be increased buy-in from youth if they play a significant role in identifying and developing community service projects that benefit their community.
Post-Secondary Readiness Activities

One of the goals of YouthBuild is to help students gain entry into post-secondary education and/or advanced technical training. Along with exposing your students to the work world to ensure they are ready for future employment, your program should provide early and consistent exposure to post-secondary settings. Your staff should organize college campus tours, invite guest speakers, and arrange college fairs. Your staff can also invite post-secondary institution staff and faculty to conduct workshops and seminars at your YouthBuild program. Another very effective way to expose your students to college and build their confidence in this area is by providing dual-credit options. Nothing beats having former YouthBuild students come back and share their college experiences with current YouthBuild participants.

Visits to Post-Secondary Education Institutions

Many YouthBuild programs schedule trips to colleges as part of the process of expanding their students’ horizons. Your program should work with local and regional post-secondary institutions to find out when the school will be offering an open house or schedule a tour for your students. Your staff should accompany your students on college tours. Students should be prepared before they go to the campus by learning a few things about the college and the types of courses they offer and by developing questions to ask.

Invite Guest Speakers from Colleges and Universities

Just as employers are invited to speak at your YouthBuild program, you should invite representatives from post-secondary education institutions and YouthBuild alumni who are currently attending post-secondary educational institutions to speak. This can give your students the opportunity to discuss their post-secondary education options in the comfortable setting of your program. You may want to invite multiple speakers on one day by hosting a “college day” for all students. You can partner with a local post-secondary institution to provide a College 101 session as an introduction to college and college courses and invite YouthBuild alumni who are attending post-secondary institutions and other speakers.

College Fairs

College fairs represent one of the many tools in a comprehensive post-program placement strategy for your YouthBuild students. College fairs can help you connect your students to post-secondary institutions and provide an opportunity for them to engage in conversation with professionals who can provide information and advice on selecting a college. College fairs are most successful if you use them as a step in the process of developing deeper relationships with post-secondary institutions to help ensure student placement and success in college.

Below is a list of resources that will help your program set up your own college fair and help connect students to existing college fairs:

- Your local community college(s) and One-Stop Career Centers can give you information on college fairs in your community.
- The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) sponsors college fairs that are free and open to the public in every major U.S. metropolitan area.
- CollegeWeekLive is the largest online college fair. Through this free event, your students can access video presentations by college admissions experts on a variety of topics, including college admissions. They can also interact with other students through video chat.

- The GreenCollegeTour hosts a Friday Online Fair series that provides virtual campus tours and live chats with admissions staff. Your students can also access resources and guidelines on developing and posting applications that colleges can access through the web site.

- Hosting a college fair at your program is also an alternative. We suggest hosting a fair with a partner, such as a local high school, church, One-Stop Career Center, or community-based organization. You should also consider approaching local corporations and employers to serve as sponsors of the college fair. You can find more detailed tips and step-by-step instructions for hosting your own college fair on the College Board web site. It provides planning guidelines and details, budgeting tools, recruiting strategies, and tips on running a college fair.

RESOURCES
A College Fairs Tip Sheet can be found in the Community of Practice.

Dual-Credit Options for YouthBuild Students

Some YouthBuild programs have partnered with their local community college to set up a dual-credit system in which YouthBuild students can earn college credit for coursework they complete at their YouthBuild program, or they can attend one class at the community college while still in YouthBuild. A number of community colleges grant credit for NCCER construction certifications.

You should get creative when you engage your college partners. In addition to the ideas mentioned here, you could ask them to use college interns as student mentors, develop summer college experiences for YouthBuild participants, or see if the admissions office can help with a workshop on the application process.

Conclusion

At this point, your YouthBuild program has provided an environment for your young people similar to one they will experience in the workplace or in a post-secondary environment, albeit with much more support and guidance. During the last month or two of your program, your focus will change from the soft skills development, career exploration and college- and career-readiness classes that we have discussed in this section to that of working with students to ensure that they are individually ready to transition to the next phase of their lives (i.e., with stable housing, child care, and transportation systems in place) and begin interviewing for jobs and/or enrolling in post-secondary education or training.
Section III: Career and Post-Secondary Placement or the Transition Period
Introduction

In this section, we will be talking about the final one to two months before a student is placed in employment or education and the first one to two months after they are placed, which we refer to as the transition period. This can be a very challenging time for YouthBuild students as they prepare to leave the supportive and safe environment of your YouthBuild program. Having intense staff support in place for students during this transition period can make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful experience for your young people.

The one to two months preceding exit or graduation from your YouthBuild program is the time to guide students in finalizing their career portfolios (which they should have been working on throughout the program cycle), completing college and other training applications, and ensuring that they are individually ready to transition to the next phase of their lives (i.e., with stable housing, child care, and transportation systems in place). By this point in the program, they should have completed most of the elements of their Individual Career Portfolio (ICP), and their focus changes from working on their ICP to interviewing for jobs and/or finishing up their plans for enrollment in post-secondary education or training.

Similarly, the one to two months after they are initially placed in a job or an educational setting require an intensive follow-up effort from the YouthBuild staff to ensure that no personal problems or communication problems arise that might derail the student in the early weeks of a job or college placement.

This section will address staff work that must happen in order to help students make the transition from YouthBuild to the workforce or post-secondary education or training successfully.

The Final Stages of Readiness

As your students begin to transition into career and post-secondary placements, you should continue to work with them to offer job-readiness training. By this point in the program, your young people should be completing work on their readiness portfolios. (For more information on readiness portfolios, see p. 63 in Section II.) Their readiness portfolios contain the raw materials they will need to transition to the next step in their lives—be it college, apprenticeship programs, additional training, or a job.

