

Script for Out-of-School Youth Recruitment and Retention

Slide 1:

Maisha:

Hello and welcome to Our Journey Together: Summer Webcast Mini-series on Out-of-School Youth recruitment and retention strategies.

Getting out-of-school youth to join our programs and getting them to stay until completion can be challenging. Out-of-school youth face various challenges in their lives which prevent them from being able to give their full participation. Developing strategies to enroll, engage, and retain out-of-school youth is critical to our programs and their personal success.

Slide 2:

Maisha:

Today we have Kimberly McCaffrey, Manager of Youth System for Philadelphia Works, and Christin Bell, Hub Project Manager for Philadelphia Youth Network to share with us their strategies for engaging, recruiting and retaining out-of-school youth.

Philadelphia Works was awarded a Career Pathways for Youth, or Summer Jobs, grant and has been doing some great work.

Kim and Christin, please tell us about the landscape of Philadelphia and a little about your program

Kim:

Thanks, Maisha. Philadelphia Works – the organization I work for, is the local workforce development board in Philadelphia. We are the lead fiscal agent for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) workforce development funding.

Our city has four American Job Centers called PA CareerLink® Centers – this is a brand utilized across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. CareerLink®

Centers work with Mandated and Community partners in order to provide services for people 18+ years old to make connections to employment.

Philadelphia invests our Youth dollars a bit differently. We work in partnership with a YouthWorks Administrator and a network of Youth Service Providers to best provide year-round services for youth ages 16 – 24. As you can see, the graphic depicts the outcomes of youth and young adults in our area for high school graduation and employment as of 2015 when compared to the US and Pennsylvania. In order to best support the needs of our local area, Philadelphia has over twenty-five year-round programs operating today in partnership with fourteen different providers. To support our summer employment system these numbers more than double.

Today, we're going to share some promising practices from one of those programs. Christin, can you share some information with us.

Christin:

Sure, the Hub at PA CareerLink® West, also known as the Hub, as Maisha mentioned, was made possible by the US Department of Labor's Summer Jobs and Beyond: Career Pathways for Youth grant. This program has been funded along with 10 other grantees since May 2016 and is a place-based initiative targeting the Promise Zone in West Philadelphia.

Promise Zones, for those of you who are not aware, are areas of high poverty, high population, and high crime across the country; there are twenty-two Promise Zones in total today.

The Hub serves both In-School and Out-of-School Youth between the ages of 16 – 24 who live, work, or attend school in the West Philadelphia Promise Zone. Our overall goals for this program are to serve two hundred and fifty young people (150 in-school youth and 100 out-of-school youth), with the hopes of connecting them to unsubsidized employment, post-secondary education, and/or job training opportunities.

Today we will share strategies around recruitment and retention specifically for our Out-of-School population.

Slide 3:

Maisha:

What are your best practices for recruiting and retaining out-of-school youth?

Christin

Recruitment of Out-of-School Youth can be difficult because these young people exist in many places yet are typically disconnected from community programs and resources. Based on experience, youth programs have the most recruitment success through word of mouth, specifically referrals for friends and family from program participants.

The key to a successful word of mouth recruitment is clear messaging of program eligibility, resources/supports and goals. It's important to make sure language internally as well as external outreach messaging is consistent and clear about your program's services so that partners and participants are spreading the word about your program accurately. Another helpful strategy we've found to encourage word of mouth recruitment by program participants, was to tie it to a leadership service and incentive for each successful referral leading to enrollment.

Also, in order to attract young people, it's important to develop a program and/or company branding that's appealing to youth who you're trying to reach. Ways you can assess your brandings effectiveness is by hosting a focus group of participants in the program to get real-time feedback on design and language from your youth's perspectives.

You also want to ensure that outreach materials are placed in areas where youth have access to them. For example, public transportation, social media, and local hang outs are great places to post palm cards, flyers, and share information about your program. You can see an example of outreach via Instagram that our team used for the Hub. Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat all allow for targeted outreach and can link to your programs website for easy access to your program's enrollment steps.

Additionally, we've found once we've gotten young people through the door, condensing the enrollment process to one session considerably limited the amount of drop off during intake. It's also important to have flexible orientations throughout the week to accommodate fluctuating schedules and availability of young people. And finally, incentivizing timely completion of enrollment has been a very effective recruitment strategy. This helps to teach youth and young adults the importance of being prepared and understanding their personal documents (such as ID's or Social Security cards). This strategy can encourage recruitment, but also prepares a young person for employers who will ask for their information to hire.

