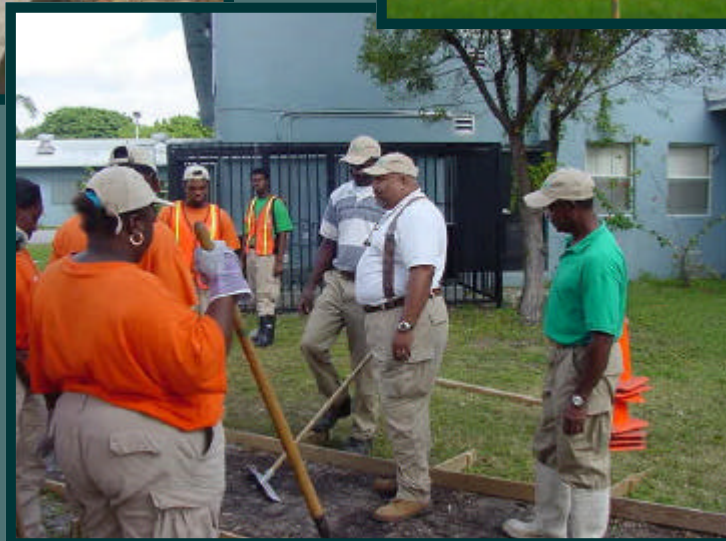


Promising Practices for Helping Low-Income Youth Obtain and Retain Jobs: *A Guide for Practitioners*

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Promising Practices for Helping Low-Income Youth Obtain and Retain Jobs: *A Guide for Practitioners*

Produced for the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps by Abt Associates with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor.

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September 2003

Dear Reader:

With appreciation to the Department of Labor, we are pleased to provide you with this Guide for practitioners serving, or considering serving, economically disadvantaged youth. We have experienced on multiple occasions the thrill of seeing highly disadvantaged young people move from dependence on the system into productive lives. We trust that you will find this Guide useful, and invite you to join us in our efforts to prepare young men and women for the world of work while providing millions of hours of service in communities across the nation.

NASCC led an effort to develop a Corps to Career program model that provided the foundation for the Welfare to Work project reported here. Our experience has shown that one of the best ways to encourage youth to become productive members of their communities is to help them prepare for and obtain meaningful employment. For that reason, this Guide highlights promising practices for helping low-income youth prepare for, obtain and retain jobs.

Our assessment of promising practices is based upon lessons learned through three distinct kinds of programs: (1) the NASCC-run, Department of Labor-funded Welfare to Work Project, an initiative run at several local corps geared to help TANF recipients and TANF-eligible youth transition out of poverty and into the workforce, (2) other welfare to work programs, and (3) other youth service programs.

We believe that lessons learned through this Project will be particularly applicable to youth community service programs because it was operated by local corps. However, because promising practices adopted through the Welfare to Work Project do not represent the universe of effective strategies for training, placing and retaining low-income youth, we have highlighted promising strategies for achieving these goals that have been field-tested by other youth service and welfare to work programs. We also highlight several promising practices that are applicable not just to employment-focused programs, but to the full universe of youth service efforts. We have included these promising practices because we believe that corps and other youth service programs that implement them are likely to support program participants particularly effectively.

We hope that you find this Guide a useful resource as you develop and implement programs that serve economically disadvantaged young adults. Our goal in creating it resonates with what we are sure is our shared mission: helping low-income youth to make successful transitions into adulthood and to become productive members of their communities.

Sincerely yours,



Sally T. Prouty, President

The National Association of Service and Conservation Corps

Introduction

Using this Guide

The National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) has sponsored the creation of this Guide so that practitioners who serve disadvantaged youth can do their jobs even better. Recognizing that practitioners are extremely busy, we have organized this Guide into easily digestible chunks of information intended to improve:

1. Services provided (specifically, to develop employment-focused programs for youth), and
2. Program operation in general (to foster positive youth development, improve program management and staffing, etc.).

NASCC commissioned Abt Associates, Inc., a nationally recognized expert in assessing and providing technical assistance to youth service programs, to create this Guide. Abt Associates developed it based upon lessons learned through several related projects. Abt Associates assessed the NASCC-run, Department of Labor-funded Welfare to Work Project and determined promising practices for connecting youth to employment based upon that effort. In addition, they conducted literature reviews of field-tested strategies for serving youth and for helping low-income individuals transition from welfare to work. Finally, they applied lessons learned from other studies of youth service and employment programs.

This Guide summarizes key findings from these research efforts. First, it begins with a summary of NASCC's Corps-to-Career (CtC) Initiative. The CtC provided the foundation for the Welfare to Work Project. This section presents valuable information about the Project's background and foundation.

Second, it summarizes the Welfare to Work Project and highlights lessons learned therein. This section will be particularly relevant to youth service practitioners

at Youth Corps, AmeriCorps, and/or Conservation Corps because the Welfare to Work Project was operated by several local corps across the Country. Accordingly, lessons learned from these programs may be particularly applicable to other corps.

Third, the Guide summarizes lessons learned from other, similar programs. It highlights promising practices both for serving youth (in general) and for helping youth to transition into employment. This section will be useful to all practitioners who serve low-income and disenfranchised youth.

Finally, the Guide features a "how-to" section. This section discusses how youth service professionals can translate promising practices into action steps that they can implement at their programs. Practitioners are encouraged to consult this section as they develop strategic plans both for improving the ways in which they run their programs, in general, and for developing employment-focused services.



NASCC and its Rationale for both the Welfare to Work Project and this Guide

NASCC is a national organization committed to helping youth make successful transitions into adulthood and become productive members of their communities. NASCC achieves this goal by providing technical assistance to youth volunteer programs (or corps) so that corps can help participating youth (1) develop academic, job, and life-skills, (2) obtain academic credentials, and (3) get jobs. NASCC supports corps by providing them with information and technical assistance on a variety of issues and by advocating for corps' interests at a national policy level.

In recent years, NASCC has come to believe that helping young adults obtain and retain jobs is one of the best strategies that corps can use to encourage youth to make positive transitions into adulthood and become productive members of their communities. Accordingly, NASCC supported two programs geared to help corps develop employment support services: the Corps-to-Career Initiative and the Welfare to Work Project. NASCC is eager to share lessons learned from these projects with other corps so that corps can structure their programs to encourage improved outcomes for youth.

What is a Corps?

Corps are state and local programs engaging primarily young adults (ages 16-25) in full-time community service, training and educational activities. Guided by adult leaders, who serve as mentors and role models, crews carry out a wide range of service projects. In return for their efforts to restore and strengthen communities, corpsmembers receive: 1) living allowance; 2) classroom training to improve basic competencies and, if necessary, to secure a GED or high school diploma; 3) service-learning based education; 4) generic and technical skills training; 5) supportive services; and 6) in many cases, an AmeriCorps post-service educational award.

NASCC Corps-to-Career Initiative

With support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, William Randolph Hearst Foundation and Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, NASCC launched the Corps-to-Career (CTC) Initiative—a multi-year collaboration between NASCC headquarters (HQ) and its member corps aimed at infusing highly effective workforce development strategies into the corps program model.

Through Corps-to-Career NASCC aimed to strengthen corps' capacity to:

- Target emerging employment and educational opportunities in their communities;
- Prepare their corpsmembers for those opportunities;
- Secure actual job placements;
- Deliver post-placement services to bolster on-the-job retention;
- Track and reinforce the progress of their graduates for a year or more; and
- Gain access to new funding sources to sustain the initiative.

CTC Initiative GOALS

- Improve retention, academic achievement and the mastery of generic workplace skills that lead to positive educational and/or employment outcomes for participants in youth corps.
- Build and buttress systems within the corps that specifically target improved career preparation for corpsmembers and the documentation of in-program and post-program progress.
- Obtain recognition of the corps as skilled providers of cost-effective, thorough career preparation for disadvantaged out-of-school youth and the resources needed to focus greater attention on educational, job skills and life skills gains for corpsmembers.

