

Appendix A: Construction Trainer Orientation Handbook



Construction Trainer Orientation Handbook

Welcome to YouthBuild!

You are now part of a network of hundreds of organizations across the United States and around the world that are working to help young people transform their lives through YouthBuild programs. As a YouthBuild construction trainer, this may be the most challenging job you have ever had—but it can also be the most rewarding.

YouthBuild construction trainers have three competing goals to accomplish:

1. **The Work:** One goal is to produce high-quality work on the construction site within the deadlines established by the project.
2. **The Participants' Personal Development:** A second goal is to help participants learn to overcome obstacles in their personal lives and to take responsibility for themselves in a work environment.
3. **The Participants' Learning:** A third goal is to ensure that the participants leave YouthBuild with the knowledge and skills they need to become economically independent and to play a leadership role in their community.

You will always be juggling these three goals. All three are equally important to the success of the YouthBuild program and to the success of the participants served by the program.

This handbook is designed to give you an idea of some of the issues you will be facing on your job and to share the experience of construction staff members from other YouthBuild programs across the country.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

What Makes a Good YouthBuild Construction Trainer?

"Hire people who have a good working knowledge of their trade and who can work well with youth—both are essential to the success of the program."

"Site trainers have to know what they're doing. They can't earn the students' respect if they are trying to figure out how to do something in front of the participants. They also have to be flexible and be able to work with young people."

"Site trainers must have a good mix of knowledge, patience, and ability to instill good habits and teach real skills. All staff must have the same vision of doing what's best for the youth."

"The staff have to have experience in the trade, a commitment to youth, and a sincere desire to see people uplifted while they're in the program and after."

"Expect to deal with salary shock when trying to recruit construction staff from the private sector into the non-profit sector. The staff you recruit must be committed."

1. The Work

Balancing Training and Production

Within all YouthBuild programs, there is a natural tension between effectively training young people and getting the job done on time. YouthBuild's goal is to train and develop young people and to build quality affordable housing. Your program will have to account for the progress of the work on the site to developers, other contractors, and funders. At the same time, if you race through the production process at the speed of a commercial construction site, the participants will not learn the skills and gain the full experience that they need from the program.

YouthBuild construction trainers across the country have identified six keys that have helped them to maintain a successful balance between training and production:

1. Organize the construction site like a real construction site
2. Quality counts—be willing to do the work twice
3. Keep everyone busy
4. Have a good safety program
5. Use deadlines to your advantage
6. Meet regularly to keep the flow of communication open and to engage participants in solving problems and assessing progress

The rest of this section will address each of these six points.

Keep the Construction Site Real

1. Be Organized

If you as staff are prepared and organized, you will keep your site operating as efficiently as possible. An organized site is also the best learning environment in which to teach participants about a real work site.

2. Establish Routines

Both participants and instructors benefit from routines. Routines help participants develop positive work habits. Aside from minimizing misbehavior, routines help to establish independence. If participants do not have to wait for instructors to tell them what to do, they can begin developing patterns of responsibility.

3. Maintain a Work-Oriented Atmosphere

Complaints, personal problems, and anecdotes should be saved for breaks, lunch time and non-work hours except when a supervisor feels that a situation warrants immediate attention. There is always time for appropriate humor and good cheer, but clowning and horseplay cannot be tolerated during work hours.

4. Plan Ahead

Make sure materials are on the site in advance of when you need them. Have a plan for how you are going to assign participants to different tasks. Have backup plans in case a task is completed faster or slower than you expected.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Make the Construction Site Experience Real

“The participants have to be acclimated to a real work lifestyle; the routine has to be regimented...the only way the participants will understand how to prepare for their future job is if the site is run as if it were a real construction site.”

“Run the construction site as if it were a regular job site; make and stick to a schedule, do safety meetings and so on...”

“Every minute has to be treated like a job site. You have to be ready to move on time first thing in the morning, every morning with no idle time.”

“Make the whole experience real! Explain what’s what and put it into a real context. Teach the jargon, how the industry works, the hierarchy, how money flows, and what drives the industry.”

“Delays and changes in schedules cause a lot of frustration: you have to have a backup plan.”

Quality Counts

Standards of performance on the work site should be high. Do not accept poor or sloppy work. Poor quality gives your program a bad reputation and is not useful training for the participants. If participants make a mistake, have them do the work again. This can involve a waste of materials. Your program needs to assume some waste as part of the cost of training.

