How To ...

Provide Summer Employment

Slow, focused growth and leveraging existing infrastructure spell success.

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by Lisa Fratt

Summer youth employment programs face uncertain prospects this year. The economy is shedding jobs and governments are cutting programs.

Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) will see its city funding for summer employment cut in half this year, to $500,000. PYN also anticipates cuts in foundation dollars and employer contributions for its summer employment program. In San Francisco, reductions in the Mayor’s Youth Employment and Education Program (MYEEP) could cost hundreds of youth jobs this summer.

On the flip side, the proposed federal economic recovery package contains $1.2 billion for youth programs, including summer employment programs. That could actually increase the number of youth served and address longtime waiting lists, says Mala Thakur, executive director of National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC).

Organizations with solid management structures, strong community support and diverse funding streams are in the best shape heading into this summer.

Slow growth

One hallmark of a successful program is gradual growth, rather than a sudden surge. Take New York City: Its summer youth employment program operates a successful online enrollment and hiring system. “Our overarching strategy is incremental growth,” says Jeanne Mullgrav, the city’s commissioner of the Department of Youth and Community Development. The high-tech system started as a pilot for 3,000 participants and expanded to 42,000 online enrollees in four years.

In contrast, Washington, D.C.’s Summer Youth Employment Program tried to do too much, too fast. Last year, the program almost doubled its enrollment from 2007, while beginning an online rolling admissions process that featured an electronic payment system. The city couldn’t keep up with demand or manage the technology. The 2008
summer program was a public disaster, and many youths spent their days sitting in auditoriums. Support is shrinking; the city’s Chamber of Commerce recently announced that it was quitting the program.

**Goal-driven**

Success hinges on a long-term vision, coupled with the people to support it. The Philadelphia Youth Council keeps PYN focused on its primary tasks, while the council itself develops partnerships, strategies and infrastructure to support local goals, including youth employment. PYN provides staff support to the youth council. It’s important to remain focused on end goals and to tie projects and funding to goals, says Stacy Holland, co-president and chief operating officer of PYN.

In San Francisco, MYEEP attributes its success to strong local support. “We started with a model the community and funders believe in,” says MYEEP Director Alvin Woo. Also important are follow-through and marketing. “We’re able to show tangible outcomes, so we’ve become the go-to program when the city wants to expand services,” Woo says. Another plus of tooting one’s own horn is recruiting – potential seasonal employees and partners want to work in a proven system.

**Lean operations**

Programs that have stood the test of time know the importance of staying lean. They train staff members to perform multiple jobs. Smart providers also build partnerships to leverage resources and to share knowledge and infrastructure.

Sound infrastructure sets the stage for future opportunities. For example, when San Francisco lost its summer employment funding in 2000, it needed an experienced partner to take the reins in place of the city agency that had run it. MYEEP, a nonprofit collaboration of community-based organizations, stepped up. Most of the components for a summer program were in place, so it made sense for MYEEP to help out and scale up.

Similarly, PYN, which operates in partnership with dozens of Philadelphia-based organizations, leveraged its resources to launch a summer internship program, running it for the city and schools. The arrangement maximized resources and trimmed costs.

Technology can also help programs stay lean. New York City’s $1.3 million investment in its online enrollment system reduced seasonal administrative staff needs, cut paper costs and allowed the city to funnel savings toward youth development.

Following are some of the providers that are well-positioned for this year.

**Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN)**

Philadelphia
(267) 502-3800
[http://www.pyninc.org](http://www.pyninc.org)
The Strategy: Sometimes the best person for the job is a middleman. Find an intermediary, and charge that organization with assessing and assimilating the needs of various players. Replace multiple applications and quality measurements with a single point of entry for youth and a universal local quality measurement. Employ a coordinated, consistent model.

Getting Started: PYN was established in 1999. The following year, it combined a portion of $6.3 million in federal Workforce Investment Act funds with $2 million in state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars to fund the umbrella summer program. Philadelphia Youth Council, the coordinating body required by the workforce act, sets priorities for PYN.

Putting It Together: PYN has grown gradually over the past decade. In 2003, the organization launched WorkReady to recruit private-sector employers to provide summer jobs.

