

Final Project Report

**Developing a 21st Century Youth Leadership
Training Chapter in New York City**

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B. Abstract

The purpose of my project was to develop a 21st Century Youth Leadership Training Chapter in New York City by establishing a 5-7 youth-adult advisory board that created vision and manages the project. The first step in fulfilling this purpose was communication with the host agency located in Selma, Alabama. The next step was to identify and building relationships with key potential advisory board members in hopes they would join the team. Finally, creating relationships with other youth serving organizations in the New York City area that wanted to strengthen their African-American and Latino youth participants' leadership skills.

C. Program Summary

This project targets African American and Latino youth between the ages of 16-24 who live in the New York City area. These populations of participants come from poor to moderate-income communities.

My project's Problem Statement is as follows: If we do not train young people to be effective, responsible, and viable citizens, we are going to lose the next generations of leaders.

The goal of my project is to help youth emerge as leaders in their communities: acquire tools, skills and experiences needed to perform effectively and efficiently as practitioners for community change.

The link between what we expect of young people and what they do is an intuitive one: if there is not a widespread expectation that youth will make a difference for their communities, it is unlikely they will. Students are much more likely to participate if their schools require and arrange the service. When their schools did so, 59% of 6th through 12th grade students participated, compared with 29% when schools did neither (Independent Sector Survey, 2000).

Some of the desired conditions of the Targeted Population are as follows:

- 25 local youth joining community boards that work with young people and community development in the New York City area
- Create a city-wide youth volunteerism day
- Register and increase youth voting [18-24] by 5% in New York City

The expected project products are as follows:

- A New York City 21st Century Youth Leadership Chapter

- A 5-7 member Advisory Board of Youth and Adults that work in the youth development field

The 5-7 youth and adult advisory board has been organized. In addition, collaborations among youth serving organizations have helped us recruit 10 youth leaders.

We partially achieved finishing the affiliation process and obtaining job and intern opportunities for our participants – especially during the summer.

My project's focus did shift since the beginning. When I first began my project I primarily focused on building the program [youth participants] as opposed to building the structure [the advisory board]. I shifted because I wanted long-term results not short-term gain. If I built a strong enough foundation, the project would depend less on me personally to drive it. I wanted to build a management system that would operate as its own entity.

The two factors that really had an impact on my project was: The proximity of 21st Century and personal financial problems.

The summer time absences affected my ability to fully complete my project's goals.

My recommendations for this project are as follows:

- Begin board and program activities in the earlier fall (October)
- Provide financial opportunities for your youth participants during the summer

D. Definition of the Problem

Problem Statement

If we do not train young people to be effective, responsible, and viable citizens, we are going to lose the next generations of leaders.

Defining the Target Community

This project targets African American and Latino youth between the ages of 16-24 who live in the New York City area. These populations of participants come from poor to moderate-income communities. This age group is one of the most vulnerable to violence, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and crime.

Many of the participants primarily live in Brooklyn and Harlem, New York. These two boroughs are joined together by over five different subway trains that travel back and forth very frequently. Transportation from any part of the city is very accessible and reasonable in cost (\$1.50/ride).

My project is located in an urban setting in Southeast New York State. With a growing population of 8 million people, 50% of them people of color and immigrants. Most of the youth are in school and have displayed some sort of leadership ability through school, their community and their church. Some participants are out of school youth and are currently working to earn their GED. 90% of the youth participants will be graduating to secondary education [college or training school] by the time they are finished high school.

Identifying Major Assumptions

My project functions on the assumption that youth leadership is not effectively and responsibly being harnessed and developed to better communities in New York City. I would go further to say, communities overlook their youth assets and are missing out on viable leadership.

E. Project Goal(s)**Goal Statement**

The goal of my project is to help youth emerge as leaders in their communities: acquire tools, skills and experiences needed to perform effectively and efficiently as practitioners for community change.