In addition, this should be a time when the job developer is working with each student on interviewing techniques by making mock interviews part of classroom preparation and by using volunteers to interview students and evaluate them.

RESOURCES

General information on how to prepare young people for interviews can be found in the interview preparation tip sheet in the Community of Practice.

Finally, as the program cycle draws to a close, it is important to continue working with students on individual readiness issues such as child care, transportation, stable housing, and any remaining or recurring substance abuse issues.
Career and Post-Secondary Placement

This section of the manual will focus on job development activities that happen in the last few months of the program cycle, and the next section will focus on post-secondary education readiness activities that happen at the end of the program cycle.

Connecting with Employers

This is generally a busy time for job developers. They must spend much of their time building on the partnership work that they did earlier in the year by identifying employers who have current job openings for students ready to be placed in a job. This is the time to visit employers with whom you already have a relationship to remind them about YouthBuild and to let them know you have qualified students who will be ready for interviews in a few weeks. It is also the time to bolster your employer database by visiting new employers to tell them about YouthBuild and letting them know of your ability to provide them with a qualified labor source. These personal visits with current and prospective employers will, ideally, encourage the employer to develop a personal interest in YouthBuild and its students, thus giving YouthBuild students a leg up in gaining interviews. As job developers get a sense of what positions are available, they work to link the students to the positions that are most ideal for them. This is a good time to invite employers to visit your program and/or worksite to meet your students and staff so that they will have a better sense of what your program offers. This could yield benefits beyond simple employment placement, by creating a community champion for your program.

At this point, the job developer should be working daily with the employer database to ensure that it is up-to-date, while also working individually with students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on the employer database can be found on p. 33 of Section I.

Post-Secondary Education Placement Activities

Because the college and financial aid application deadlines occur earlier in the year, it is likely that any student planning to continue in some form of post-secondary education will already have completed college placement testing, financial aid, and college applications.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the college application and financial aid processes go to p. 55-56 in Section II.
For these students, this time is best spent in preparing for college life. For example, many community colleges have various “College 101” courses or seminars or other introduction-to-student life offerings. If you have established a formal partnership with a post-secondary education institution (see p. 31 in Section I for more on establishing post-secondary education partnerships), that organization may send someone to your site for a day to provide such a workshop for your college-bound students. You should also identify various support programs that are available to students on campus and make sure that your students know how to access them. Another good practice is to ask older graduates of your program attending college to return to the program to share their college experiences with current students or to mentor them if they will be attending the same school.

This is also a good time to review finances with your college-bound students and to make sure they are placed in a part-time job if they will need part-time employment, which most will, while attending college.

Working Individually with Students

This is a critical time, and students who receive adequate adult support and guidance are the most likely to be successful in their first jobs and ultimate career paths. Ideally, job developers will have already built a solid relationship with all students. However, during this time period, they must foster an even closer, supportive, and mentoring relationship with the students who are ready to be placed.

It is very important for job developers, counselors, and case managers to be aware of the possibility students have for self-sabotage when they are getting ready to leave the program. As students approach graduation and the end of the YouthBuild cycle, they may begin to engage in behavior that will undermine their own success. Many of your students may never have experienced success. It can be scary to succeed. In some sense, their impending success will cause them to shed a part of their identity. It is crucial to be aware of this common phenomenon in YouthBuild programs and create a safe space for young people to talk about their fears and struggles and receive support and guidance from YouthBuild staff.

In addition to building a solid and supportive relationship with each student, your job developer should work with each student to develop an individual placement strategy. This will include meetings between the job developer and the student to assess job readiness competencies and performance in the program. These meetings will also explore placement strategies designed to best serve each student (for example, additional job-shadowing, informational interviewing, and internships before final placement). Your program should evaluate student performance against the criteria for job placement developed by the program, and your staff should inform students of their status. Your program should pay particular attention to the completion of your students’ job readiness portfolios.
Not all students will be ready for placement at the end of the program cycle. Some of your students might still be unsure of their career paths and what they want to do, or they might not have mastered essential job-readiness competencies. For these students, your program can establish a support group to address the following issues:

- difficulties young people may have on the job;
- career counseling and exploration;
- counseling about how to keep a job or obtain a new job;
- providing help with resume writing and interviewing skills; and
- goal setting for work, career, and job placement.

Most of the above simply continue the work begun during the program.

**Contingency Planning**

In spite of careful planning and diligent work, your program might not have a sufficient number of appropriate jobs or educational placements available at graduation. Furthermore, not all students are likely to meet job placement criteria exactly at the same time. Some may have to spend a few additional months completing program requirements and will need to be placed in part-time employment during that period. It is important to connect students who are not ready for placement with an alternate opportunity. If your young people have a long period of idle time, they may return to the at-risk behaviors they engaged in prior to joining the program.

To accommodate these factors, your program should have contingency plans for students you do not place immediately. Contingency plans need to be identified before the end of the year, and preliminary arrangements must be made to make sure the plans are available. Some possibilities are:

- **Short-term jobs**—Even jobs that are not intended to be long-term can help young people develop their skills and acquire a sense of themselves as workers. These short-term jobs might be part-time or full-time, seasonal, or otherwise temporary in nature. Examples include working with youth in after-school programs or working in the service or retail industry.

- **Employment at YouthBuild**—YouthBuild organizations can often employ their own graduates on a temporary basis. If the program is between cycles, graduates can work as outreach workers, receptionists, or help with building maintenance or finishing any remaining construction work from the program cycle that was not completed.

