

a
guide to
community
outreach



United States Department of Labor

Employment & Training Administration / Office of Youth Services / Office of Youth Opportunities

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MODULE 6

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introduction- why do youth councils need to do community outreach?

The Youth Councils created by the Workforce Investment Act are expected to serve as their community's clearinghouse and local experts on workforce development issues concerning youth. In many communities there is a leadership void in this area; however, forward-thinking Youth Councils are recognizing this gap and are preparing to close it. But how does a Youth Council become politically powerful and visible, able to plan, coordinate, and oversee youth workforce development in the community?

A recent survey by the National Association of Workforce Boards revealed that workforce boards are not well known in their communities and identified this as a major problem needing attention. The report suggested that there is a critical need to have a well-thought-out strategy to market the boards themselves, rather than just marketing training programs. Information gathered from several local practitioners revealed that Youth Councils experience similar problems regarding their visibility and involvement with the members of local communities.

purpose of the guide

This guide to community outreach for Youth Councils provides suggestions on how to reach out to key groups in the community, to policy makers and to the media to raise awareness of youth issues. Part I presents tips for developing an outreach plan. Part II includes sample materials, which may be used as a reference for contacting and involving community leaders and organizations to obtain their help in developing a local youth workforce development system. The last section of the guide suggests additional resources for those who want more information.

The material in this guide was extracted from Media Outreach: A Public Relations Guide to Working with Your Local Media (National School To Work Opportunities Office), Americorps: A Guide to Working the Media (Corporation for National Service), and Putting Your WIB on the Political Map: Tips on Marketing, Communications and Public Relations (National Association of Workforce Boards) and used with permission of the authors.

how does a youth council develop a community outreach plan?

An effective community outreach strategy is far more than a “marketing plan” and doesn’t come about by chance. The Youth Council has to decide that community outreach is important and then adopt a consistent attitude that reflects its mission and goals, its willingness and capacity for community leadership, its membership, and its ability to commit resources to a logical detailed plan for sharing its story.

A community outreach plan can take many forms. The plan can consist of a simple list of tasks that the Youth Council wishes to accomplish over the next three, six or twelve months, or it can be a comprehensive planning document. The overall goal is to provide information needed to raise the level of understanding in the community on how to promote a seamless, comprehensive workforce development system for youth, and to be regarded as a major source of information on youth workforce development initiatives and research.

The outreach plan needs to identify the major target audiences, the communications objectives for each of these groups, and the tools needed to help accomplish the objectives. Although target audiences will vary from community to community, they include:

1. Individuals and job seekers
2. Businesses and employer associations
3. Service providers
4. Education and training institution
5. Civic and professional organizations
6. Unions
7. Community and faith-based organizations
8. Economic development organization
9. Youth Council board members and staff
10. Community leaders
11. Elected officials
12. Media
13. General public

how can the youth council involve the community?

There are many ways to involve the community. Most organizations already promote their programs to the community through such traditional means as conferences, exhibits, and presentations. Other effective means of reaching out to the community include:

- Word of mouth by Youth Council members, youth staff, youth participants, youth service providers, business and community agency partners, and community leaders.
- Speaking engagements to community and business groups.
- Printed materials such as fact sheets, fliers, brochures, annual reports, videos, and copies of news clips, posters, public service advertisements on buses or billboards, and articles for church or community newsletters.
- Special events such as community potlucks, recreation events, program graduation celebrations, job fairs, award and recognition events for business and other partners, and participation in national events such as Groundhog Job Shadow Day.
- Community service projects by youth program participants and staff.

how can the youth council involve policy makers?

One of the Youth Council's main community outreach priorities is to keep local, state and federal officials informed about the positive things that the Youth Council is doing. The following steps will help familiarize officials with the good work that you are doing.

- Make a list of key elected officials. Include the name, address, and telephone number of the mayor and other local officials such as the sheriff and county administrators, state legislators and officials such as K-12 or higher education administrators, governor, U.S. representatives and senators. Add elected officials to mailing lists when sending out press releases or newsletters.
- Send copies of all positive media materials to elected officials. Examples include newspaper clips, magazine articles, and video copies of television news segments.
- Invite elected officials to attend and speak at special events or press conferences. If there is a scheduling conflict, ask elected officials to send a member of their staff. Work with their public affairs teams to ensure media coverage. Also, ask the officials to prepare an official proclamation or citation for your project to be presented at the event.

- Send a letter inviting elected officials and their staff to visit your youth projects and see the results for themselves. Be prepared to show and discuss everything about the projects and to introduce these visitors to your youth staff, service providers and participants. Representatives and senators return from Washington to their home districts frequently. Call their district offices to determine when they will be in your area/in their home districts. Their phone numbers will be in the blue pages of your phone book under the federal government section. Choose a date that is far enough in advance to be considerate but not far enough in advance to be forgotten – six to eight weeks' notice is a general guideline. While Congress is in session – weekends, Mondays and Fridays are the best days.

how can the youth council involve the media?

The key to getting good press attention is understanding the media. Usually, the organizations that get media coverage are the ones that look for ways to meet the media's need for news. There are a number of possible ways to convince the media that the Youth Council's story is worth telling.

- Present a local angle to breaking news of interest (e.g., employment trends or school reform).
- Present an education or community service award.