Current Conditions

US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Studies (2000) have shown that in 1998, 18% of New York City's children live in a household with an income below the relevant poverty threshold. In 1999, almost a quarter (23%) of children lived with only their mothers, 4% lived only with their fathers, and 4% lived with neither of their parents. 46% of children in female-headed families were poor in 1998 and in 1998, 65% of poor children lived in households that did not include their biological father, compared to 25% of children who were not poor (Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 1999).

According to Males, author of The Scapegoat Generation, (1996), the prison boom has triggered dramatic budget cuts for schools, colleges, after-school programs, drug rehab, job training, Head Start, affordable housing, legal aid – every social program that gives poor and distressed people hope has been reduced” (p29 – 30).

Annie E. Casey Foundation (2000) reported 3 million (or 9%) young people 16-19 are not attending school nor are they employed. Older youth, ages 18-19, are three times as likely to be detached from school and work as youth ages 16-17. In 1999, 13% of youth 18-19 were neither enrolled in school nor working compared with 4% of youth ages 16-17 (Kids Count Data). Detachment from school or the workforce, especially if it lasts for several years, puts youth at increased risk of having lower earning, less stable employment history than their peers who stayed in school or secured jobs and minimizes their contribution to society.

The link between what we expect of young people and what they do is an intuitive one: if there is not a widespread expectation that young people will make a difference for their communities, it is unlikely that they will. Students are much more likely to participate if their schools require and arrange the service. When their schools did so, 59% of 6th through 12th grade students participated, compared with 29% when schools did neither (Independent Sector Survey, 2000).

Desired Conditions

Below are the desired conditions of the Targeted Population:

- 25 local youth joining community boards working with young people and community development in the New York City area
- Collaborate with school districts to promote students to participate in a community service activities
- Create a city-wide youth volunteerism day
- Decrease drug use, teenage pregnancy and violence among young people by 3%
- Register and increase youth voting [18-24] by 5% in New York City
- Develop family centers that promote better relationships with their families
- Develop a citywide youth and adult advisory board that help direct funds that promote youth development projects.

F. Project Purpose

The purpose of the project is to help youth emerge as leaders in their communities: acquire tools, skills and experiences needed to perform effectively and efficiently as practitioners for community change.

Expected Outputs

The major outputs that would exist if my project were successfully completed are as follows:

- The creation of a New York City 21st Century Youth Leadership Chapter
- Development of a 5-7 member Advisory Board of Youth and Adults that work in the youth development field

The first step in developing a 21st Century Youth Leadership Training Chapter in New York City was to create a local advisory board.

The advisory board consists of 5-7 youth and adults from the local community and various organizations. This board has worked to develop an operating structure for the program and help evaluate program success.

The second activity is to facilitate the youth leadership curriculum to participants through a series of biweekly topics like how have youth leaders been incorporated in the leadership of communities? How have they been nurtured? What roles can young people realistically play in community development? How can we begin to change the perception of young people being care free and not responsible into young people being one of the most valuable resources in neighborhoods? How do we mold healthy relationships between youth leaders and adult practitioners? How do we begin to create a culture where young people are looking at community development as a career option? How do we begin to create succession plans between leadership?

Background

15 years after the Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act and the Selma to Montgomery Commemorative march; 21st Century has managed to create 30 different chapters. Nationally and Internationally youth learn to inspire, assist, organize and develop, young people of all ages, in and out of school, to be skilled community focused leaders, resiliently and creatively empowering themselves and their communities to affect positive change now and in the 21st Century.

21st Century looked at the Northeast to strengthen their network of youth leadership development. They wanted to help develop a structure that speaks to the principles of 21st Century radical organizing and have a grassroots approach to creating youth leaders.

The collaboration between 21st Century and myself came as a result of Malika Sanders and myself working together and discovery the lack of viable training arenas for young people.