- **Fee-for-service construction**—Some YouthBuild programs arrange fee-for-service construction projects between program cycles to provide jobs for graduates awaiting placement and to generate program income. These can be a series of short-term construction projects like painting a community center, doing minor home repairs for residents in the neighborhood, or renovating a small store or office for a business in the community. These projects can also be more sustained construction projects that provide interim work for a crew of graduates and the program’s construction training staff. Some programs make the creation of a revenue-generating job-creating subsidiary a core method of providing jobs. Such placements are short-term jobs, not program services, so youth should be exited from the program in order for this placement to be reflected as a positive outcome.
Intensive Follow-up and Support During the First Two Months of Placement

No matter how challenging students find their experience in your program, they will most likely find the transition out of YouthBuild even more challenging. A key staff person dedicated to supporting students as they transition out of the program and providing intensive follow-up support is vital to the post-placement success of your students. A key component of strong follow-up is to begin marketing this to youth as soon as they enter the program. You may want to tell them that your program is a two-year program with one year of program activities at the site and a second year of follow-up activities. This will help them understand that the program will be there for them even after they leave.

Through follow-up supports, your program provides assistance and support to your students after they leave the safety and security of YouthBuild, encouraging their success in post-secondary and employment placements. Knowing that youth can face difficulty and need support to transition from the program to the “real-world”, the Department of Labor requires programs to provide follow-up supports to students for at least three quarters after they have exited the program, which, depending on the time within the quarter that they exited, may be close to a full year of follow-up interaction. Many programs provide follow-up supports for even longer than that, using funds from sources other than the Department of Labor.

Through follow-up supports, your staff members will be better able to address the inevitable issues that arise for students as they exit the program environment and enter the market environment of work and school. Follow-up also ensures that students focus on their longer-term goals in work, learning, and leadership.

Your program must conduct follow-up frequently enough to address the range of issues facing program graduates and must provide services based upon the needs of individual participants. Follow-up is critical to ensure successful, long-term retention in post-secondary education and employment. While your students will receive follow-up supports for a year after their placement, your program should provide the most intensive follow-up supports in the first two months of placement.

The purpose of providing follow-up supports is to:

- provide a check-in point for problem-solving underlying personal issues that get in the way of steady progress towards career/educational goals and
- encourage graduates to reflect on their experiences in their work and post-secondary worlds.
The following guiding principles can assure that you develop a strong follow-up service system in your program. Your program should:

1. **Match the follow-up supports to the characteristics, needs, and personal situation of the student.** When matching services, consider factors such as the age of the graduate, needs, at-risk status, their personal support system, and workplace or college hours.

2. **Develop a follow-up assessment tool to determine the kind and amount of follow-up needed.** This should include work history, reasons the student left previous jobs, social skills, life skills, crisis and stress management skills, attitude towards work and/or school, family situation, and other barriers (e.g., transportation, child care, substance abuse, mental health issues, etc.).

3. **Develop a written follow-up plan with the student prior to his or her ending the program.** This plan should be agreed to and signed by the student and the YouthBuild staff member working with him or her. Be sure to include in the plan the young person’s retention or follow-up assessment, a list of people and resources that the student can turn to when tempted to quit school or a job, goals to reach on the job before leaving, goals to reach in school before graduation, a plan to address barriers to success, back-up plans for addressing barriers, and contact information of six people in the event the YouthBuild staff person is not able to locate the student directly.

4. **Follow the plan and hold students accountable for their signed agreement.** Your program should be persistent and maintain the agreed schedule of contact. Your staff might also consider developing a reminder system for follow-up supports based on the Department of Labor quarterly data reporting schedule.

**Job Placement Follow-Up**

Your job developer should make it clear to both the student and the employer that they should expect regular contact during the first few months of placement. This will make it easier for your job developer to evaluate the placement from the perspective of both the employer and the student. The following table provides a suggested schedule for contact during the first two months of placement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Time on the Job</th>
<th>Frequency of Contact between Job Developer and Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days one, two and three on the job</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day four through the end of second week on the job (weeks one and two)</td>
<td>Twice a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week three through the end of the second month on the job (weeks three through eight)</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A few days before the first day of employment, the job developer should check in with the student to go over the following:

- Do you know where to go on the first day (e.g., the address where you should report may not be the same as the one at which you interviewed)?
- At what time do you have to report for work? Discuss with the student the importance of arriving 30 minutes early to work to account for any unexpected transportation issues.
- What is your transportation plan to get there? Do you have money set aside for public transportation, if needed?
- If the student is a parent, what is the child care plan? What is the backup child care plan should the child or child care provider be sick?
- What do you plan to wear on your first day? Is it clean?

At the end of the student’s first day, the job developer should call him or her to ask how it went. Questions you can ask at this time are:

- What time did you arrive to work?
- How did your transportation work out?
- How was your orientation?
- Did you understand what was being asked of you?
- Are you clear on your schedule for the coming week and what number to call should you be running late or sick?
- Did you like your supervisor? The other workers? Were you able to connect with anyone in a way that made you feel comfortable? How did you feel about how they welcomed you?
- Were you able to approach your supervisor with any questions you had about the job?

After the first day on the job, your job developer should contact the student one or two more times during his or her first week to check in and ask similar questions. One of these contacts should be in person, if possible.
The job developer should also contact the employer two or three days after the student begins employment. Remember, the employer will likely be very busy. Do not take up much of his or her time. Instead, have a set of prepared questions ready and try to get off the phone in less than five minutes. If you cannot reach the employer by phone, stop by their workplace very briefly. A suggested script for this first employer call or visit is as follows:

Hello, I am ____________, the job developer with Anytown YouthBuild. I am calling to check in on (student) to ask how she is doing on her first few days at work.