CTC Initiative RESULTS

- Improved post-program placement rate into employment and/or education from baseline of 44.3% to 61.4%

- Increased the number of exited corpsmembers who participated in post program activities from less than 2% at baseline to over 75%.
- Strengthened the capacity of 26 corps—serving over 12,500 corpsmembers annually—to improve post-program corpsmember outcomes by engaging them directly as CTC sites, WtW sites or California replication CTC sites.

An outside evaluation of NASCC capacity building by Rebecca Taylor, Ph.D. at the first 10 CTC Full Implementation Sites noted the following overall changes and progress during the CTC Initiative:

- Changes in vision or mind-set occurred at all of the 10 CTC sites
- Changes in strategy (any new, revised, or reactivated plan or method to achieve a goal) occurred at all of the 10 sites.
- All of the 10 sites assigned staff to the CTC initiative in order to achieve CTC goals.
- All of the 10 sites made changes in the structure of their programs in order to achieve CTC goals.
- By the end of 2000, 6 of the 10 sites had developed new systems or modified existing systems to track the in-program and post-program educational and employment outcomes for each corps member.
- One or more changes in program services occurred at all 10 sites.
- All 10 sites re-allocated existing resources to support the achievement of the goals of the Corps-to-Career Initiative.
- Obtained funding for AmeriCorps education awards for CTC corpsmembers to greatly enhance the opportunities for corpsmembers to attend post-secondary education and a wide range of second-stage training programs.
- Developed and distributed a highly flexible and customizable corpsmember tracking database.
- Spurred additional resources for corps to support workforce development strategies through the NASCC Welfare to Work grant and a California state-wide WIA grant for a California Corps-to-Career replication involving 11 local corps.



CTC Initiative Participating Corps

California Conservation Corps
Civic Works
Conservation Corps of Long Beach
Dallas Youth Services Corps
East Bay Conservation Corps
Greater Miami Service Corps
Fresno Local Conservation Corps*
Los Angeles Conservation Corps
Marin Conservation Corps
Mile High Youth Corps
Milwaukee Community Service Corps
New Jersey Youth Corps - Camden
New Jersey Youth Corps - Newark
Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps
Orange County Conservation Corps*
Sacramento Local Conservation Corps
San Francisco Conservation Corps
San Jose Conservation Corps
Tulare County Conservation Corps
Urban Corps of San Diego*
Utica Community Action, Inc.
Youth Conservation Corps, Inc.

* California state-wide replication sites

CTC Initiative Program Model

NASCC developed a comprehensive program model—outlined in the CTC Full Implementation Guidelines (FIGs)—detailing key programmatic functions across six key areas: 1) In-program corpsmember development; 2) Post-program placement; 3) Post-program support; 4) Data collection/tracking; 5) Staffing; and, 6) Funding. Participating CTC sites developed programming to adhere to the FIGs according to a set implementation calendar. NASCC provided training, technical assistance and leadership in supporting corps moving toward implementing the FIGs. A complete copy of the FIGs is included in the Appendix.

Connection to NASCC Welfare-to-Work Project

The Corps-to-Career Initiative provided NASCC with both the experience and impetus to apply for the Welfare to Work grant. As part of the CTC Initiative, NASCC pledged to seek out additional support for strengthening corps' capacity to improve post-program outcomes. Five of the nine Welfare-to-Work sites were part of the CTC Initiative and, as a condition of participating in the WtW project, all sites pledged to adhere to the Full Implementation Guidelines. Although Abt Associates did not evaluate the CTC Initiative, this background piece is included in this Guide because CTC was such a critical element of NASCC's preparation for implementing the WtW project.

The Welfare to Work Project

Project Summary

Practitioners looking to improve the services that they provide low-income youth can learn a great deal from the Welfare to Work Project. By assessing this effort, Abt Associates identified a number of promising practices that corps can use to help low-income youth obtain and retain jobs.

In order to understand how and why various practices were effective, it is first necessary for practitioners to be familiar with the context of the Welfare to Work Project. Information about key project components also will help practitioners assess the feasibility of applying the practices in their programs. Accordingly, before identifying promising practices that were utilized in the Welfare to Work Project, we first describe the Project in general.

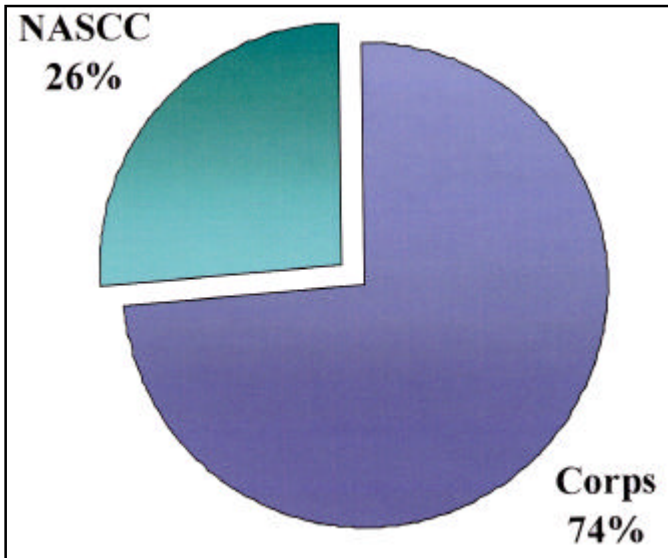


Project Overview

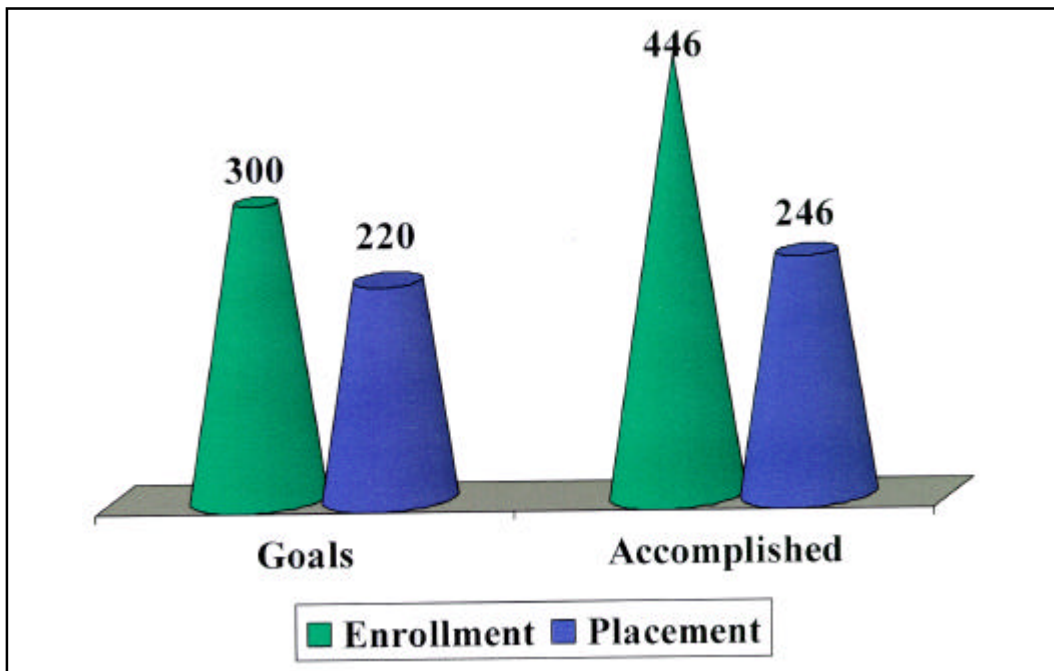
The Welfare to Work Project was a four year, \$3.8 million, U.S. Department of Labor-funded effort geared to provide TANF-eligible youth with service learning experiences that help them transition out of poverty and into employment. NASCC applied for this grant with nine corps that it selected to serve as implementation sites.

Approximately 74% of the DOL funding was distributed to participating corps. NASCC used the remaining 26% of the grant to provide participating

corps with a variety of support services. Specifically, NASCC provided corps with strategic planning assistance and with information about how to help low-income individuals form meaningful attachments to the labor force, acted as a liaison between corps and DOL, and facilitated reporting.



