



Best Practice: Partnership to Increase Youth Employment Opportunities

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CITY: TORONTO

**POLICY AREAS: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT;
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

BEST PRACTICE

Since 2001, the City of Toronto has funded and coordinated Youth Employment Partnerships (YEP), a non-profit neighborhood-based youth employment network. The program is organized by the Youth Employment Unit of the Social Development, Finance, and Administrative division of the City. Its success lies in its coordinated approach to job development. The network of agencies works with youth, ages 15 to 29, to assess their skills and provides access to a large pool of resources - over 5,000 employers and industry organizations use YEP network services, and the jobs made available range from entry-level to skilled.

ISSUE

YEP addresses two main issues in the City of Toronto. Firstly, there are predictions of a workforce shortage in the next five to ten years as aging workers begin to retire. The need for retirees to transfer skills and institutional knowledge to the next generation of workers has become more evident. The YEP network is therefore working closely with representatives from the skilled trades to identify training and apprenticeship opportunities for youth and connect youth to job and training opportunities that match these industry demands.

Secondly, while there are a number of effective neighborhood-based youth employment programs across the City of Toronto, creating partnerships with sectors/employers can be very labor intensive. Sectors/employers may have multiple job opportunities, but individual youth employment programs may not have the capacity to be able to meet the demand of the sector/employer. In order to enhance the ability of these organizations to provide comprehensive employment services for youth, the City created YEP as the coordinating network and entity.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of YEP are to:

- Increase the variety and number of job and career opportunities for youth in Toronto;
- Create one point of access for partnership development with large sector-specific labor organizations, public institutions and employers;
- Provide large forums for recruitment to increase the benefits for employers and provide a greater number and variety of positions for youth;
- Create learning partnerships between sector-specific labor organizations and the youth focused employment sector to increase the knowledge base of both partners;
- Market the size, capacity, services and resources of the non-profit employment sector broadly to employers in the community;
- Create a system of job sharing within the network to better ensure that good jobs are filled by youth who need them and that employer's interests are also met.

IMPLEMENTATION

YEP was developed based on feedback from a city-wide consultation process with youth employment organizations. A series of community meetings were held that focused on the successes and challenges faced by employment service providers. These organizations also discussed how to better serve both youth and potential employers. The creation of a network was

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proposed to implement a coordinated job development strategy and to compliment the activities carried out by the individual neighborhood-based youth employment organizations. This coordinated model reduces the chance of duplicating marketing calls to employers from the non-profit youth employment sector.

The City created the Community Development Officer position to coordinate YEP and a small budget to support its activities.

An advisory group was formed with representation from the City's Economic Development Division, Social Services and the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group (TWIG). It now includes Toronto Community Housing Corporation, as well as regional representation from the youth employment sector.

A quarterly youth employment sector manager's committee was established to help guide the program, and a monthly job developer's meeting was scheduled to manage daily coordination of the job development partnerships and strengthen the alliance between YEP member agencies.

Marketing materials were produced to promote YEP services for sectors/employers and to invite them to partner with organizations within the YEP network. Materials are available online at www.toronto.ca/yep.

The Intergovernmental Committee on Economic and Labor Force Development (ICE) Committee partnered with YEP in hosting two forums for employers. As a result, the first partnerships between labor organizations and employers were established.



Retail Council of Canada Job Fair



Business representative answers questions at Job Fair

Having established a baseline for success, a number of opportunities arose for YEP to help coordinate job fairs. Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association presented YEP with the opportunity to create a customized job fair for youth to be connected to sector specific employment opportunities. Despite some challenges, YEP was able to organize the job fair within two weeks. This partnership has continued and the job fair is currently in its eighth year. A partnership was then created with the Retail Sector Council of Canada (RCC), which was also interested in developing a job fair tailored to the retail industry. YEP partners shared their understanding of the sector in order to develop a robust program both for retail employers and job seekers. Additional partnerships have been formed, including an in-house partnership with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) who was interested in providing entry-level seasonal positions, and where appropriate, identifying candidates for full-time employment opportunities.

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Toronto Transit Commission Job Fair



Participants display interview appointment times

As a result of these successes, a new, two-day model for a job fair was established. On the first day, youth are given the opportunity to attend and participate in an event within a specific sector in order to learn more about the industry's culture, potential career opportunities, realistic salaries and benefits, as well as learn about employers' expectations. The presentation is facilitated by a representative from a relevant employment sector who has industry expertise and experience. This provides valuable information to youth and helps them determine if the industry is a good fit for them. On the following day, candidates meet with recruiters. Having had a substantive learning experience on the first day, candidates can better communicate industry-specific job skills and interests to recruiters.