At the same time, you cannot expect quality work before its time. The process of learning new skills can be frustrating to everyone. Time should be allotted for participants to practice new skills and techniques. Repetition is key. Give participants time to do manageable projects so they can learn from their mistakes in a safe environment.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Quality Counts

“If the participants don’t do something right, our trainers make them take it apart and do it over. This teaches them the proper way to do something and to be more conscientious the next time around.”

“We find the process is much slower than with skilled workers, but the final product is of higher quality, because we took the time to do it right.”

Keep Everyone Busy

One of your key responsibilities and biggest challenges is to make sure that all the participants are kept busy at the same time. When participants do not have enough to do, or when they do not feel that their work is important, they tend to drift off or get into trouble. Make sure you have enough work and enough materials to keep everyone busy.

It is easy to focus on a few participants and forget about the others. It is especially easy to spend time with the participants who are most eager to learn, or the ones who are always asking questions or seeking out new opportunities. Be sure to give equal attention to all the participants on your crew—both the males and the females, both the loud ones and the quiet ones. Sometimes your best workers will come from the least expected places!



Have a Good Safety Program

A good safety program has several parts:

1. It trains the participants to work safely on the site
2. It means keeping your work site clean and your tools in good working order at all times
3. It includes regular monitoring, safety meetings and other mechanisms to keep safety in the consciousness of everyone on the site
4. It includes a plan for dealing with and reporting accidents promptly

Safety makes for a productive work environment. It is an important part of the learning process for the participants. And safety is critical to protecting your program from disaster.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Safety Counts

"Keep the site clean. A clean site is a safe site. We stop early every day to do clean up."

"It's important to do the safety meeting—you can do them during breaks without making a big deal about them. We do them every Wednesday during break."

"Everyone should be encouraged to get OSHA Safety Training. It's good training and our participants really took well to it."

Use Deadlines to Your Advantage

Deadlines are an unavoidable part of a construction project. But there's also value to the participants in learning about deadlines. Deadlines help keep participants motivated. Understanding the importance of deadlines helps them to understand how the different parts of the construction process fit together. And it helps prepare them for the job market.

Participants can help you meet deadlines if they understand what needs to be done by what deadline. Teach them about the schedule and requirements of your project.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Deadlines

"We have a little healthy competition going between four or five crews. The competition comes partly from the imposed deadlines, but it helps to meet those deadlines."

"Look for solutions from within the participants...they'll then own those solutions."

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

There are a lot of details to making a YouthBuild program run well. Not only must you keep track of all the details of a regular construction project, but you have to coordinate with the other components of the program, and you must keep on top of what is happening with every participant. The key to success in running a YouthBuild program is keeping communication flowing—within your department, between departments, and with the participants. The more everyone is informed, the more cooperative everyone will be. One of the best ways to do this is by setting aside time for regular meetings, including meetings of staff and meetings of participants.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

"Time needs to be set aside every day when the staff can meet—once a week is not good enough."

"We all get together before the participants arrive and again after they leave."

"We do site meetings with the participants every week. You can encourage participation by going around and having everyone say something."

"It's important to set time to deal with participants individually: to address weaknesses and advancements and to keep everyone on the same level."

2. The Participants' Personal Development

Overview

YouthBuild is about helping young people transform their lives. As a construction trainer, you will wear many hats, and your role will include much more than teaching construction. It will also involve helping participants learn how to overcome obstacles in their personal lives and take responsibility for themselves in a work environment. For many construction trainers, this is the first time that they have taken on this kind of role. Here are a few tips from your peers around the country for working successfully with your participants:

1. Build strong relationships with the youth
2. You can't avoid dealing with personal problems
3. Counseling doesn't only happen with a counselor in an office
4. Be a role model
5. Deal with poor attendance promptly
6. Know that not everyone will make it through the program
7. Keep in mind that it's not just a job



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Helping Young People Transform Their Lives

"Not only are you an instructor or a teacher, but you're a parent, a big brother, a big sister, a father confessor, a warden, a referee, you name it."

Build Strong Relationships with Youth

The creation of mentoring relationships between staff and participants is one of the most powerful tools in helping them to make changes in their lives. Successful mentorship requires an atmosphere of trust and respect.

Young people often come into the program doubting any adult's sincerity and commitment. Staff need to work hard to earn the participants' trust. Staff should expect to be tested. Trust comes from staying consistent in what you say and do, modeling the behavior that you expect from participants, and treating everyone equally.