Has (student) arrived on time every day?
Has (student) performed up to your level of expectations?
Is there anything (student) could be doing better with which we can be of help?

Thank you very much for your time. Here is my phone number and e-mail address in case you would like to contact me with any concerns about (student). We work very hard with our students to prepare them for the workplace, and we want to do everything we can to help them succeed once they are placed on a job, so please don’t hesitate to reach out to me if there is anything I can do to support (student’s) continued employment with you.

After the first week, your YouthBuild program can scale back contact with the student to once a week for the first few months. It is crucial to keep up this regular contact. The first few months on a job is the most likely time for a student to get derailed. By keeping in close contact with your students during this crucial transition period, you can be alert to any problems that may be developing before they become too big to solve.

Some students will have difficulty with their first job. Their communication skills may need more work or they may have trouble consistently getting to work on time or remembering to call in when they are sick or late. Some students will not like their first jobs and will need assistance in resigning from their jobs appropriately and finding new ones. Students can be encouraged to maintain their jobs by focusing on their long-term goals and by accessing the resources of the YouthBuild program. Some programs offer financial or other incentives for job success that may help to retain youth in employment.

Regardless of the situation, regular communication is important because it will help your staff identify red flags before they become larger problems. It also allows your program staff the opportunity to intervene quickly if there is a problem and possibly mediate the problem between the employer and the student. If there is a problem and the situation does not seem to be salvageable, your staff can remove the student and offer a different candidate to both save the relationship with the employer and not discourage your student.
Post-Secondary Placement Follow-Up

Similar to students who are placed in jobs, your program staff should provide intensive follow-up support to those who enter post-secondary institutions. Your staff should follow up with graduates in post-secondary institutions on a regular basis. In the first week of school or training, your staff should contact the students daily. After the first week, your staff should communicate with students at least once a week for the first two or three months. Your staff can then reduce the amount of contact to once a month for the remainder of the follow-up year. Of course, students should know that they can always reach out to their case manager, job developer, or other YouthBuild staff person when they need help with their challenges.

In delivering supports to graduates in post-secondary institutions, your program should strongly consider partnering with the institution. Many schools offer supports that are readily available to the general student population. However, if your program collaborates with the post-secondary institution to offer support services, it is likely that you will offer supports in a more proactive manner, and the students will have greater access to everything the campus offers. While the specific structures for delivering student support services varies widely across post-secondary institutions, the following are key student service offices that YouthBuild programs should consider engaging to offer students support and assistance during their post-secondary experience:

- **Student support services**—Provide academic tutoring, academic and financial aid counseling, and transfer support. Some programs also provide personal and career counseling, opportunities for students to engage in cultural events, housing assistance for former foster-care youth, and mentoring opportunities.
- **Academic counseling**—Provides academic and financial aid counseling, transfer support, and long-term education and career planning.
- **Supplemental instruction and/or academic resource centers**—Offer a range of tutoring and academic support services.
- **Developmental education faculty**—Provide developmental education instruction that meets the learning styles and needs of YouthBuild students.
- **Career centers**—Provide information to help students explore and pursue careers. In addition, they often house expert career advisors who can offer students direct career-planning support.

Just as with students placed in jobs after YouthBuild, regular communication with graduates placed in post-secondary education is important because it will help your staff identify red flags before they become larger problems. In the case of students enrolled in college, the danger is not in losing their jobs but in not attending classes without going through a formal withdrawal process. This results in failing grades (as opposed to “incompletes”) that can negatively impact their future college efforts.
Conclusion

Paying very close attention to the needs of your students during the transition period is crucial to the long-term success of your students. It is important to build this intense staff support for students into the culture of your program to help your students overcome any self-sabotage or other derailments they may face at this emotional time when they are transitioning out of the program.

Knowing that young people will continue to need support for more than the first few months after their initial placement, the Department of Labor requires programs to provide follow-up supports to students for at least three quarters after they have exited the program, which, depending on the time within the quarter that they exited, may be close to a full year of follow-up. The next section addresses how programs can provide effective follow-up supports to young people for the full three quarters after they have transitioned out of the YouthBuild program.
Section IV: Continuing Along the Long-Term Pathway to Success
Introduction

In the first section of this manual, we discussed our guiding motivation as YouthBuild program staff: to contribute to the lifelong success of our young people in all aspects of their lives—education, employment, family life, and civic engagement. This last section of the manual covers the support that we give to our young people after they have transitioned out of the YouthBuild program into a career or post-secondary placement.

The Department of Labor requires YouthBuild programs to provide follow-up supports to young people for a minimum of three quarters, and often up to a full year, after they have exited the YouthBuild program. The exact time frame depends on when in the quarter a young person exited the program cycle. This follow-up period is an extremely important component of the program as young people learn to navigate the world of work and education without the daily support of caring and supportive staff. Many programs continue to provide follow-up supports for young people beyond this time frame, using funding from sources other than the Department of Labor; thus, following through on a promise many programs make to their young people through the oft-repeated phrase: “Once in YouthBuild, always in YouthBuild!”

So, how do we support our YouthBuild students after they have completed the program cycle? Our goal is to help them be successful in:

- maintaining a job that pays a living wage and progressing up a career ladder;
- remaining enrolled and successful at post-secondary education schools or apprenticeships;
- using their first job and educational experiences to lead to the development of further skills, more advanced jobs on a career path of their choosing, increased income with benefits, and lifetime learning;
- creating and maintaining a support system that nurtures their continued growth and sustains them through difficult periods;
- helping them manage family responsibilities; and
- becoming strong, contributing members and leaders in their communities.

