
Chapter 3: Leadership Issues in Recruitment and Selection of Program Participants

Recruitment

Youthbuild programs recruit prospective participants in a variety of ways—through community organizations; newspaper advertisements; lists of high school dropouts from public schools; and the word-of-mouth of previous Youthbuild graduates.

Some programs specifically try, as part of their overall recruitment strategy, to recruit applicants who have already demonstrated leadership skills. There are several effective ways to do this:

- Build relationships with “pre-Youthbuild” programs such as drug rehabilitation centers, streetworker outreach programs, young parents programs, mentoring programs, urban corps, and church programs. Ask staff to recommend young people from their programs who have demonstrated leadership abilities.
- Build relationships with ministers, parole officers, and other local community leaders who have contact with out-of-school youth and who understand the leadership development concept.
- Encourage referrals from successful Youthbuild graduates who understand what leadership development means and who are able to convey the concept to their peers.
- Include information about leadership development in all recruitment materials distributed to organizations and interested individuals.

Selection

In most Youthbuild locations, there are many more applicants than there is room in the program. Most of the applicants would benefit from the Youthbuild program: most need a job, a skill, an education, counseling, and a second chance. Many Youthbuild programs have specific criteria for selecting trainees, it’s not just “first come, first served.” Applicants are often evaluated in an interview and through other aspects of the application process. Many programs specifically include some form of leadership criteria in selecting trainees for their program.

Criteria that a program might want to consider in trainee selection include:

1. Is this applicant ready for the Youthbuild program?
2. Is this applicant interested in playing a leadership role in the community?
3. Does this applicant understand the leadership expectations and requirements of the program? Can she or he demonstrate a willingness to meet those expectations?

Is the Applicant Ready for the Youthbuild Program?

Youthbuild programs typically seek to recruit young people who want an opportunity to change their lives and become leaders and role models in their communities. But not all applicants are equally ready to take advantage of the full range of resources that Youthbuild has to offer.

- Applicants who are still heavily invested in “street life” will have a more difficult time taking advantage of Youthbuild than those who are actively trying to leave it
- Applicants who have serious addiction problems may need other services before they are ready for Youthbuild
- Applicants who have unresolved, outstanding warrants or major pending court cases may need to be absent from the program for extensive periods of time

As part of the selection process, a Youthbuild program may want to consider the length of the program, the organization’s capacity to provide extensive support services, and the potential of an applicant to make changes in his or her life during that period of time. An applicant who is not ready this year may be ready next year to take full advantage of the program.

Is the Applicant Interested in a Leadership Role in the Community?

While some applicants may have had opportunities to demonstrate leadership potential in previous activities, most have not. The most effective way to judge applicant interest is in a direct interview. An interview process can explore whether an applicant:

- Understands and can demonstrate responsibility for self
- Understands and wants to take responsibility for family
- Is concerned about problems facing the community
- Has any experience in community leadership

Staff members who are interviewing applicants might generate a common set of questions to explore some of these issues. Interview questions might include:

1. Name five times in the past six months that you have taken responsi-

- bility for yourself.
2. Do you have children? What is your relationship with them? What do you want your relationship with them to be?
 3. What is the most important problem facing your community? What do you think should be done about it?
 4. If you were the mayor, what would you do to change things in your community?
 5. Have you ever been involved with any organization that was helping to improve your community?

In addition, as a writing sample, applicants might be asked to write a paragraph or two on what they think young people can do to help improve the community, or answer a single question that helps reveal their thoughts on community leadership. (Keep in mind that some applicants are more able than others to express themselves in writing.)

Does the Applicant Understand the Leadership Expectations and Requirements of the Program?

Most young people hear about Youthbuild as a construction training program. They seldom know that Youthbuild is also a leadership development program. It is useful to explain in an information session or an interview that trainees will have both leadership opportunities and responsibilities in the program. Describe the leadership development component of the program and the leadership requirements that participants will be expected to meet.

Leadership requirements that could be given as examples during the interview might include:

- Achievement of leadership competencies or skills
- Regular community service
- Registering to vote (if the trainee is of voting age), and voting in all elections for the remainder of the program
- Attending at least one meeting of three different community organizations during the program cycle, and reporting back to the program
- Taking on a leadership role or serving on a committee at some time during the program

Some Youthbuild programs establish simple leadership challenges as part of their requirements for acceptance into the program. These provide a good test of applicant motivation and ability to take leadership on tasks that are relatively easy to accomplish. Here are some examples of leadership challenges that might be part of the application process:

1. Require applicants who are of age to register to vote and bring proof

of registration back to the program.

2. Require applicants to obtain a library card and bring it back to the program.
3. Require a certain number of hours of volunteer community service.
4. Require applicants to identify a sponsor such as a parent, parole officer, staff person from another program, or minister who will agree to serve as a support person for the candidate in their development. Those applicants who can't find a sponsor might be referred to a local mentoring organization.
5. Require a short essay on what the applicant will contribute to the Youthbuild program.

Voices of Youthbuild Graduates:

What Makes Someone a Leader?

“The difference between young leaders and young people who are not leaders is confidence.”

“A leader is one that takes the initiative to step forward and leads a group of people who are afraid.”

“Leaders make things happen. They don't just tag along.”