But it is not enough for staff to be respectful of participants. Staff must also be firm in not allowing participants to disrespect one another or staff. Participants need to know that cursing, name-calling, put-downs, and sexist or racist comments have no place on the work site.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Build Strong Relationships with the Youth

"We operate under what we call the "Bond Theory"—that is, in order to effect change, there has to be a significant person in the youth's life. So the site supervisor is expected to form a relationship with the participants based on trust and respect."

The Participants' Personal Development: Construction Staff Are Role Models and Counselors

All young people are guided in their development by adults around them who can give them guidance and helpful advice—parents, older relatives, and teachers. Many YouthBuild participants haven't had enough positive adult mentors and role models to help them in their growth and development. In addition, young people in YouthBuild programs have to deal with a lot of outside pressures. The relationships that you develop through your work with the young people will be very important to them. They may share things with you that they won't share with anyone else, including their counselor. They will look to you for guidance and advice as they are trying to make profound changes in their lives and take on the responsibilities of adulthood.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Construction Staff Are Role Models and Counselors

"Counseling is being done on the work site throughout the day, and done by the construction site staff—the youth don't even know they're being counseled and take better to it, building real relationships with the trainers."

"Counselors and construction field staff need to recognize the differences between them that create tension when dealing with the youth. They really have the same goals, just different approaches to achieving those goals."

You Can't Avoid Personal Problems

You will learn more about the participants' personal lives than you ever wanted to know. Since this may be a new role for you, keep in mind the importance of always respecting your participants' right to confidentiality with their peers, community members, and parents. If participants lose trust in staff with regard to their personal concerns, it will undermine their confidence in the program.

At the same time, if a participant talks to you about a situation that places him or herself, another participant or staff member, or the program in danger, it is your responsibility to share that information with the program manager. The program should have a policy on confidentiality so that the participants are aware that some things have to be handled differently from others.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Helping Participants with Personal Problems

"We stress to the participants from the beginning that this is not just a job to make money—it's about bettering themselves as a whole."

"The site supervisor has to be a lot more than just a foreman. He can't just deal with people's problems by passing them off to a counselor."

"You have to have solutions to their problems. If someone comes to you and says they're on drugs or that they got their girlfriend pregnant, you have to be able to offer solutions or help. You have to earn their trust."

"We deal with ongoing problems: men and women pairing up, pregnancy, families sabotaging the women's participation in the program. We talk a lot about what is not appropriate on the work site."

Be a Role Model

The way you interact with the young people in the program will influence your effectiveness in helping them mature. You need to model the behavior that you are trying to pass on to the participants. It is also important to maintain proper boundaries, as in any participant/teacher relationship.

There is often a temptation to “hang out” with the participants. This includes everything from socializing after hours, telling jokes, drinking together, or sharing confidences. Staff members need to act as strong mentors rather than as friends. Be yourself, have fun, but always show mature adult behavior and never drink with students. Of course, adult staff are expected to be drug-free and to never engage in romantic relationship with participants, regardless of their age.

There is also a temptation to lend money to participants. It is sometimes difficult to see participants in financial need and say “no” to them. But when individual staff members lend money to participants, it creates an atmosphere of secrecy, dependency, favoritism, and mistrust. Instead, teach participants how to manage the money they receive from YouthBuild as a stipend, including bringing lunches from home and limiting some of their more costly social activities. If a participant is having a serious financial emergency, work with the counselor and program manager to see if the program has an emergency assistance policy.

One program budgeted over \$10,000 for emergency assistance to participants, which the participants emphasized as critical in their very high attendance rate. However, loans to participants from the program with the expectation of repayment are a bad idea for participants because they do not have the capacity to pay them back, and it distorts the relationship to have them in debt to the program.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Be a Role Model

“It’s more than just building houses...it’s about improving their lives. You have to surround the youth with morally upright people.”

“The problems are the same in every city. The difference is the quality of the people who operate the program.”

“Instructors must lead by example, model the behavior they are trying to create. For example, you can’t expect the participants to wear their safety gear if the trainers aren’t wearing their own.”

Deal with Poor Attendance Promptly

Training cannot take place if the participant perceives a personal problem as more important than the day’s work schedule. Be prepared to confront the problems that obstruct the growth of individual participants.

Latecomers and stragglers should not be overlooked; it is not helpful to the participant or fair to the rest of the group. Participants should receive whatever consequences or assistance the program policy and particular circumstances demand, whether it is a stern warning, dock of pay, counseling or other consequence. Do not assign menial or unappealing jobs such as clean up or moving of material as punishment. These jobs ought to be shared by everyone as part of their common training experience.