This section will cover the services and opportunities offered to young people for the three quarters to a year after they have transitioned out of your program—what we will call the transition support period. To differentiate these young people from those who are still actively enrolled in a program cycle, we will refer to the young people who have transitioned out of your program as alumni. Young people like being alumni; it is a word with positive associations.
Understanding Department of Labor Outcomes, Definitions, and MIS Timelines Related to Transition Support

As discussed in Section I of this manual (see p. 13), the Department of Labor has established five performance outcomes for which all Department of Labor YouthBuild programs are held accountable. Although all five performance outcomes contribute in a very meaningful way to young people’s long-term success, one of them is most directly related to their success in the time after they finish the YouthBuild program cycle: the retention in employment or education outcome. The retention in employment or education outcome measures the number of young people who were placed in employment or education in the first quarter after exit and are in a placement in the second and third quarters after exit. These three quarters are known as the “follow-up period.” The young people do not have to be in the same employment or education placement in each of the three quarters.

This outcome recognizes that it is not enough to simply place our young people in a job or a post-secondary educational institution after they complete the YouthBuild program cycle. In order to significantly reap the benefits of these placements, young people must stick with these first jobs or find another job if the first one doesn’t last, as it often doesn’t. The same is true for education. For these reasons, setting up a system that provides ongoing staff support to your alumni, keeps in touch with them, and offers them the support they need to be successful is crucial to the success of your young people and to positive outcomes in the Department of Labor MIS. When young people leave the program, they will face enormous new pressures coupled with the loss of daily support. Some of them will need near-daily contact with the staff they grew to trust during the program cycle.

Staffing Transition Support

Some programs find it challenging to set up a staffing pattern for transition support. Especially during the first years of your Department of Labor YouthBuild grant, when you have smaller numbers of alumni, the work of transition support may not yet be full-time. Nonetheless, it must be a part of a staff person’s job description and a function on which the Program Director is focused. If the Program Director is not meeting with the staff person responsible for transition support on a regular basis, getting reports on alumni progress, and reviewing the retention data, this function can sometimes fall between the cracks, especially since it may be a smaller percentage of a staff person’s overall time in the first years.

Five Performance Outcomes

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<th>1. Placement in Employment or Education</th>
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<td>2. Attainment of a Degree or Certificate</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3. Literacy and Numeracy Gains</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4. Retention in Employment or Education</td>
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<td>5. Recidivism</td>
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Tracking Outcomes

The calendar below shows:
- YouthBuild Program – the length of a program varies
- Exit Quarter – the quarter in which student exits program
- Follow-up Period – the next 3 quarters

PATHWAYS TO LONG-TERM SUCCESS FOR YOUTHBUILD STUDENTS
SECTION IV: CONTINUING ALONG THE LONG-TERM PATHWAY TO SUCCESS
There are many functions that may be wrapped into the staffing of transition support:

- coordination of overall transition services, opportunities, and supports;
- outreach and ongoing communication with alumni;
- organizing gatherings of alumni to continue the sense of belonging to a positive peer group;
- collection and entry of data for the Department of Labor MIS;
- assistance in job development and career counseling;
- assistance in post-secondary education support and goal-setting and financial aid issues;
- organization of individual counseling, referrals, support groups, life skills, and crisis intervention;
- teaching of GED prep classes for those who have not yet passed the GED;
- assistance in the development of an alumni club and support of an alumni club; and
- organization of community involvement and leadership opportunities for alumni.

Although the position may not be full-time, it is important to designate a specific staff person as the transition support coordinator with the responsibility of coordinating these services. In the first year of a program, this person should be employed (or tasks designated to an existing staff member) at least four months before the end of the program cycle, if possible. This four-month period will give prospective alumni the opportunity to get to know this staff person. If alumni have prior familiarity with transition services staff, they are much more likely to participate, to ask for what they need, and utilize transition support.

Depending on their overall workload, any of the following staff positions could have transitions coordinator incorporated into their job responsibilities. In addition, each of these positions will likely be included in the overall transition support team.

- **Job Developer**—Because the job developer tends to work with alumni a great deal, many programs include the responsibilities of transitions coordinator in this position description. Regardless, the job developer will play a role in providing ongoing career counseling and assistance to alumni and may take on the functions of outreach and ongoing communication with alumni, assistance in the development of an alumni club and support for the club, and organization of community involvement and leadership opportunities for alumni.

- **Counselor/Case Manager**—The transition component of your program will need the services of a counselor/case manager, and your program can explore various options. One option is to add the alumni who need these services to the current counselor/case manager’s caseload, but be advised that this should only be a short-term solution because of the danger of spreading this person too thin and short-changing the young people in your program. Another option is to specifically hire a transitions coordinator with a counseling background and add this function to the job description. If your program has enough students, you may want to consider hiring two counselors/case managers. One of these positions can be full-time, dedicated to the students in the current program cycle, while the second position could be part-time and dedicated to working specifically with alumni. Your program might consider structuring the part-time counselor/case manager position with an afternoon and evening schedule to accommodate alumni who work daytime jobs or attend school on a full-time basis so that they are able to access those services. Your program may also want to explore a
partnership with a local counseling service to provide support to youth who are in their follow-up period. Another idea is to have two staff who rotate, each focused for one year on current students, then following them full-time in the transition year, and then returning to work with a new class in year three.