NASCC established concrete performance goals for the Welfare to Work Project. Through this effort, NASCC planned to enroll 300 TANF-eligible youths in corps programs and to place 220 of them in unsubsidized employment after they completed the program. Ultimately, NASCC exceeded these targets, enrolling 446 TANF-eligible youths and placed 246 of them (a little over 55%) in jobs. In addition, 47% of the corpsmembers who participated at one of the seven corps that completed the program remained employed for at least six months after placement.



Participating Corps

The following nine corps participated in the Welfare to Work Project: the Greater Miami Service corps, the New Jersey Youth Corps of Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Vineland; the Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps of Cleveland and Columbus; the Dallas Youth Services Corps; and the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in Taos, New Mexico. Ultimately, the first seven of these sites completed the Project.

NASCC targeted participating corps for the following reasons:

- They were sufficiently well-run to develop the expanded placement and counseling services that NASCC had identified as key components of the project.
- They served economically disadvantaged young people.
- They either were interested in expanding services to include TANF-eligible youths or were likely already serving TANF-eligible youth.
- They had the capacity to collect required data.

Participating corps varied in size and structure. Their operating budgets ranged from slightly under \$300,000 to over \$2,000,000. Annually, they served between 85 and

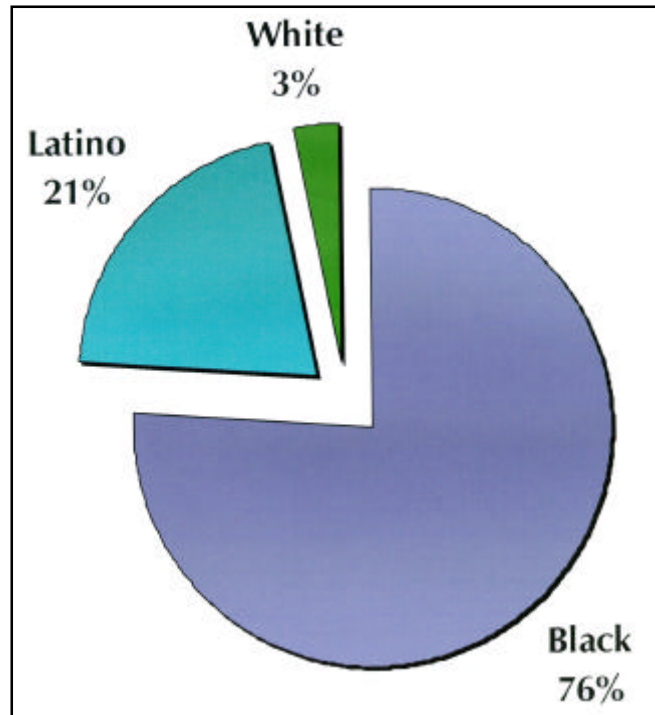


425 corpsmembers. Some corps were part of larger state agencies, others were part of local school systems, and others were independent nonprofits.

Despite these differences, participating corps shared several similarities. Most were located in low-income, urban settings and served large percentages of extremely economically disadvantaged youth even prior to their participation in the Welfare to Work Project.

Youth Served by Participating Corps

The vast majority of corpsmembers in all of the programs were African American and Latino. This was true for both the traditional corpsmembers (corpsmembers who were not TANF-eligible and thus not a part of the Welfare to Work Project) and for the Welfare to Work corpsmembers. On average, approximately 76% of Welfare to Work corpsmembers were Black, 21% were Latino and 3% were White; they were extremely similar to the traditional corpsmember in demographics.



Youth served in the corps grappled with a number of personal challenges that limited their ability to succeed in both educational and

employment arenas. Specifically, many corpsmembers struggled with substance abuse, had unstable family lives, were young parents, had insecure

housing situations, and/or had extremely low literacy. Many corpsmembers grew up in poverty and had parents who received public assistance. Finally, many corpsmembers did not have reliable transportation or childcare, and these logistical barriers prevented many of them from attending corps programs consistently and made

Corpsmember Challenges:

- Substance abuse
- Low literacy
- Insecure housing
- Unstable family situations
- Lack of transportation
- Growing up in poverty
- Having children/lack of childcare

Barriers were more prevalent among Welfare to Work corps members, but common to all corps members.

it difficult for them to obtain and retain jobs. Program staff noted that, while these barriers tended to be more pervasive among Welfare to Work corpsmembers than they were among traditional corpsmembers, all of the youths served faced the same range of challenges.

Welfare to Work Project Implementation

Standard Services Provided at Participating Corps

Corps participation in the Welfare to Work Project offered a similar range of standard services that comprised the basic corps program. Despite these similarities, however certain aspects of key standard corps components differed among the sites. One of the most notable differences among participating corps was in the kinds of community service experiences that they offered corpsmembers: In some programs, all corpsmembers participated in environmental projects in which they provided physical labor; in others, corpsmembers could choose among clerical, administrative, and manual opportunities in a variety of fields, including construction, education, healthcare and sanitation. Another key difference among participating corps was the extent and quality of the partnerships that they had established with other local service providers. Some corps had a wide array of partnerships with local One Stop Centers, Workforce Investment Boards, welfare offices, employers and community colleges; others did not have as extensive or well-established web of networks.

Key Differences Among Participating Corps:

- Kinds of service and employment opportunities offered.
- Extent and quality of partnerships with local service providers.

Welfare to Work Project Participation

NASCC specified several requirements for corps participating in the Welfare to Work Project. Each participating program was encouraged to employ both a case manager and a job developer. While many corps already employed case managers as part of their standard programs, as part of the Welfare to Work Project case managers were tasked with providing increased levels of assistance to TANF-eligible corpsmembers, including counseling, referrals to necessary intensive support services, and intensive career counseling. Most corps had not previously employed job developers, and hired them as part of the Welfare to Work Project. Job developers were tasked with improving job opportunities for all corpsmembers and with providing specific, targeted assistance to TANF-eligible corps members.

Each corps also had to enroll at least 30 (60 in the case of the New Jersey Youth Corps of Newark site) welfare-eligible corpsmembers, place at least 22 of those individuals (44 in Newark), track those corpsmembers and collect employment retention data for at least one year. Participating corps also had to comply with the reporting requirements established by NASCC and DOL.

Welfare to Work Project Participation Requirements for Corps

- Adhere to CtC Initiative FIGs
- Employ a Case Manager
- Employ a Job Developer
- Enroll at least 30 Welfare-Eligible Corps Members
- Provide Increased Levels of Case Management and Job Development Support to Welfare to Work Corpsmembers
- Track Welfare to Work Corpsmembers for at Least One Year post-program
- Fulfill NASCC/ DOL Reporting Requirements

After hiring the requisite staff, Welfare to Work Corps began the processes of (1) recruiting participants, (2) determining that potential corpsmembers were eligible to be counted as part of the Welfare to Work Project, and (3) enrolling participants. Corpsmembers targeted by the Welfare to Work Project were young adults receiving, or eligible for, TANF, non-custodial parents, and persons requiring substance abuse treatment, English proficiency skills, and public or assisted housing. Recruitment was on-going for much of the project. Sites recruited participants by partnering with welfare offices, local One Stop Centers and other social service agencies, by publicizing the project and, often, by word of mouth.

While in the corps, Welfare to Work corpsmembers were mainstreamed into standard program activities in a way that no stigma resulted. All corpsmembers participated in standard corps activities: receiving some



counseling; attending academic courses (including adult basis educating, ESL, and/or GED prep), classes in life-skills (including parenting, anger management, STD and drug awareness), and employment training; and participating in some paid off-site community service activities. Indeed, participation in supported community service activities is a defining characteristic of all corps programs. These team-based projects provided participants with the opportunity to gain hands-on job skills and experience that they can apply to future work. Corpsmembers are

provided with a small stipend in return for their participation in community service programs.