An engaged, involved council is key to the organization’s success. The first of three scheduled increases in the minimum wage, which went into effect two years ago, could have devastated WorkReady, costing some 1,300 youth their summer paychecks. State and local government funding covered $1.8 million of the shortfall. When PYN alerted the council, its members raised $500,000 in private sector funds for paid internships to keep the program fully funded.

Youth Served: Each summer, 6,000 to 8,500 youths (ages 14 to 21) are employed at 1,400 work sites, in partnership with the city, schools and local businesses.

Staff: PYN commits five year-round staffers to its summer program, with the workforce swelling to 80 during the summer season. During the summer, 25 administrative staffers tackle enrollment and training, while 55 academic advisers oversee youth workers. “We’re nimble,” boasts Stacy Holland, co-president and chief operating officer. “We can respond to change easier and faster” than organizations with a broader focus.

Money: The summer jobs program consumes about $10 million of PYN’s $28 million budget. Twenty-two government, corporate and foundation funders contribute to that budget.

Results: PYN is nationally recognized as a leading intermediary. The use of PYN has been credited with saving money, compared with the costs of running separate programs. For example, when the city announced plans for youth internship programs in 2007, PYN assessed the city’s goals and proposed a coordinated approach that leveraged administrative and infrastructure requirements. “The city would have spent 20 to 25 percent of their dollars building infrastructure. Instead, PYN did it for 10 percent of program costs,” Holland says.
Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

Washington (202) 698-3492
http://does.dc.gov/does/cwp/view,a,1232,q,537757.asp

The Strategy: Provide more youth with a longer program, enabling them to earn and learn more. Streamline paperwork with an automated payroll system.

Getting Started: The city set out with a lofty goal of serving more youth, but failed to plan or budget adequately for a more extensive summer program. It deployed a new payroll system without testing or training for providers.

Putting It Together (Or Failing To): The 2008 SYEP launched a rolling admissions program, attracting 20,000 youth, about 5,000 more than anticipated. Everyone who applied was accepted into the program. The city pleaded with businesses to accept youth workers, but secured private slots for only 600 of them.

As the city scrambled to find positions for all comers, it boosted providers’ contracts and signed on additional providers, asking them to meet the unexpected capacity. Municipal oversight fell short. Some vendors overcharged the city, and others failed to construct a meaningful work experience. While some youth were stuck in auditoriums or assigned to sham work programs, their peers built go-karts and took flying lessons.

Youth Served: About 20,000 youth were paid $7 an hour.

Staff: In 2008, seven full-time staff members supported SYEP, and 40 seasonal site monitors oversaw job sites. The 2008 program became all-hands on deck when the mayor made a commitment to find employment for all applicants, says Joseph Walsh, acting director of Washington’s Department of Employment. This year, the department anticipates doubling its full-time staff to 15 and using professional site monitors from its compliance department at larger or problematic job sites, rather than college student site monitors.

Money: The 2008 program exceeded its initial budget of $21 million by $30 million. The city covered most of the shortfall by dipping into an emergency fund.

Results: The overly ambitious program is the prototype of summer employment mismanagement. The electronic payroll system confused providers, who did not properly track working hours, and poor timekeeping resulted in some youth being underpaid and others overpaid. The mayor fired the program director.

Irate stakeholders and youth-serving organizations are urging the city to fix the program. They say simple fixes like enrollment caps, deadlines for youth applicants and timelines for providers could help moderate costs. Other essentials include ongoing communication, monitoring and site visits by city staff. But for this summer, the city
plans to continue its open-ended rolling admissions policy during the 10-week summer program.

Walsh is shooting for a more orderly process this year. Refined procedures encourage early enrollment, with early applicants able to select their preferred jobs. Youth who apply after May 1 will be assigned automatically to remaining open job sites. Washington also plans to beef up projects that worked in 2008. For example, its Green Summer pilot program, which focused on identifying and documenting sources of pollution in the Anacostia River, will be expanded from 200 to 800 participants, with the support of such partners as the District of Columbia Department of Environment.