My responsibilities for this project included:

- Create a 21st Century affiliate in New York City
- Develop a Youth-adult advisory board
- Meet with key players identified 21st Century who would potentially collaborate on this project
- Identify potential advisory board members
- Begin to build a operating structure for the affiliate
- Outreach to Youth serving organizations to form collaborations
- Recruit youth participants
- Fundraise

21st Century's Responsibility to this collaboration was:

- Provide technical assistant for setting up affiliate
- Identify youth organizations and individuals to collaborate with
- Lend their name and affluence to attract productive collaborations

Advisory-Board members:

- Dirk Butler – adult member

- Kelli Moore – adult member
- Shanee Smith – youth member [CED alumni]
- Sabrina Charles – youth member
- Dr. Gwen Parker – adult member
- Representative from Youth in Action – Youth Member
- Rev. Miller – adult member

The role of the advisory board is to

- Recruit at least 2 youth leaders for the program
- Actively participate in establishing policy and procedure for the New York Based 21st Century Leadership Training Chapter
- Identify at least one internship and/or employment opportunity for participants

G. Result

Major Outputs

The major outputs that would exist if my project were successfully completed are as follows:

- The creation of a New York City 21st Century Youth Leadership Chapter
- Development of a 5-7 member Advisory Board of Youth and Adults that work in the youth development field

I have developed the 5-7 youth and adult advisory board. In the beginning of my project I didn't realize I had two parallel projects. Creating the advisory board was a project in and of its self. Then I was developing the affiliate of 21st Century that included bringing together young people for leadership facilitation.

The advisory board began meeting bi-weekly. It was hard for members to commit because many of them had a lot of things on their community involvement plate. I thought it was important to meet that often so members could begin to develop board rapport and learn about the project. After carefully assessing everyone's schedule, we moved had monthly board meetings.

At this point, the advisory board is still developing its goals for the affiliate. We are wrestling with question of – Do we seek our own 501©3? If not, how do we attract dollars?

I spend the first three (3) to five (5) months building relationships with youth serving organization to recruit youth participants. We recruited about 10 youth, most of them from the Brooklyn area. The youth participants begin meeting at a church in Brooklyn that was made possible by Rev. Miller. 21st Century made their youth leadership curriculum available and I was the main facilitator in the beginning.

The project must still further strengthen their commitment from its advisory board members. We still have not finished all of the required paper work to become a legal affiliate with 21st Century because we are currently discussing how will funds be raised and who will be fiscally responsible.

The summer time was tough to meet and many of the projects came to a halt except for the youth leadership training. We had fewer because sessions because many of the young people got summer jobs or intern opportunities.

The project must identify financial opportunity in the summer time for the youth participants. Not having economic means or employment internships hurt the programs integrity during the summer months.

H. Conclusion/Recommendations

My project's focus did shift since the beginning. When I first began my project I primarily focused on building the program [youth participants] as opposed to building the structure [the advisory board]. I shifted because I was looking for long-term results not short-term gain. If I built a strong enough ground-work then the project would depend less on me to drive it. I wanted to build a management system that would operate as its own entity.

The fact that 21st Century is located in Alabama really hindered my ability to successfully complete the project in the time frame allotted. The Executive Director, Malika Sanders, was very difficult to contact during the start-up process. I could not move on things because I need guidance and/or permission from 21st Century and could not get it within a timely fashion.

The other factor was personal. I was feeling emotionally depressed. I had very little financial resources at the time and was looking for employment. Even though not having a job at this time helped me focus more on the project it also depressed me because I was anxious about my financial situation.

The one expected thing that occurred that significantly affected my ability to complete the project and achieve my stated goal was the summer time absences. Summer was a tough time to pin people down – youth and adults. No

one wanted to meet and people were usually working or on vacation. Attendance was an all time low. I didn't really plan for this, even though I know people are less willing to build during summer months.

I would recommend that to begin this project around October and really build momentum so when the summer months roll around your participants [adults and youth] already have bought in. I began this project around January or February and I was getting people interested. Our first advisory board meeting was in late May, the summer was just around the corner.

The other recommendation is to have financial opportunities for your young people during the summer. Youth want to make money during the summer months and if the agency they are with provides this, they will buy into what you are doing. Providing internships and job opportunities was one of my evaluation methods for the advisory board but it did not manifest before the summer time.