Furthermore, because the Welfare to Work Project required corps to employ job developers and case managers, as a result of the Project, corps

offered all corpsmembers (including both those who were eligible for TANF and other corpsmembers) expanded job development and case management services. The Welfare to Work Project gave case managers the ability to provide all corpsmembers with more individualized counseling and expanded life skills trainings. In addition, newly-hired job developers provided all corpsmembers with a variety of employment trainings and post-placement supports.

They engaged in a number of activities geared to increase the quality and quantity of post-program job placements, including meeting with corpsmembers to discuss their career goals, helping corpsmembers to develop career action plans and resumes, and conducting both mock interviews and job



searches with corpsmembers. Some job developers also held job fairs, taught corpsmembers how to search for jobs, and/or taught corpsmembers how to pursue career advancement opportunities. In addition, most job developers networked with area employers as a means to facilitate placement. While some corps provided limited job development services prior to their involvement in the Project, none had provided these services as systematically and thoroughly as they did as part of Welfare to Work.

Welfare to Work participants received some services that were not offered to standard corpsmembers, including additional case management and job-support services. In addition, the Welfare to Work Project enabled corps to provide Welfare to Work corpsmembers with stabilization services that addressed short-term crises that might otherwise have resulted in their withdrawal from the program or their inability to continue working. Each Welfare to Work corpsmember was eligible to receive approximately \$1,000 worth of tools, uniforms, or other supports that were likely to be essential in

helping him or her to obtain and retain a job. For example, many programs used Welfare to Work funds to help Welfare to Work corpsmembers get drivers' licenses (or get licenses reinstated) so that they could get to the jobs; other programs provided Welfare to Work corpsmembers with clothing vouchers that they could use to purchase work-appropriate attire. Finally, after successfully



completing the corps and being placed into unsubsidized employment, Welfare to Work corpsmembers received post-program support services geared to promote job retention and advancement as well as the pursuit of higher education. Corps staff remained in contact with Welfare to Work corps members for a minimum of one year after corpsmembers were placed.

While some corps tracked regular corpsmembers for this length of time, not all participating corps did.

Welfare to Work Corpsmembers' Tenure in the Project

Like their peers who were not part of the Welfare to Work Project, most Welfare to Work corpsmembers remained in corps programs for between six and twelve months (though some Welfare to Work corps members cycled in and out of the program and others rushed to work because they were concerned that their TANF benefits were running out). Most Welfare to Work corpsmembers who participated received both their TANF payments and a small stipend.

Summary of Promising Practices

Promising Practices in Developing Programs that Train and Employ Economically Disadvantaged Youth

Based upon both an assessment of the Welfare to Work Project and a literature review of studies of programs geared to help low-income individuals obtain and retain employment, Abt Associates developed this summary of promising practices for training and employing economically disadvantaged youth.

In addition, NASCC has contributed concrete examples of “Corps in Action,” promising practices it has observed within corps, based on its regular interaction with and intimate knowledge of the Project programs. Finally, see NASCC’s CTC Guidelines beginning on page 43 for additional specific recommendations.

Methodology for Identifying Promising Practices in Developing Programs that Train and Employ Economically Disadvantaged Youth

To identify these promising practices, Abt Associates engaged in three research tasks. First, we compared quantitative outcome data from the seven sites that completed the Welfare to Work Project, and used that data to identify the corps that did a particularly effective job of recruiting, training and/or placing Welfare to Work corpsmembers. We then documented those strategies used by high performing sites that appear likely to be linked to their high level performance. Second, we interviewed Welfare to Work corps staff about those aspects of both the standard corps and the Project that they felt were most effective. Third, we conducted a literature review in order to identify strategies that other practitioners have used to train and place low-income individuals.

Our research revealed that effective employment programs aspire to achieve the following core goals. All seek to:

1. Recruit and enroll low-income and at-risk individuals,
2. Train program participants for employment,
3. Provide program participants with counseling and other support services,
4. Place program participants in jobs, and
5. Help program participants to retain employment.

We have organized our discussion of promising practices accordingly.

1. Promising Practices for Recruiting and Enrolling Low-Income and At-Risk Individuals

In order to be effective, job placement programs first must enroll a pool of individuals who (1) meet program participation requirements (i.e., are low-income, unemployed, TANF-eligible, etc.) and (2) are sufficiently skilled and motivated that they are able to benefit from and complete the program. Successful programs utilize some or all of the following strategies to recruit program participants:

- ***Partnering with Other Service Providers to Recruit Qualified Individuals***

Employment programs often cultivate relationships with entities that serve targeted youth (social service agencies, the criminal justice system, etc.) and recruit participants who receive support assistance from those entities. Recruiting program participants from other service providers can ensure that participants meet specific participation requirements (receive TANF, are unemployed, etc.) and can lay the groundwork for mutually beneficial relationships with other service providers.

Corps In Action:

In order to access referrals of eligible participants, the Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps (OCCC) of Cleveland formulated direct partnerships with a local youth detention facility, a substance abuse treatment facility, and the agency that provides foster care and adoption services for Cuyahoga County.

- ***Publicize the Program at Locations Frequented by Qualified Individuals***

In order to recruit participants effectively, many organizations advertise their services in areas that youths frequent (schools, clinics, recreation centers, etc.). Posting leaflets at these locales increases the likelihood that targeted youth will know about employment programs.

Corps In Action:

New Jersey Youth Corps (NJYC) of Vineland staff did recruitment outreach visits to the courthouse and the local job training offices to encourage referrals and also set up recruitment displays at the local mall.

- ***Screen Potential Program Participants***

Some employment programs find it helpful to screen potential program participants by requiring candidates to complete some activities prior to actually enrolling in the program. While some practitioners feel that screening participants goes against their mission and can lead to creaming, others believe that it enables them to use limited resources wisely. Proponents of screening assert that it is efficient because it enables them to target their services to individuals who are sufficiently skilled and motivated to complete training and get jobs. These practitioners also observe that, by screening, they are able to assure employers that they can meet employers' needs for particular kinds of workers and that this results in productive relationships that increase practitioners' ability to place program graduates.

**Summary of Promising Practices
for Recruiting and Enrolling
Low-Income and At-Risk Individuals**

- Work with Other Service Providers to Recruit Qualified Individuals
- Publicize the Program at Locations Frequented by Qualified Individuals
- Screen Potential Program Participants Prior to Enrollment

2. Promising Practices for Training Program Participants for Employment

One of the most essential components of all programs geared to help low-income individuals obtain jobs is preparing individuals for employment. Although some programs aim to train participants for specific jobs and thus provide courses in core skills required for those jobs, the corps and the other programs we reviewed are more generalized.

These programs are geared to serve individuals who have had extremely limited job experience. While they aim to help participants acquire some specific job skills, equally importantly they seek to familiarize participants with expectations from the world of work. Effective employment programs use the following strategies to prepare participants for employment:



- ***Hire a Job Developer***

Hiring an individual whose job entails focusing solely on providing participants with employment support and on connecting those participants to jobs helps to ensure that programs geared to help low income individuals obtain and retain jobs actually achieve those goals. While requiring other program staff to take on job development responsibilities can facilitate placement and retention, delegating these responsibilities to one specific individual appears linked to better participant results.

When hiring job developers, programs should employ individuals who have experience working both in the private sector and with marginalized populations. Individuals who are familiar with both workplace and street culture are able to relate to participants and to provide them with a realistic understanding of workplace norms.

Corps In Action:

The NJYC of Vineland Job Developer came on board and began introducing the program to prospective employers with a newly crafted brochure and letter of introduction. Rapport was established with Home Depot, Vineland Check Cashing, Cumberland County College, Rowan University, Atlantic City Hilton, Bally's Park Place Hotel Casino, and Caesar's Casino Hotel with the hope of finding unsubsidized employment for WtW participants.

- ***Create Individualized Action Plans and Help Clients to Progress Towards Their Employment Goals***

Some programs find that it is particularly important to work with clients to explore clients' professional aspirations and to develop personalized and realistic action plans for clients that are based on those goals. Programs find that serving clients effectively means validating clients' aspirations and customizing their approaches to reflect clients' interests.