Internally, City agencies are now looking to YEP to help fill open positions in a variety of departments and aid in the creation of pilot projects during the summer months. New partnerships are continuously created and are being coordinated across the YEP network and with the divisions represented on the advisory group.

A new one-day model was implemented in 2011 between YEP, Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) and Toronto Workforce Innovation Group (TWIG). The model consists of a half day training followed by a networking lunch and customized recruitment event. Members (employers) from the tourism and hospitality sector are connected to by OTEC and invited to a half day "Engaging Generation Y" workshop. YEP connects youth interested in pursuing a career in the tourism and hospitality sector and provides them with half-day training on "Essentials of Service Excellent". Both groups are brought together for an informal network lunch followed by a customized recruitment event. All partners contributed to the funding of the event.

In addition to these activities, a series of breakfast meetings have been held with various industry sectors and associations in collaboration with the TWIG. The aim is to bring sectors together with labor organizations to exchange information on the employment opportunities that exist.

On a continual basis, YEP and its network of agencies work with organizations to:

- Provide free employment assistance
- Screen and match skilled and knowledgeable young people to job openings
- Offer pre-employment and on-going support
- Employer and potential employee support on a confidential, individual basis
- Prepare potential employees for new work challenges
- Arrange free job fairs when an organization has multiple job postings
- Arrange wage subsidies (where available)
- Provide guidance and support regarding apprenticeship opportunities
- Provide training assistance
- Share job opportunities on a city-wide basis



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COST

The City of Toronto spends \$120,000 CAD (approximately \$114,920 USD) annually to support the program.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

YEP has improved targeted job development for youth across the City of Toronto. YEP has also achieved increased awareness of the size capacity of the non-profit employment service sector and the services and support available from employers and other labor market related organizations. In addition, YEP has provided an improved point of entry for employers to connect to the network.

The program's success is measured on an annual basis through consultation with the YEP network. Management discusses the activities and outcomes and, if they wish, commits to continue to participate with YEP. The network consists of thirty agencies and all agencies have continued to commit on an annual basis. The network is stronger today than it was when it was initiated ten years ago. Managers believe that YEP has been successful at coordinating targeted job development activities and this greatly reduces duplication of outreach. Through the implementation of policies and guidelines, along with a Commitment Agreement, YEP has increased trust within the network. Together, the agencies that make up the network are able to identify needs, gaps, and share best practices. Training opportunities have been created as required to ensure that both training and the information provided to job develops are consistent.

The sectors that have been particularly successful in partnering with YEP (based on the match of needs of employers versus needs of youth) are landscaping, maintenance, construction and retail.

TIMELINE

- 2001 YEP established; committees formed and in-depth research carried out
- 2002 Initial joint marketing materials produced that promoted YEP to employers
- 2003 Landscape Ontario partnership created and first joint job fair held
- 2004 Retail Council of Canada; Ontario Construction Secretariat, Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
- 2005 Toronto Transit Commission; Toronto Community Housing Corporation
- 2006 Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)
- 2007 Central Ontario Building Trades
- 2008 New marketing materials created; Ministry of Training; Colleges and University
- 2009 Joint Toronto District School Board (TDSC) and Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) job fair planning initiated
- 2010 Joint TDSB & TCDSB job fair
- 2011 Joint OTEC, TWIG training and recruitment event implemented

*Please note all of the above partnerships continue on an annual basis along with smaller partnerships and events on a local neighborhood basis.

LEGISLATION

N/A



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LESSONS LEARNED

There are two main challenges faced by YEP. The first challenge is to accurately assess the number of placements that result because of YEP. This is difficult to assess because there are so many partners involved, making it difficult to determine how a youth was connected to an employer; this is especially challenging if the employer has multiple locations and recruits through a variety of different methods. Secondly, the high turnover of job developers creates challenges for maintaining trust in the network. YEP is always adapting to the changing labor market trends and should be considered a continuous program for participants rather than a quick fix approach.

TRANSFERABILITY

This is a very transferable service to any large metropolitan area where employment services are needed and an array of services and resources need to be directed to youth. YEP has remained so successful and strong for ten years because it has a coordinator designated to the program. They are held accountable for ensuring that the network maintains its strong position and achieves its goals and objectives. This makes it an innovative alternative to a network formed of volunteers who may be unable to continue support on an on-going basis.

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.