- **Teachers**—Your program might have alumni who need to obtain their GEDs or who have recently decided to apply for college. Having teachers help with alumni educational needs can ensure their success. Similar to the above example, one configuration is to hire a person with an education background and have that person work part-time as the transitions coordinator and part-time on handling the educational needs of alumni. Yet another option, if the number of alumni needing GED help is small, is to assign your program GED teacher to assist alumni in the same class as new students or in a special class for alumni. Teachers can also be a support for those students who have transitioned into post-secondary education.

- **Alumni Positions**—Your program can also hire alumni to assist in the transition program, either on a short- or long-term basis. Alumni may be able to facilitate outreach and ongoing communication with other alumni. In fact, they may have the best ideas for how to stay in touch with alumni and how to create activities that will be the most helpful to their peers. Another function that alumni may be able to serve is that of collecting and entering data on the placement retention outcome in the Department of Labor MIS. Because these alumni positions will have responsibilities that will determine the success of your transition program, it is important that young people being considered for these positions exhibit the following:
  - a proven track record of taking responsibility and initiative;
  - good communication skills;
  - problem-solving skills;
  - ability to maintain confidentiality;
  - leadership ability; and
  - good relationships with staff, peers, and the director.
A staff position with the transition component of your program will provide opportunities for your alumni to develop their leadership potential; however, your program should also develop a system to support these alumni in their roles. To facilitate this, your program might want to implement the following elements into the alumni staff program:

- regularly scheduled meetings with the alumni’s supervisor who acts as an advocate;
- a quarterly plan with goals, objectives, specific accomplishments, and dates to meet these; and
- opportunities to train in writing, computer skills, public speaking, and other job skills.

**Program Director**—Another important component of staffing the transition services program is that of the Program Director and the board members. Although the Program Director is extremely busy, it is crucial to have his/her presence at alumni council or policy committee meetings, social events planned by alumni, and at other alumni-targeted activities. The presence of the Program Director and board members indicates that the continued success of alumni is a high priority for the program and that they personally care about the students.

**Keeping in Touch with Alumni**

In order to help your alumni continue along paths to success and to report their progress to the Department of Labor, first and foremost you must keep in touch with them. This can be a challenge. As we know, young people move around a lot, and they often change phone numbers. For this reason, it is important to make sure you have several phone numbers for each of your alumni before they finish the YouthBuild program cycle. Some programs collect as many as seven phone numbers for each alumni. These include the phone numbers of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, etc. In addition to obtaining multiple phone numbers for each student before they leave the program, make sure each student has set up a free e-mail account through Hotmail, Google, or Facebook so they can keep in touch with each other and your program in order to provide them with an ongoing supportive community.

Many YouthBuild alumni talk about how critical it was for them to talk to a YouthBuild staff person very frequently during their transition year, often even daily! Do not underestimate how important the relationships with all staff are, not just the transitions coordinator. The friendships and mentoring relationships that have been formed during the program cycle are often the most important asset alumni carry with them into the next stage of their lives. Sometimes these relationships continue for years, even decades, as long-term friendships.

Your transitions coordinator, job developer, or other designated staff person should contact alumni regularly—as often as once a week and no less than once a month—to talk with each one, show their support and interest, assess how each one is doing and what support each one might want or need from your program. In addition to phone calls, it is helpful to visit alumni at home or at work. Contacting alumni individually will also help your program locate alumni who have moved. During these regular contacts, check in with alumni on how they are doing on multiple fronts. Regardless of a young person’s placement, your program should keep track of their general well-being by asking questions about their support networks and any personal challenges they might be facing.
RESOURCES

A comprehensive list of questions to use when checking in with alumni can be found in the Community of Practice.

Be sure to invite them to the next alumni gathering and use this time to express a strong statement of appreciation for what the alumni have accomplished and an affirmation of your and the program’s continued support for their growth and development. In addition to regular individual contact with alumni, it is helpful to send regular e-mails to all your alumni telling them of events, successes of other alumni, and opportunities. Be sure to send birthday cards!

Follow-Up Services and Opportunities

The kinds of support and opportunities you offer to your alumni during the follow-up period will be similar to those offered to them during the program cycle: counseling and case management, education, career development, community service opportunities, and leadership roles and responsibilities. You will have to be creative about how to offer these services and opportunities to young people whom you are not necessarily seeing on a daily basis and who will likely have daytime commitments either as students, in apprenticeship programs, or at jobs. Some programs begin this process right from the beginning of Mental Toughness, telling the students that the YouthBuild program is comprised of two different parts: Part One where the youth are attending every day and Part Two, which is the transition and follow-up period.

Counseling/Case Management

No matter how challenging students find their experience in your YouthBuild program, they will likely find the transition out of your program even more challenging. For this reason, addressing the personal and emotional issues of alumni is an important component of transition support and crucial to your alumni’s long-term success. Some of the support services that may be helpful to your alumni during the follow-up period include:

- **Individual counseling**—Your program counselor or transitions coordinator should make regular appointments with specific alumni or make it known that alumni can drop in at specified times or even unannounced as needed. It is important for the counselor to connect regularly with alumni, even if only by phone. Because of the level of trust necessary for effective one-on-one counseling, these sessions work best if your alumni know the counselor prior to graduation.
- **Support groups**—Your program can organize alumni peer support groups that meet regularly. Sometimes these will be continuations of groups begun during the program phase. Depending on the needs of alumni, there can be support groups for a wide range of issues, such as responsible fatherhood, addiction, parole, or entrepreneurship. Your counselor can assist in these support groups. The groups can be informal discussion groups in which participants talk about an agreed-upon topic. Alternatively, the support group format might focus on one person at a time, with peers listening and encouraging each other, asking questions, giving advice, and making suggestions. It can also be a more structured “equal time” format in which each person has equal time to talk about whatever is on his/her mind.