Corps In Action:

The Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps (OCCC) of Columbus focused on meeting the academic needs of its WtW participants through its partnership with the North Education Center that allows corpsmembers to be TABE tested to assess their basic education needs. The case manager could use that assessment to develop an individualized education/service plan for each participant.

- ***Maintain a Consistent Employment Focus***

Effective programs maintain a clear employment focus throughout the program. They provide a streamlined continuum of services in which trainers, case managers, job developers and other key staff (1) share a common vision of what constitutes clients' success (placement and retention) and (2) collaborate to make that vision a reality.

Programs that aim to improve both clients' employment prospects and their academic skills (such as corps) find that it is particularly important to clearly and consistently link academic training to clients' ultimate employment opportunities. By making explicit connections between educational training and clients' career aspirations, these programs help youth to understand that academics are relevant and thereby secure their buy-in. By framing the academic components within the corpsmembers' employment interest, practitioners also ensure that training doesn't "feel like" school. This is effective because many youth who enroll in employment and training programs did not have successful experiences in school.

Corps In Action:

The NJYC of Paterson focused on training new staff through both on-the-job training and cross-organization training with Passaic County's One-Stop employment system.

- ***Educate Participants About the Culture of Work and Focus on Soft Skills***

Because most employers are more concerned with potential employees' soft skills—basic work skills—than they are with their hard occupational skills, effective employment programs integrate soft skills training into every aspect of their curricula. This is particularly important with severely economically disadvantaged populations, because often these individuals never have been exposed to the norms of the professional work world. Participants benefit from trainings on dressing appropriately for work, communicating appropriately with employers, anger management, workplace conflict resolution, and the importance of attending work consistently. After introducing these kinds of soft skill concepts, practitioners can reinforce them throughout the academic, community service, employment, and other aspects of their programs.

Corps In Action:

The Greater Miami Service Corps emphasized employability techniques by conducting mock interviews and gathering a few participants in small settings to address issues that affected them in interviews.

- ***Mimic the Professional Work Environment***

Effective programs mimic real-life work situations as a means to prepare clients for the workforce. For example, often participants are required to work in teams, report to supervisors, and dress professionally. Some successful programs also simulate the work environment on-site. By exposing clients to "the look" of the workplace and familiarizing them with common workplace tools (such as computers, desks, and high-tech phones), these programs help clients adjust to environments that might otherwise seem alien.

Corps In Action:

The corps model in effect mimics the professional work environment as corpsmembers spend 15-32 hours per week working in teams on community service projects under a crew supervisor. This "work first" approach is a key to preparing corpsmembers for post-corps employment.

- ***Expose Young Participants to a Range of Career Options***

Programs that serve youth may find it particularly advantageous to provide participants with training and, if applicable, community service opportunities, in an array of different fields. Programs that provide participants with the opportunity to explore a variety of career paths allow them to form an educated assessment of their professional interests and thereby increase the likelihood that they will discover fields in which they are interested. We observed this phenomenon in the Welfare to Work Project, as corps that provided participants with a wide variety of community service opportunities achieved some of the most impressive participant results.

Corps In Action:

The job developer at the NJYC of Vineland drove several corpsmembers to a construction trades job fair a couple of hours north of the city and the resulting exposure led participants to explore employment with local carpenters, electrical and steelworkers unions.

- ***Provide Monetary and Other Rewards for Program Participation***

It also can be helpful to provide clients with regular paychecks in exchange for their participation in employment programs, as well as incentive payments or "bonuses" for reaching key program milestones. Monetary rewards not only motivate clients to remain in training, they also familiarize clients with the "taste of the rewards and demands of earning."

Corps In Action:

WtW participants at the NJYC of Paterson were some of the best performing corpsmembers, with several receiving "Corps Member of the Month" awards and other academic achievement and perfect attendance awards. Such citations were added to the Career Portfolios that corpsmembers assembled and used for job application purposes.

Summary of Promising Practices for Training Program Participants for Employment

- Hire a Job Developer
- Create Individualized Action Plans and Help Clients to Progress Towards Their Employment Goals
- Maintain a Consistent Employment Focus
- Educate Participants About the Culture of Work and Focus on Soft Skills
- Mimic the Professional Work Environment
- Expose Young Participants to a Range of Career Options
- Provide Monetary and Other Incentives for Program Participation

3. Promising Practices for Providing Program Participants with Support Services

In order to help disadvantaged youth obtain and retain jobs, effective employment programs must provide them with needed supplemental supports. Practitioners observe that it is extremely difficult to motivate clients to train for, get and retain jobs when their basic needs are not met. Programs that serve extremely disadvantaged populations find it particularly important to be able to address immediate crises in participants' lives, because these crises are likely to be frequent and disruptive and can prevent participants from completing training, and getting and remaining employed.

- ***Provide Comprehensive Services***

In order to address clients' numerous personal challenges, employment programs must either provide or be able to access a variety of support services. Programs that serve economically disadvantaged individuals must address the root of their clients' problems and to address those problems as part of their efforts to place and retain clients. Because disadvantaged youth often have an array of needs, it is helpful for programs to be able to provide access to an array of supports, ranging from emergency shelter, to substance abuse counseling, to transportation assistance, to childcare, to therapy.

In addition, programs need to provide intensive and long-term follow-up. Clients who have multiple barriers to employment are likely to need help addressing immediate challenges for many months after they obtain jobs. Ideally, programs could provide these individuals with assistance for at least a year after placement.

Corps In Action:

The NJYC of Camden used WtW funds to bring in a counselor specializing in grief and loss issues related to violence and trauma to run an eight-week course for corpsmembers. A large number of Camden participants' lives have been impacted by violent trauma and most lack access to the necessary counseling.

- ***Cultivate Trusting Relationships Between Staff and Clients***

In order to be able to link disadvantaged youth to the services they need, employment programs must provide effective and personalized case management services and cultivate trusting relationships between program staff and participants. These relationships help clients to feel sufficiently comfortable with staff to confide personal needs and issues that may prevent them from making progress. Only after clients disclose this kind of personal information can programs provide them with the supports they need.

Corps In Action:

The staff at the Dallas Youth Services Corps (DYSC) had success in the challenging realm of tracking WtW participants after they left the program and were placed in jobs. Staff believe their success was due mostly to participants feeling—perhaps for one of the few times in their lives—that they were part of a close-knit group at the corps. That sense of connection kept them coming back for monthly alumni gatherings and other reunion events where the case manager could check in on their progress.

- ***Network with an Array of Effective Service Providers***

Because few employment programs are equipped to provide all of the services that severely economically disadvantaged individuals might need, it is important that programs cultivate relationships with other practitioners that can provide these services. Programs can draw upon these networks to ensure that the full range of clients' needs is met. Programs that ensure that the support service providers with whom they work provide high quality services are particularly likely to help participants achieve targeted results.

We observed this phenomenon in the Welfare to Work Project. Having well-established relationships with local service providers; including local One Stops Centers, departments of welfare, schools and adult education centers, and organizations that provided substance abuse counseling, helped several of the participating corps achieve favorable participant outcomes. Conversely, corps that did not have these kinds of networks reported difficulty in establishing the Project and, more generally, in linking corpsmembers to needed support services.

In addition, corps reported that the quality of services provided by local providers affected their ability to meet Welfare to Work Project goals and effectively to serve corps members.

Corps In Action:

Several participants in the OCCC of Cleveland were ex-offenders and the corps networked with Community Re-Entry programs in order to help those participants with their unique needs.

Summary of Promising Practices for Providing Program Participants with Support Services

- Provide Comprehensive Services
- Cultivate Trusting Relationships Between Staff and Clients
- Network with an Array of Effective Service Providers

Promising Practices for Placing Program Participants in Jobs

Ultimately, most employment programs are centered on helping clients to obtain and retain employment. Effective programs engage in several strategies that maximize their ability to secure positive placement outcomes for program participants.

- ***Engage Employers***

Effective employment training programs work with employers to ensure that the training they provide is relevant to employers' needs and that they are preparing participants for actual jobs. (Training is useless if it is not linked to actual career opportunities.) Involving employers in program planning also can facilitate placement, as employers who are connected to training programs understand their value and may be more likely than others to hire program graduates as a result.