The counseling staff will be important partners in dealing with attendance and other behavior problems. At many YouthBuild programs, participants are required to sign a contract which spells out what is expected of them. If your program has a participant contract, make sure you have a copy of that contract, and an official way to report infractions to the program manager or counseling staff.

As a trainer, you will need to distinguish common excuses from real problems that need professional attention. When a participant has a serious problem that interferes with his or her training, the information should be shared with the counseling staff and discussed for supportive action.

Many programs have a policy of providing bonuses of \$25-50 per pay period for perfect attendance. This incentive is important for teaching that the person who is there all the time is actually more valuable to the project than the one who is not 100% reliable.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Deal with Poor Attendance Promptly

“Poor attendance was a huge problem in the beginning. What helped was going over rules and expectations, reinforcing them on a regular basis, and enforcing disciplinary measures—in some cases leading to termination.”

“We had each participant sign a participant contract and terminated a lot of people at the beginning based on that signed contract.”

“When we realized attendance was the foundation of success, we put in place lots of incentives in the form of bonuses for perfect attendance every pay period and raises for cumulative good performance every two months.”

Not Every Participant Will Make it Through the Program

Working with participants can be frustrating. It is difficult to watch self-destructive behavior and to accept the fact that not all participants are ready to change their lives right now.

Try to take the long view. It is helpful to remember that change takes a long time. As many YouthBuild programs have discovered, the impact of your work may show up years from now when the participant who leaves the program internalizes how YouthBuild affected his life and makes better life choices. Sometimes a participant who left the program or was dismissed will come back at a later time, ready to make a positive change.

Whatever happens, don't vent your frustrations with the participants. Sometimes it is tempting to share your frustration with participants, but don't do it. Venting about other participants, other staff, or other aspects of the program will undermine its success.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Not Every Participant Will Make it through the Program

"You can't reach everyone. You have to try with everyone, but ultimately you have to accept that not everyone will make it."

"When we pinpoint problems, we try to direct the right staff person to help deal with that problem. We try counseling. Still we lose some."

"If you do realize that someone is not working out, deal with the situation quickly so that it does not affect the whole program."

Quote from a participant: "Some people have never even been in a positive environment with people who care. Even if they drop out, they have gotten a glimpse of a different way of life that will help them decide to change. They have to start somewhere."

It's Not Just a Job!

Working at a YouthBuild program is more than just a job. It requires deep dedication and commitment from the staff. You can be sure that the participants notice and appreciate the investment that you make in their lives.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

It's Not Just a Job!

"The trainers have to care about the participants. You can't look at your role as a punch in-punch out job."

"You can't look at this as if it's only a job... You have to give a lot. You have to go inside yourself and find things that are deep inside. This is the most rewarding work I've ever done... and the hardest."

"Keep at it. It's worth it."

3. The Participants' Learning

What Are Participants Expected to Learn?

While you are constructing a building and mentoring participants, you will also be teaching them. As a construction trainer, one of your goals is to ensure that your participants leave YouthBuild with the knowledge and skills that they will need to become economically independent and play leadership roles in their community.

On the construction site, participants are expected to learn five different types of skills:

1. Proper work habits
2. Leadership skills
3. Construction skills
4. Practical application of classroom learning
5. Safe work practices

Proper Work Habits

Many YouthBuild participants have never had a job or have not been able to keep a job for very long. The construction site provides a chance for them to learn the skills it takes to keep a job and to be successful in a job. As a construction trainer, part of your role is to teach participants positive work habits such as how to follow directions, how to take initiative, and how to follow through on an assignment.

Positive work habits should include:

- Preparedness (coming to work in proper dress, with tools, awake and ready to function well)
- Attendance and punctuality
- Understanding of and respect for safety requirements and work rules
- Accepting supervision and following directions
- Taking initiative and asking questions when necessary
- Learning to complete assigned tasks
- Cooperating with co-workers and treating co-workers with respect
- Resolving conflicts constructively
- Using the proper trade vocabulary



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Proper Work Habits

"Have your main emphasis on basic work skills, not just on carpentry. This enables the graduates to have a better chance at succeeding on a job."

"Bad language, poor work habits and being unprepared on the site are all likely to be problems that you have to deal with."

"We've had to teach the participants to call when they're going to be late or absent."