- **Referrals**—Your program as a whole, and transition support in particular, must develop a comprehensive network of partnering agencies that young people can access. In certain situations your alumni may be best served by a referral to a more specialized organization. For example, if alumni are struggling with addiction, depression, or complicated legal problems, they may need more resources than your YouthBuild program can provide. In such instances, partnerships with larger professional centers ensure that your alumni have access to the help and support they need to continue their journeys.

It is important to pay attention to common personal and emotional issues that YouthBuild alumni face, including

- **Post-program letdown**—After the daily commitment of the YouthBuild program cycle, your alumni will likely want a break. Sometimes there is a letdown after the excitement of graduation passes. Your alumni can settle back into their old reality and relapse into bad habits, especially if they have not secured a job or educational placement. Sometimes alumni feel that there is no reason to get up in the morning because they have nowhere to go. Old family problems can resurface and old dynamics can reinstate themselves. Young people who stayed clean throughout the program might begin to use drugs again. The best approach to this challenge is to keep young people engaged in program activities until an appropriate placement is found (see p. 74 in Section III on short-term temporary jobs).

- **Legal, logistical, and health issues**—Your program counselors might be called upon to help alumni straighten out legal and logistical problems. This might include transportation issues such as saving money to buy a car or dealing with traffic infractions. In some cases, alumni may need legal assistance to become custodial parents or to handle an immigration issue, for example. Alumni may need assistance with health care issues, since often, if they do not have insurance, they will not go to a doctor. All of these types of assistance are important in order to keep your alumni emotionally and physically healthy and, thus, able to continue on their long-term pathways to success.
Career and Post-Secondary Education Counseling

Career and post-secondary education counseling in the transition support program is an extension of the counseling support young people received during the program cycle on these topics. Your program should continue to advise your alumni on adjusting to the worlds of post-secondary education or the workplace. The support your transition program offers can range from organizing support groups for alumni struggling with difficulties at school or at work to continued counseling as they plan for their next steps, to building strong partnerships with colleges that provide the support on campus.

The following are common career and post-secondary education services that a transition program may typically offer:

- support groups for alumni dealing with job-related difficulties or for those struggling in their first year of post-secondary education;
- counseling and workshops on specific job-related issues (e.g., how to keep a job, how to appropriately leave a job, how to handle conflicts with one’s supervisor, etc.);
- counseling on specific issues that typically arise for young people in their first year of post-secondary education (e.g., how to balance the course workload, how to manage finances and stay on top of financial aid deadlines, how to approach instructors with questions or concerns; identifying campus support services such as tutoring, counseling, or affinity groups);
- access to job listings, a jobs database, and your program’s employer network;
- help with updating resumes and continuing to hone their interviewing skills;
- assistance with setting goals for their current jobs and make plans for their subsequent jobs;
- access to career fairs and inviting a range of employers (e.g., unions, temporary services, and other agencies); and
- occasional program-sponsored specialized certification courses for alumni (e.g., lead abatement, toxic waste handling, asbestos removal, etc.).

Your job developer can also organize workshops as part of transition support. These can focus on topics that will help alumni navigate the world of work, such as dealing with stress in the workplace, understanding and respecting employers’ policies and procedures, promoting one’s own advancement in a company, communication on the job and relationships with co-workers, or resolving problems and handling grievances on the job. Your program may have covered these topics while young people were still active in the YouthBuild program cycle; however, revisiting these topics with your alumni during their first year of post-program employment may help them make even more meaning of the content.
Helping Alumni Transition to New Employment Opportunities

Sometimes, an alumni’s first placement may not last in the long term. There are many reasons for this, and it is important to work with the young person to identify the reason why the position did not last. Perhaps there were child care issues, a relapse into drug use, or other personal challenges. If this is the case, it is important to work with the young person to address those issues before sending them out to another job placement, so you’re not setting them up for repeated failure. If the loss of job was due to performance at the workplace, it may make sense to have them do a short-term internship at your YouthBuild program to practice their soft skills. Of course, the reason may have had nothing at all to do with the young person’s performance. It may be that the organization for which they were working had to downsize or make other workforce adjustments.

Whatever the reason for job loss, your job developer will need to work with alumni to place them in subsequent job placements. When alumni need new placements, the job developer should begin by creating individual plans, just as they did prior to graduation. Next steps that the job developer may take on behalf of the alumni include:

- contacting a temporary agency if someone requires immediate employment;
- revisiting the placement network and investigating where there are job openings;
- meeting with the alumni to review available jobs, making sure potential jobs fit well with the person’s interests and skill level, and that their career portfolio is ready (More information on the career readiness portfolio is available on p. 63.);
- putting alumni in contact with potential employers;
- reviewing and helping alumni update their resumes and practice interview skills; and
- checking in with alumni before and after interviews.

Once alumni have found new placements, the job developer should institute the same follow-up system as was done for the first placement (see p. 86 for suggestions on how often to contact alumni during their first two months of placement).