Corps In Action:

The NJYC of Camden formed a Corporate Partners Program in an effort to formalize employer linkages on an individual basis rather than through a group format like an advisory committee. Two documents were developed to serve as articulation agreements between the corps and each employer. Corporate Partners provided job shadowing and mentoring opportunities as well as considering corps graduates for open positions.

- ***Consider Employers' Needs When Developing and Marketing Programs***

Because employers that participate in workforce development efforts do so primarily to meet business objectives, when marketing program graduates, practitioners should be sure to frame their work in terms of employers' interests. Marketing one's program as a solution to employers' needs for semi-skilled labor and reliable workers who will not leave their jobs after a short time is a much more effective strategy than encouraging employers to get involved and hire program graduates because it may be good public relations.

In a similar vein, job developers who view both employers and program participants as their primary customers are likely to be particularly effective. In the Welfare to Work Project, job developers who emphasized ways in which hiring participants would serve employers (such as tax and public relations benefits, as well as the benefit of hiring individuals that had the kinds of skills and experience that corps members learned) were particularly effective at placing participants.

- ***Place Participants in Living Wage Jobs***

Some research shows that programs may be more effective if they encourage clients to pursue living wage jobs (and not necessarily accepting the first job offers they get). So doing may also help programs to achieve their missions of helping participants obtain economic self-sufficiency, because programs do not help their clients to forge viable pathways out of poverty if they place participants in low-income, "dead-end" jobs. Though clients who get low-wage jobs may transition from welfare to work, these individuals do not always reap significant monetary benefits from working, and may not, as a result, form

secure attachments to the labor force. This can result in high-turnover, which can be a problem both for employers and for program participants and may prevent employers from hiring future program graduates.

Corps In Action:

The NJYC of Vineland worked to develop a partnership with the WaWa Corporation, because it offered corpsmembers higher-wage jobs and benefits including tuition reimbursement.

- ***Place Corpsmembers in Jobs Related to the Training They Receive***

In order to ensure maximally positive placement and retention outcomes, it may be helpful to place participants in jobs in which they can apply the training they received in the program (provided they are interested in careers in these fields). This practice can facilitate placement, as potential employers may be familiar with the training that participants receive and thus more willing to hire program graduates. It also can result in continuity between participants' experiences in the program and their post-program employment (and thereby facilitate retention).

Corps In Action:

The NJYC of Newark placed appropriate WtW participants in a health care training program following their initial stint in the corps program. The second-stage program—included phlebotomy and EKG training—prepares participants to become licensed nurses' aides.

Summary of Promising Practices for Placing Program Participants in Jobs

- Engage Employers
- Consider Employers' Needs When Marketing and Developing Programs
- Place Participants in Living Wage Jobs
- Place Corpsmembers in Jobs Related to the Training They Receive

4. Promising Practices for Helping Program Participants Stay Employed

Employment training programs are ineffective if program graduates are unable to remain employed consistently. Recognizing this fact, funders, researchers and practitioners increasingly are measuring their success not just in terms of placement outcomes, but also in terms of retention (and, in some cases, advancement). Effective employment programs use many of the following strategies to ensure positive retention outcomes for disadvantaged youth.

- ***Place Participants in "Good" Jobs that Offer Potential for Advancement***

We already have discussed how placing participants in jobs in which they earn more than the minimum wage can facilitate placement. Placing individuals in these jobs also may encourage retention, as individuals are likely to be less willing to leave relatively high wage jobs than they are low-wage jobs. In addition, placing program graduates in jobs in which there exists the possibility of advancement is likely to result in relatively higher retention rates, because individuals may be more willing to remain at jobs in which they have the potential to learn new skills and earn more money.



- ***Place Participants at Facilities at Which They Can Explore a Variety of Careers***

Placing individuals at employment sites that offer a range of career opportunities also may facilitate retention. Individuals may be more willing to remain with a given employer if they are able to explore a variety of jobs that mesh with their interests while remaining with that employer. (For example, individuals placed at hospitals may explore careers in food preparation, health care and/or facilities maintenance.)

- ***Place Participants in Jobs Located Near Major Transportation Routes***

Placing participants at jobs located near major transportation routes helps to ensure that they can get to work easily. Because this practice enables individuals to attend work consistently, it may lead to superior retention outcomes. However, the location of some employers may be unfamiliar to disadvantaged youth who may not have had many opportunities to leave their neighborhood. Field trips, or practice visits to employer locations, may help clients feel more comfortable.

- ***Cultivate Relationships with Employers Who Hire Program Graduates***

Forging close relationships with employers who hire program graduates can facilitate post-placement conflict resolution and case management, and thereby increase retention. Employers that have relationships with training providers appear likely to solicit their support in helping newly-placed employees adjust to challenges that they encounter in the workplace (rather than just firing these employees). It is important to note, however, that most employers do not want to take on case management responsibilities themselves and do not want to have to provide employees with labor-intensive supports.

Corps In Action:

The Dallas Youth Services Corps (DYSC) held several employer luncheons where they got at least ten different company representatives to attend. Each of the attending businesses at the Dallas employer's luncheon made a commitment to send job postings and inform the corps first when a position becomes available.

- ***Provide Consistent and Effective Post-Placement Follow-Up***

Maintaining consistent communication with individuals after placement is likely to increase retention. Post-placement follow-up appears to be particularly effective when practitioners call and visit individuals frequently immediately after placement and make efforts (1) to discuss individuals' personal problems (and potential barriers to success), (2) to refer individuals to needed support services, (3) to discuss individuals' plans for advancement, and (4) to refer them to training or additional supports that may help them to

actuate those plans. Job developers who work flexible schedules and are available after traditional working hours are particularly effective at facilitating retention, because, by working these hours, they are able to support program participants when they call for advice or help (i.e., when they are not on the job).

Corps In Action:

A primary barrier facing newly employed participants from the Dallas YSC was an inability to cope with change in the work environment; they often expressed a desire to quit because of changes in supervision or when a work colleague left. The corps scheduled workshops to address this issue and formed job clusters of participants employed in related fields to offer a support network.

- ***Allocate Significant Resources Towards Tracking and Retention Services and Provide Participants with Incentives to Remain Employed and to Stay in Touch***

Because it can be extremely difficult for staff to remain in contact with program graduates, especially after they have gotten jobs, it is necessary for programs interested in improving retention to allocate significant financial resources and staff time to this task. In addition, providing participants with tangible incentives for reaching key program and employment milestones can encourage retention and facilitate employment. In the Welfare to Work Project, several corps found that it was effective to provide corpsmembers with clothing allowances and other small rewards for completing the program, for getting jobs, and for remaining employed, because providing these rewards not only encouraged corpsmembers to stay in their jobs, it also encouraged them to maintain contact with the program.

Corps In Action:

The new, more stringent, rules for the GED presented a challenge for the NJYC of Paterson in that it took most students much longer to prepare for and pass the test. Rather than delaying job placement, the corps developed a GED preparation group for participants who had been placed into employment, but still needed take or retake the GED.

Summary of Promising Practices for Helping Program Participants to Retain Employment

- Place Participants in "Good" Jobs that Offer Opportunity for Advancement
- Place Participants at Facilities at which they can explore a variety of careers
- Place Participants in Jobs Located Near Major Transportation Routes
- Cultivate Relationships with Employers Who Hire Program Graduates
- Provide Consistent and Effective Post-Placement Follow-Up
- Allocate Significant Resources Towards Tracking and Retention Services and Provide Participants with Incentives to Remain Employed and to Maintain Contact with the Program



Summary of Promising Practices for Youth Service Programs

This section highlights a number of effective practices for serving economically disadvantaged youth that are applicable not just to employment-focused programs, but to the full range of youth service initiatives. Programs that utilize these strategies appear particularly likely to generate positive outcomes for participants.