Slide 4:

Kim:

Thanks for all the great info, Christin. Another key component of recruitment is working with partners in your area. It's imperative for our youth workforce systems to know that we cannot do this work alone. Often times, we all work with a mix of what we refer to as "Core" and "Community" partners. Core partners are basically those organizations who have been written into and funded by grant proposals or have formal subcontracts within our program designs. Community partners are those organizations who develop informal relationships or maybe even have an MOU with a program to support specific areas.

As it relates to the recruitment of out-of-school youth at the Hub, we've worked with a few Core partners. If you do not already, I'd suggest becoming better acquainted with your local School District and American Job Center. Both these partners are contracted to support the Hub, however relationships exist in many of our programs with these partners. These can be great partners due to their access to the out-of-school youth population. Our School District partners with us regarding re-engagement activities for youth who have not completed their high school equivalency as well as connecting graduates who may not have a clear post-secondary plan. The AJC provides referrals and opportunities for co-enrollment to leverage additional services for participants.

Ultimately, when it comes to recruitment partners – the more the merrier. As Christin mentioned, it's important to make sure your message is clear but the more people and organizations you can share it with, the more your program casts a net for potential participants. We've provided some sample organization types that would be beneficial for this targeted outreach.

Slide 5:

Maisha:

What strategies have not worked for recruiting and retaining out-of-school youth? Why didn't they work? What would you do differently next time?

Kim:

Great questions, Maisha. There are lots of challenges that programs face when recruiting out-of-school youth. A few challenges we're going to discuss today, we've actually already shared strategies that could potentially help programs prevent these from occurring.

As Christin talked about earlier, typically word of mouth is the most successful strategy to recruit out-of-school youth. So, when you pilot or implement a new program, recruitment may be difficult since the word of mouth needs to be established. With spreading the word, it's necessary to ensure your program has dedicated outreach/enrollment positions and is providing intensive training for them. These staff will be responsible for ensuring your message is shared clearly in your community.

Another aspect of recruitment that is important to set up at program implementation is your programs web presence. When we first began enrollment at the Hub, our website had not been developed. This can affect the accessibility for young people to learn about your program. Having a website is just one method to reach out-of-school youth. Our program has tried many types of outreach to engage with potential participants. What we've learned is that face-to-face meetings are more successful than contact via telephone and email.

Lastly, a big challenge workforce programs run into with recruiting and enrolling out-of-school youth can be suitability for services. This includes the young person's competing needs, career and college readiness expectations, and understanding of services at enrollment and during programming. It is common for young people to attend orientation and/or meet with staff because they need a job immediately, like yesterday, but most workforce programs are planning to support a young person's career pathway journey. This is when it's most important to make sure your program's message is clear and to ensure that youth are being connected to the best program fit. Asking questions and having clear communication with youth and young adults early in the enrollment process will help to address this challenge.

Slide 5:

Maisha:

What feedback have you received from out-of-school youth on your recruitment and retention strategies? How have you used this feedback to improve your efforts?

Christin:

Feedback we've received during recruitment from young people have been primarily around supports for transportation assistance and professional clothing for interviews. Travel can be expensive for youth who no longer have access to school transpasses or tokens, and although our target area consists of only 3 zip codes young people are traveling to and from different areas throughout the city.

Additionally, we've experienced young people who need assistance with retrieving copies of source documentation such as social security card, photo ID or birth certificate in order to complete enrollment. It's important to have supports in place to assist young people through the process of applying for new documentation as well as helping them to navigate to find free resources to help cover the cost of those documents before enrollment into the program.

Finally, due to life circumstances such as single parent households and GED program requirements, it's important to have a flexible schedule for programming throughout the week during morning, afternoon, and if possible early evening hours.

Which leads us to retention strategies.

Slide 7:

Maisha:

How do you use your partners to retain out-of-school youth?

Christin:

We've found that our team has been most successful with engaging young people when they have developed and maintain a rapport with youth. Young people in our program are coming with many barriers that prevent them from connecting to opportunities and persisting in them. It's important to build trust with participants through intensive and intentional case management. This will help identify barriers that arise during their time in the program and will help support staff assist young people in connecting to needed supportive services to help alleviate some of those barriers.

It's also important to create a space for peer-to-peer learning through bi-weekly cohort meetings where youth learn from each other's education and employment experiences as well as learn about community resources and opportunities within their surrounding neighborhoods.

Finally, look for ways to incentivize participation and completion of activities. Incentives go a long way and can have a great impact on your programs retention. Incentives also are useful in successful transitions to the next step of a young person's career-pathway journey.

Slide 8:

Maisha:

Thank you Philadelphia for sharing those great recruitment and retention strategies for out-of-school youth and thank you all for listening to Our Journey Together: Summer Webcast Mini-series.