- Tie into a well-known event (e.g., Back to School Week or Groundhog Job Shadow Day).
- Explain the local implications of state and national education reports, surveys and news.
- Arrange for testimonials or guest speakers before appropriate groups and meetings (e.g., city council meetings, school board meetings).
- Involve the media as a partner in Youth Council activities (e.g., youth participants job shadowing at a local newspaper, radio or television station or collaborating on a public service announcement campaign).
- Tie into previous local youth stories covered by the media (e.g., the positive effects of youth programs on juvenile crime, high school completion, enrollment into post-secondary education and training programs and economic development.)
- Link Youth Council programs with another publicity event (e.g., the local high school job fair or career day).
- Tie in with education trends or feature stories that newspapers are covering.

There are many ways to communicate with the media. Some communications methods are more appropriate than others in a particular situation. Reporting the news is a fast-paced, high-pressure job. News professionals want accurate information, short, colorful comments and background information that will help them understand the significance of the story.

Press Release

A press release is a one or two page account of your story written as a news article. A press release can publicize an issue or story; provide background information on a news event; or announce an upcoming activity. A well-prepared press release follows some well-defined guidelines: the headline should grab the reporter's attention; the lead paragraph should give the basic who, what, where and when or how; the body of the release should provide the most important information first so it can be shortened without omitting important information.

Media Advisory

A media advisory is a brief, one-page memo alerting media to an upcoming event. The advisory should include a description of the program, the time, location, participants and a contact name and phone number so that the media can get more information if required.

Pitch Letter

When a story is not about an immediate news item, reporters appreciate receiving a pitch letter that briefly describes the story idea and why the publication's or station's audience would be interested.

Pitch Call

It is also common practice to make a pitch call to a reporter or news outlet to remind them of an event or announcement.

Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are an excellent way to raise an issue, respond to an issue being discussed in the community, support the position of the newspaper or another writer, correct misunderstandings or factual mistakes, or respond to something with which you disagree. These letters should be short and make the most important points in the first paragraph, since the letters are often edited.

Opinion Editorials

Opinion editorials, which appear opposite editorial pages, are a highly effective way of expressing your opinion in the newspaper. They should be persuasive, well thought out, well-written, concise, and authored by a high-profile member of the Youth Council.

Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements are an effective way to share information on how Youth Council programs benefit the community. The brief announcement should be written in a clear, conversational tone and include a way to contact the Youth Council for more information. PSA's generally run 15, 30 or 60 seconds.

what additional resources are available?

For further information on community outreach and working with the media, you can contact the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Public Affairs (OPA) in Washington, D.C. at (202) 693-4650 or one of the ten regional offices throughout the country. A list of DOL Regional OPA offices appears on page 17.

The following web-based publications provide valuable information on community outreach, especially on ways to make effective use of the media.

- *Americorps: A Guide to Working With the Media*
Corporation for National Service;
http://www.americorps.org/resources/media_guide.pdf
- *Putting Your WIB on the Political Map: Tips on Marketing, Communications and Public Relations*
National Association of Workforce Boards;
<http://www.nawb.org/pdf/pub-5-2000.pdf>

letter of invitation for a site visit

The Honorable (Name of Elected Official) January 1, 2001
Title
Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Title + Last Name of Elected Official:
(Examples: Senator Jones or Commissioner Smith)

The Youth Council of Clarksville is working to help young people in our area to develop the skills they will need to be successful and to help employers find young people with the skills needed to fill existing jobs and help their businesses grow.

We would like to offer you the opportunity to see for yourself how our programs are making a difference in the lives of the young people living in the Clarksville area. We hope that you will consider visiting our Youth Opportunity Center in downtown Clarksville on Friday, February 15, at 10:00 am. We would be honored to welcome you there to observe the skills building class and, afterward, to meet the staff and the young people enrolled in the program. We know that you'll learn things about the Youth Opportunity program from this firsthand experience that you couldn't learn in any other way.

I will call your staff next week to see if your schedule will permit your attendance and to answer any questions you or they might have. In the meantime, I can be reached at 206/442-5642 if you need further information.

Sincerely,

David Copperfield
Youth Council Chair
Clarksville Workforce Development Council

sample press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 1, 20xx

CONTACT

Joe Smith
206/222-1515 or

Jane Smith
206/333-1234

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY CENTER INCREASES HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

Clarksville – The Clarksville Youth Opportunity Center has increased the high school completion rate by 5 percent since the program began in September 2000, center director Mary Jones announced today.

Alisha Hernandez, a 17-year old participant, is a student at the Clarksville New Options Alternative High School and an intern at Providence Medical Center. She said, “A year ago I was sitting at home and unable to find a job after dropping out of Clarksville High School. Now I am doing well. I will get my high school diploma this June and will begin a nursing program at Clarksville Community College in September. I would really like to thank Ms. Jones and the staff at the Youth Opportunity Center, Mr. Smith at the New Options School and Ms. Doyle, my supervisor and mentor at Providence Medical Center, for helping me discover what I wanted to do and helping me develop the skills that I needed to do it.”

The Youth Opportunity Center, along with educational, community and business partners provides educational, social, and occupation opportunities to over 1,000 young people in the Clarksville Enterprise Community. Education and training programs are personally tailored to meet the needs of the young people participating in the long-term program. The goal of the program is to increase the number of young people completing high school, going on to higher education or training, and acquiring the first job on their career ladder. The Clarksville Youth Opportunity Center is one of 36 centers across the country.