**LA Scholars**

California School-Age Consortium (CalSAC)
Los Angeles
(310) 857-8865 [http://www.calsac.org](http://www.calsac.org)

The Strategy: Provide summer college prep, work experience and training for recent high school graduates interested in working with children and youth after school. Help fill the gaps in after-school staff needs.

“There are 10,000 after-school positions in Los Angeles. One-third are vacant on any given day,” says Rebecca Goldberg, CalSAC regional strategies director.

Getting Started: LA Scholars piloted in 2008 as part of the mayor’s Hire LA Youth Initiative to secure jobs for 15,000 youth. CalSAC partnered with the Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles Community College District, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, LA Community Development Department and afterschool employers to develop and fund the program.

Putting It Together: LA Scholars recruited 300 recent high school graduates and incoming seniors to enroll in the six-week summer program. During the first five weeks, the youth spent their mornings in college prep classes, including English and math, at community colleges. CalSAC provided afternoon training and job shadowing, immersing the youth in the basics of after-school work. The final week was dedicated to the job shadowing and training. The culminating event, an after-school job fair, attracted 20
employers and provided participants the opportunity to secure permanent jobs in the after-school field.

Youth Served: Three hundred recent high school graduates and incoming seniors earned $8 an hour for 50 hours of training.

Staff: One CalSAC staff member worked on the pilot, and a part-time consultant helped connect youth to courses and job shadowing.

Money: CalSAC allocated $100,000 to the pilot, and the Los Angeles Community College District received a $60,000 grant from the Foundation for California Community Colleges to pay for participants’ books. This year, CalSAC expects to tap into federal Workforce Investment Funds to assist with college counseling for participants.

Results: Between 50 and 75 percent of LA Scholars found part-time employment in the after-school field. Many continued to take college courses; the consortium reported 500 distinct class enrollments among LA Scholars for the fall semester.

**Mayor’s Youth Employment and Education Program (MYEFP)**

San Francisco  
(415) 202-7903  
[http://www.myeep.org](http://www.myeep.org)

The Strategy: Expand a successful year-round program into a summer employment program. Maintain slow and steady smart growth.

Getting Started: When the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funding ended in 2000, San Francisco, like other cities, needed an experienced partner to fill the void in summer youth employment. For more than 15 years MYEEP, a nonprofit collaboration of 12 community-based organizations, had operated a year-round youth employment program, serving 1,200 youth and garnering national recognition. “We had partnerships with 300 work sites, a solid pre-employment training program and the administrative infrastructure to process and pay 900 youth,” says MYEEP Director Alvin Woo. MYEEP was perfectly positioned to take the reins and effectively meet summer employment needs.

Putting It Together: MYEEP tweaked its program, shortened the pre-employment training from 10 hours to eight hours, and focused primarily on work preparedness. On the staff side, the organization hired a part-time data entry person, and some local partners/employers extended the employment period for administrative staff members to support the expansion. In 2001, its first summer of operation, MYEEP secured placements for 900 youth at an assortment of local nonprofits and public-sector employers. MYEEP continues to build on its success, with its summer program growing by another 100 youths in 2004 by coordinating the Mayor’s Vocational Program, a one-time summer initiative.
Youth Served: One thousand youths were in the summer program in 2008. MYEEP targets work-eligible youth, ages 14 to 17, who have to overcome such barriers as poor English language skills, juvenile justice involvement or parenthood.

Staff: Thirty staff members, including subcontractors, are dedicated to the summer employment program.

Money: MYEEP commits $1.7 million of its total $5 million budget to summer employment. Nearly half of youth wages – more than $1 million – are utilized in the summer, Woo says.

Results: MYEEP continues to grow gradually and successfully blends year-round and summer programs, which Woo describes as a win-win for the community, because job placement sites often have summer staffing needs. Additionally, many partners are nonprofits and public sector-programs, so participants become supporters of community service.

MYEEP succeeds by keeping it simple and focusing on its primary mission – tapping into summer employment as a springboard to prepare youth to be successful members of the adult workforce. It continues to refine its offerings. For example, in 2006, MYEEP launched a small counselor-in-training program that provides year-round training to six summer participants. The next summer, the youths serve as case managers who support subcontractors and new youth participants.