Methodology for Identifying Promising Practices for Youth Service Programs

In order to identify promising practices for youth service programs, Abt Associates conducted a literature review of programs geared to provide low-income youth with supports that facilitate their positive transition into adulthood. Both because there are countless such reports and because those reports that we reviewed were largely descriptive (most were formative assessments and process studies), the list of promising practices we have generated here is neither proven nor exhaustive. Despite this fact, we believe that these studies provide important preliminary documentation of effective strategies for serving economically disadvantaged youth. We are particularly confident in the validity of promising practices identified in multiple reports, and, accordingly, have summarized those practices in the section that follows. Note that these promising practices are applicable to a variety of different kinds of programs, including both employment-focused and other types of programs.



Most of the articles we reviewed discuss promising practices in two broad arenas: (1) Youth Services and (2) Program Infrastructure. For this reason, we

have organized our discussion of promising practices for youth service programs into two sections: (1) promising practices for delivering services and (2) promising practices for structuring programs.

Promising Practices for Delivering Services

Organizations that serve low-income youth use a variety of strategies for recruiting program participants, encouraging individuals to remain in programs, and cultivating productive relationships between staff and youth. Based on our literature review, the following themes emerge as promising practices for delivering services.

- ***Employ a Strengths-Based Perspective***

Effective youth service programs employ an assets-focused model for delivering services (and, accordingly, focus on building on youths' strengths as opposed to their weaknesses). By having high expectations for the youth that they serve and by providing youth with opportunities to build on their strengths to develop new skills, lead and excel, these programs increase participants' self-confidence. This is particularly important because many underserved youth have not had a great deal either of these kinds of opportunities or of positive affirmation from authority figures.

- ***Foster Supportive Relationships***

Successful programs also cultivate supportive relationships for youth, including positive social networks with adults. Some programs do this by featuring intensive one-to-one case management; others do it by fostering one-on-one mentoring relationships between adults and youths.

**Summary of Promising Practices
for Delivery Services
in Youth Programs**

- Employ a Strengths-Based Perspective
- Foster Supportive Relationships for Youth

Promising Practices for Structuring Programs

Successful youth service programs share several key similarities in the way in which they are run and structured. Though there is no one size fits all for programs, the following general principles help programs to run effectively.

- ***Form Effective Partnerships with Other Service Providers***

In order to provide low-income youth with the array of supports that they need, effective programs form meaningful partnerships with other service providers. Effective partnerships feature several elements that contribute to their success: (1) they are marked by ongoing, regular, and reciprocal communication; (2) the benefit of the partnership is clear to all parties involved; and (3) partners invest a significant amount of time in planning how they will work together, and their roles and responsibilities are defined clearly. As documented in prior sections, we observed this effective practice in action at some of the Welfare to Work Project corps.

- ***Hire Staff Who Have Relevant Professional Credentials and Who Can Relate to Youth Served***

Successful programs hire staff who have relevant professional credentials and, as important, a solid familiarity with the clientele served. Many programs find that staff who either have had personal experience living in poverty and may have personally overcome some of the challenges their clients face; others have worked with economically disadvantaged youth for long periods of time are able to gain clients' trust and to forge meaningful and productive relationships with them. Relevant professional credentials vary depending on the position to be filled. In general, job developers should have some sort of professional experience in the private sector, case managers should have some sort of professional certification, and program directors should have some managerial, program, and fundraising experience.



- ***Collect and Use Data***

Effective youth service programs use streamlined data management systems both to monitor staff performance and to conduct on-going internal assessments of program accomplishments and challenges. They collect data that is relevant to them and that reflects their strategic goals and missions. These programs set clear, outcome-based standards for success and hold staff accountable for meeting those standards. They judge staff performance not only by looking at means but also by looking at ends, i.e. client outcomes. They also review program data and develop strategic plans for program improvement based on the data they collect. Finally, effective programs conduct evaluations both to chronicle their efficacy and as a means to demonstrate accountability and confirm improvement to stakeholders.

Summary of Promising Practices for Structuring Youth Programs

- Form Effective Partnerships with Service Providers
- Hire Staff Who Have Relevant Professional Credentials and Who Can Relate to Youth Served
- Collect and Use Data



Summary of all

Promising Practices for Developing Programs that Train and Employ Economically Disadvantaged Youth:

- Partner with Other Service Providers to Recruit Qualified Individuals
- Publicize the Program at Locations Frequented by Qualified Individuals
- Screen Potential Program Participants
- Hire a Job Developer
- Create Individualized Action Plans and Help Clients to Progress Towards Their Employment Goals
- Maintain a Consistent Employment Focus
- Educate Participants About the Culture of Work and Focus on Soft Skills
- Mimic the Professional Work Environment
- Expose Young Participants to a Range of Career Options
- Provide Monetary and Other Incentives for Program Participation
- Provide Comprehensive Services
- Cultivate Trusting Relationships Between Staff and Clients
- Network with an Array of Effective Service Providers
- Engage Employers

Promising Practices

- Consider Employers' Needs When Marketing and Developing Programs
- Place Participants in Living Wage Jobs
- Place Corpsmembers in Jobs Related to the Training They Receive
- Place Participants in "Good" Jobs that Offer Potential for Advancement
- Place Participants at Facilities at Which They Can Explore a Variety of Careers
- Place Participants in Jobs Located Near Major Transportation Routes
- Cultivate Relationships with Employers Who Hire Program Graduates
- Provide Consistent and Effective Post-Placement Follow-Up
- Allocate Significant Resources Towards Tracking and Retention Services and Provide Participants with Incentives to Remain Employed and to Stay in Touch

Promising Practices for Youth Service Programs:

- Employ a Strengths-Based Perspective
- Foster Supportive Relationships for Youth
- Form Effective Partnerships with Service Providers
- Hire Staff Who Have Relevant Professional Credentials and Who Can Relate to Youth Served
- Collect and Use Data

Implementing Promising Practices at Your Program - Next Steps

Based on our assessment of the Welfare to Work Project and literature reviews of both employment and youth service programs, we have identified a host of promising practices that youth service practitioners can employ to improve their programs and implement effective job training services. In order for this Guide to achieve NASCC's goal of helping programs actually to develop and implement improved services, however, practitioners need to translate their understanding of promising practices into actual programmatic changes.

How can organizations translate promising practices into concrete action steps?

1. Review the promising practices identified in this guide.

Ask yourself...

Which of these practices is it feasible for my organization to adopt? (There are likely to be several.)

- **Consider your organization's mission.**

Which promising practices identified here resonate with your mission? For example, if the goal of our program is to help youth move out of poverty, it makes sense for our program to explore employment focused strategies. If the goal of our program is to help youth graduate from high school, some of the strategies for improving general programmatic services may be more applicable.

- **Consider your organization's fiscal situation.**

Does your organization have the finances necessary to adopt labor-intensive strategies such as developing entirely new programs for participants? Or, is your organization constrained to less resource-intensive efforts, such as encouraging current staff to adopt a more assets-focus approach? If expensive strategies resonate with your organization's mission and you don't have the necessary resources to implement them, will it be possible for your organization to raise funds for specific strategies?

- **Consider staff resources at your organization.**

Are your colleagues likely to agree with your assessment of promising practices that your organization should adopt? Does your organization have enough staff to adopt the practices that you feel are most appropriate? What can you do to help ensure staff buy-in?

- **Consider the population that you serve.**

Are the youth in your program likely to respond particularly well or poorly to certain promising practices suggested here? Are there certain factors afflicting your target population (criminal records, developmental disabilities, etc.) that may render certain strategies more or less likely to be successful?

2. Make a list of the three to five promising practices that you think would most enhance the services your organization provides.

For each promising practice that you list, identify:

- The benefit that your organization will reap from adopting that practice,
- Several concrete action steps that your organization will need to take to adopt the promising practice, and
- The staff and financial resources you think that adopting that practice will require.

Use the Promising Practices Worksheet at the end of this guide to do this.

3. Share this list with key staff to solicit their feedback and to get their buy in.

4. Prioritize strategies based on staff input.

5. Develop a strategic plan for actuating one or two of the promising practices you have identified at your organization.