Leadership Development

Leadership opportunities enable your alumni to continue to take responsibility to make things go right for their lives, for their families, for the program, and for their community. These opportunities do not stop after students finish the program cycle and are often the incentive for following through on other responsibilities. In fact, in many cases, leadership opportunities increase after the program cycle. Your program should consider discussing opportunities for continued leadership development before the end of the program cycle. Examples of leadership opportunities your YouthBuild program can offer include:

- **Hiring alumni as interns or staff**—As discussed earlier, programs can hire alumni as interns. This is an excellent way to extend leadership opportunities to recent alumni while helping your program to sufficiently staff the program, including transition support. Alumni can assist with transition activities, be hired as assistant construction crew chiefs, community service coordinators, or as assistant fundraisers.
- **Adding alumni to the Board of Directors**—This is a great way your program can extend formal decision-making roles to alumni. The board can benefit from the alumni perspective. If your program opts to include alumni as board members, consider including at least two young people on the board. This way they can receive peer support and function more effectively. Other suggested guidelines for youth participation on your program board are:
  - preparing and training alumni board members in the procedures and business of the board, such as board functions, policy development responsibilities, fiscal responsibility, confidentiality issues, and supporting the executive director;
  - preparing and training other board members to incorporate and support alumni board members;
  - asking alumni to serve on one of the board committees, such as executive, personnel, finance, policy development, fundraising, or public relations;
  - moving alumni into leadership roles on the board or within a committee as their leadership skills improve; and
  - ensuring that the board chair spends time with the alumni to answer questions, work out problems, or hear concerns that might not get aired by the young people in the meetings themselves without support.

- **Representing your program publicly**—Successful alumni are often the best representatives of YouthBuild to the wider community. Your program should involve alumni in fundraising events, media appearances, testimony at city council hearings, visits to state or federal legislators, and site visits by important visitors. You can also include alumni as keynote speakers at city and state functions. You and your transition services coordinator should work together to create such opportunities for alumni.

- **Continuing community service**—Many alumni will continue to give back to the community through service projects. Your transition support program and alumni club can develop these opportunities to encourage alumni to continue to serve their community.

- **Helping recruit, select, and mentor new students**—Your program can use alumni to help recruit new students. Alumni can spread the word about YouthBuild informally to friends and neighbors. In addition, alumni can serve on selection committees by interviewing candidates for YouthBuild, and they can assist during the orientation by sharing their experiences, leading small group discussions, or facilitating workshops. Once the new cycle begins, some of your alumni can act as mentors to coach and encourage new participants in your YouthBuild program.
- **Serving on the transition policy committee**—Your transition program can create a policy committee similar to the program policy committee. The Program Director, the transitions coordinator, and several alumni can define the scope of responsibilities. For example, the transition policy committee could act as a management team for the transition program, providing guidance on issues such as evaluating the opportunities provided; suggesting changes in structure, scheduling, services, or activities; gathering input from other alumni; and planning social events.

- **Operating an alumni club**—Former participants know better than anyone the benefits of YouthBuild. Coordinating an active alumni club gives alumni the chance to continue networking with each other and provides an ongoing support network. This can also provide additional opportunities for post-program outreach and retention efforts with alumni. Alumni clubs can provide alumni with an opportunity to develop the club’s mission and goals and take on a comprehensive and continuing leadership role. Additional information on alumni clubs is below.

**Alumni Clubs**

An alumni club, much like a college alumni group, will be organized and led by your alumni, with a designated YouthBuild staff person to support them. Alumni will decide on the club’s activities, raise funds for the club, and represent themselves to the wider community. For example, they might decide to focus on community service, tutor incoming students, or organize a youth conference.

Alumni clubs are comprised of alumni who have voluntarily formed a club that will allow them to:

- remain permanently connected to your YouthBuild program;
- continue to build a supportive community among their peers;
- foster continued personal growth and leadership development;
- provide input into the development and policy decisions of your program;
- help each other network for career and educational advancement;
- represent the program publicly;
- provide opportunities for alumni to engage in community development and leadership; and
- disseminate information about your program and about alumni.

These components work together to provide a context of support for the alumni. For example, if alumni are involved in continuing GED preparation and are coming to some of the social events, it’s likely the alumni will get interested in some of the leadership activities and participate in the alumni club. If your alumni are coming to a support group, they are more likely to set higher goals for themselves in work and education.
Staffing the Alumni Club

Your program may consider hiring alumni as part-time paid coordinators for the alumni club. A coordinator could also be one of the interns from your transition support program.

Although your alumni club should operate fairly autonomously within guidelines set by your program, the assistance of a designated staff person can ensure success. The staff support person, who may also be your transition support coordinator, should act as a liaison between the alumni club and the program, help the alumni club coordinator plan activities, and provide access to program resources that may be available.

Conclusion

After completing the YouthBuild program cycle, young people often face what may be one of the most challenging years of their life. They will be challenged every day on a job, or in college or a training program, in ways they have never experienced but without the daily support of a caring YouthBuild staff.

As such, providing careful, loving, and strategic support as well as leadership opportunities to alumni during this transition period can make the difference between alumni staying on track to long-term success or slipping back to behaviors that will undermine them in meeting their goals. It is crucial to be in touch with your alumni regularly so you can provide support if they need it and so that you can be inspired by all that they achieve on their personal pathway to success!
Conclusion

Helping young people think about what comes after YouthBuild is a job that begins before the YouthBuild program cycle even starts – with messages to young people that YouthBuild is a program for the long haul – a program that prepares them for a career, for post-secondary education, or for advanced training, and just as importantly, for a lifetime of taking responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities. In short, YouthBuild will help young people meet their highest aspirations for themselves.

In order to fulfill this promise to the young people in YouthBuild, it is important for YouthBuild program staff to be prepared to provide opportunities and support throughout the program cycle and after young people exit the program. This takes an extraordinary amount of preparation and commitment on the part of YouthBuild staff, and we hope that this manual has helped guide you through much of the work to be done to prepare a solid two years of support for your YouthBuild students, so they are ready to transform their lives and their communities.