An effective strategic plan will identify:

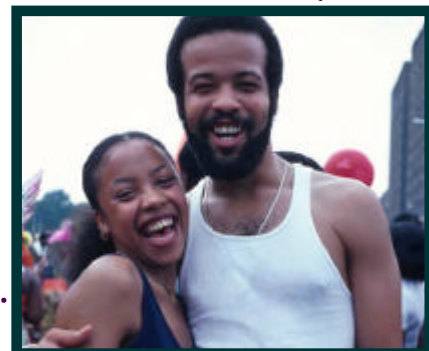
- Key goals (in this case the promising practices you plan to adopt at your organization),
- Strategies and action steps for achieving each of those goals,
- Resources you will need to implement these strategies, and
- Measurable outcome targets that are linked to each of these goals.

****Strategic plans also should indicate a timeframe for *when* key goals and strategies will be implemented.****

Use the Planning Worksheet on the previous page of this guide to start to develop your plan

Congratulations!

The work of implementing promising practices is still to come, but you have taken five essential first steps that ensure that you're on your way to implementing promising practices at your organization. Implementing these practices will help your organization to serve youth better and that's something to celebrate!




NASCC'S Guidelines for CTC Full Implementation Phase II

In-Program Corpsmember Development

Corps must have the following **in-place** & documented to be considered at "full implementation":

- 1) At least eight hours per week of structured, paid or unpaid, corpsmember development activities including academic instruction, career development, lifeskills and other non-field, non-work-based development activities.
- 2) A strong emphasis on, and corresponding amount of time dedicated to:
 - Obtaining high school diplomas or GEDs for corpsmembers who have not finished school.
 - Improving basic skills for those corpsmembers in need of remediation; or
 - Academic topics (including co-enrollment in post-secondary institutions) for qualified corpsmembers.
- 3) A career preparation component that provides at least 40 hours of structured activities, and includes, at a minimum, all of the following:
 - Individual development planning or goal setting process, along with regular check-ins on progress, that results in an individual strategy for each corpsmember;
 - Resume writing assistance;
 - Career interest assessment testing;
 - Individual career counseling;
 - Assistance with job search; and
 - Classes on, or assistance with, job retention skills.
- 4) A lifeskills component that provides at least 40 hours of structured activities and includes many of the following: drug awareness, driver's education, parenting, anger management, conflict resolution, AIDS/HIV, first aid, health issues, problem solving, time management, leadership development, gang awareness, computer literacy, financial management, and community relations.

- 
- 5) A means, through case management or referral, by which corpsmembers can obtain professional assistance in dealing with personal issues (abuse, unresolved trauma, financial difficulties, criminal issues) that would pose barriers to successful post-program placement.
 - 6) A structured means in which employers provide input on the corps program.
 - 7) A career resource center on-site, or regular staffed access to one off-site, that includes the following:
 - Postings of job announcements; Information on college admission dates, entrance tests and scholarships;
 - Information on trade schools, unions and other local second stage training programs;
 - Information on local labor market trends;
 - Computers available for writing resumes and applying to schools;
 - Resource materials on career development; and
 - Information on local career fairs, job recruiting fairs and college fairs.

Post-Program Placement

Corps must have the following **in-place** & documented to be considered at “full implementation”:

- 1) One or more staff members specifically tasked, as part of their job responsibilities, with finding and pursuing, in a structured, pro-active, and sustained manner, post-program opportunities for current and exited corpsmembers, and marketing exiting and former corpsmembers to employers and schools.
- 2) An employer engagement strategy in which the corps communicates regularly (at least quarterly) with at least five employers, possibly through an Employer Advisory Committee, to review curriculum, obtain input on the training and development of corpsmembers, and discuss employment opportunities. Alternatively, the corps is a partner in a larger agency or collaboration's Employer Advisory Committee that meets the above stated guidelines. The corps actively pursues and engages new local employers.
- 3) A means of, and staff member or volunteer assigned to, regularly obtaining updated information on local labor market trends.
- 4) Active partnerships (involving the regular sharing of resources, provision of referrals or other collaboration) with the following:
 - At least five local employers or unions;
 - At least two local community colleges, universities, trade schools or other academic institutions; and
 - At least one second stage training program that provides internships, apprenticeships or other skilled training leading to career-oriented full time employment.

An "active" partnership means that partners have regular, perhaps monthly, contact and that each partner hires or enrolls exited corpsmembers regularly.

Post-Program Support

Corps must have the following in-place & documented to be considered at “full implementation”:

- 1) Regular supportive case management contact that includes all of the following:
 - ❑ A written amendment to the corpsmember handbook, or other formal means, outlining the eligibility requirements (usually based on length of stay and/or type of termination) for receiving intensive post-program support. At a minimum, provide services to all those who stay at least six months and leave under favorable circumstances;
 - ❑ Structured case management one-on-one contact with each "eligible" corpsmembers at least three times in their first month post-program and at least monthly thereafter for the first year post-program unless the former corpsmember demonstrates, through success in her/his placement, that intensive contact is unnecessary. In any case, contact with all corpsmembers at least quarterly with the assumption that most will benefit from the more intensive level of contact. The structured contact, a mix of both telephone calls and in-person meetings, covers a variety of case management issues including, but not limited to: job adjustment, promotion, resignation, supervision issues, employment barriers (such as transportation, housing, family issues), personal issues, continuing education, etc.;
 - ❑ Structured contact at least two times in the first six months post-program with the employer or school counselor, if cooperative, of each eligible former corpsmember; and
 - ❑ Trained, professional staff members, who know the corpsmembers well, to initiate and conduct the contact. These must either be new staff positions, or existing staff with re-structured position descriptions that allow time for these activities, or a partnering agency that has a means of getting to know the corpsmembers well. Experience from other programs suggests that a reasonable caseload for a full time case manager is 35-50 corpsmembers.
- 2) A career resource center that is staffed by a corps staff person or qualified volunteer and is open during non-work hours at least two times per month for former corpsmembers. If the corps uses an off-site career resource center, the corps ensures that former corpsmembers have non-work hour access each month to that center.

Data Collection/Tracking

Corps must have the following **in-place** & documented to be considered at “full implementation”:

- 1) Ongoing data collection and regular, on-time submission of CTC Site Data Reports to NASCC.
- 2) An operational, computer-based system to document and record all relevant in-program and post-program corpsmember data, and a way to ensure that the corps will always have a staff member who is able to enter data, develop reports and modify fields.

Staffing

Corps must have the following **in-place** & documented to be considered at “full implementation”:

- 1) A clearly identified CTC Manager/Coordinator who serves as the main contact for NASCC and is responsible for CTC implementation and oversight.
- 2) Full investment in CTC of Corps' Executive Director or equivalent as evidenced by this person participating in some CTC all-site conference calls, being involved in conversations with the NASCC staff about site status, and making fundraising and staffing of CTC a demonstrated priority.
- 3) Full understanding and 'buy-in' from all staff at the corps. The corps has held staff meetings, briefings, working groups or retreats to obtain input from all staff members on CTC activities and to ensure that CTC is an integral piece of the corps. Evidence of full understanding could be that a staff member, chosen at random, could provide a clear explanation of the goals of the CTC Initiative, citing its impact on both the program and the corpsmembers.
- 4) All CTC activities fully staffed to support activities described in this document, Guidelines for CTC Full Implementation.
- 5) Full participation in NASCC CTC activities including conference calls, all-site calls, site visits, listserv discussion group, and training sessions.

Funding

Corps must have the following **in-place** & documented to be considered at “full implementation”:

- 1) A defined budget of funds and resources necessary for fully staffing and supporting all CTC activities.
- 2) A creative fundraising effort underway, from public and private sources, that supports all CTC activities. Corps has some or all of the following:
 - New CTC funds in hand;
 - Re-allocated existing resources to support CTC; and/or
 - Partnerships with other agencies or collaborations who will assume CTC functions.
- 3) A plan that demonstrates how the corps will support CTC activities over time without relying on short-term or start-up grants. The corps has a vision for how it will incorporate CTC activities as an integral part of its long-term funding strategy.

NOTES

