

I. IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION:

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II. GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of Program/Project Nominated: Minnesota's Youth Practitioners Network
Nomination Category: Professional Development/Capacity Building
Month/Year Initiated: January 1998
Is the nomination for: statewide program
If local, the name of the locality is:

III. RESOURCE

Total Start-Up Costs: Direct: \$0
Fund Source(s): WIA and Minnesota Youth Program
Indirect: \$6,000

Total On-going Annual Costs: Direct: \$0
Fund Source(s): WIA and Minnesota Youth Program
Indirect: \$6,000

IV. SYNOPSIS (Narrative Section)

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V. CRITERIA INFORMATION (Narrative Section)

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National Customer Service Award
Synopsis
Minnesota's Youth Practitioners Network

The Minnesota Youth Practitioners Network provides much needed technical assistance to local Youth Council's/youth service providers by locally trained staff, opens lines of communication between state and local staff, and builds the capacity of local youth employment and training providers. Members of the Youth Practitioners Network meet quarterly to discuss youth workforce issues, network, share ideas and best practices and receive technical assistance.

The Minnesota Youth Practitioners Network has been the impetus for all Workforce Service Area's (WSA) to meet youth performance standards as set by the state and the Department of Labor. WSA's have continued to provide quality programming and planning for youth employment and training programs.

The Minnesota Youth Practitioners Network should be considered for a national award because it bridges the gap between state and local youth employment providers. This innovative idea of working with and training Youth Program Specialist to provide peer training has brought about a philosophical shift in Minnesota. The shift occurred when state and local staff started working together to help Minnesota's youth gain valuable workforce skills.

Minnesota's Youth Practitioners Network

I. Project Basis

A. What was the original customer-driven basis for developing the project/program?

The original basis of this system-wide approach was to provide local Workforce Service Area youth program staff with an opportunity to network, share ideas and best practices. The inception of this concept came from the Office of Youth Development's staff philosophy of non-competitiveness, helping others learn what works in regards to youth employment and training and establishing open lines of communication between state and local level staff. There was a desire to build capacity within youth employment and training providers and to be proactive in ensuring local program compliance.

The Minnesota Youth Practitioner's Network (YPN) provides immediate technical assistance to Youth Councils/youth service providers by locally trained staff and builds a sense of camaraderie among Minnesota's youth employment and training providers. All are willing to share their "best practices".

B. What were the objectives/goals?

The objectives of the Minnesota Youth Practitioner's Network are to enhance local Workforce Service Area staff's capabilities of providing peer-based training and networking. The YPN provides local youth staff the opportunity to provide technical assistance at the local level (there is much more of a "buy in" with this approach). The ultimate objective is to enhance and build the capacity within Minnesota's Youth Workforce Development System, which in turns provides the ultimate customer service to the youth of Minnesota.

C. What customer problem does this project solve and how was it identified?

There was the need to build capacity to provide technical assistance at the local level. The implementation of the YPN brought about a cohesiveness and desire to work together to assist youth develop the necessary skills to enter the workforce and become productive members of society.

II. Project Operations

A. How is the project developed and operated to incorporate customer input?

The Minnesota Youth Practitioners Network was developed incorporating local Workforce Service Area (WSA) Youth Program Specialists' need for a system of peer training and technical assistance. Office of Youth Development staff conducted meetings with all WSA Youth Program Specialists to determine their technical assistance needs. The Youth Program Specialists stated they wanted a

system of peer training whereby local staff would receive training in youth development and employment and training issues and then return to the local area to train staff and other employment and training providers. Local staff stated they wanted a system in which they would be an active participant in their own learning. It is well researched that learners who are actively engaged in their learning are more effective and productive.

- B. Nomination must demonstrate that project development involved customers, customer data, and/or a cross-section of staff having the most direct contact with customers affected by the project/program nominated.**

Youth Practitioners Network was developed based on local youth providers' feedback at inception of Job Training Partnership Act programs. Local providers expressed need for capacity building.

III. Use of Award Funds

- A. How would award monies be utilized to build and expand the objectives of the project?**

The award monies would be utilized to develop a comprehensive Peer-to-Peer Conference thereby expanding local capacity building efforts. Additional funds would provide the Youth Practitioners Network the opportunity to continue quarterly YPN meetings. These funds would allow for more in-depth training in such areas as case management, performance measures, program development, and collaboration.

- B. What would be done to share information about the project and to assist others to initiate a similar project in their area?**

1. Program design written and shared.
2. The program design posted on Office of Youth Development website.
3. Staff would provide technical assistance to other states in implementing a similar program.
4. Conduct technical assistance presentations at regional and national conferences.
5. On-site consultation, if necessary.

- C. A brief budget must be included with your nomination indicating how funds would be utilized if awarded \$25,000.**

1. Peer-to-Peer Conference - \$8,000
2. Internal Staff Development for state staff - \$2,000
3. Quarterly YPN Meetings - \$7,000
4. WSA Mini-grants; local and regional Capacity Building Activities - \$8,000

IV. Project Results

- A. Points will be awarded for nominations that show results—based on meeting a customer definition of quality, and customer satisfaction indicators. Includes demonstrating that original objectives have been met or exceeded; measurable performance indicators; customer and/or staff feedback, and other success outcomes.**

All WSA's met youth performance standards as set by the state and the Department of Labor. A monthly report developed by the Office of Youth Development allows local WSA's to monitor their progress in meeting performance standards. There has been and continues to be consistent, quality programming and planning, which is an indication that the Youth Practitioner's Network serves as a valuable capacity building tool and maintains an open line of communication between state and local staff.

Youth Practitioners express satisfaction with the Youth Practitioner's Network during Peer-to-Peer Conferences, YPN meetings, and during conversations with Office of Youth Program Director.

- B. What impact has this project had on professional development/capacity building project as demonstrated in the nomination entry? Category may include: leadership; training; a customer focused reorganization; staff involvement and empowerment; effecting a cultural change---any area of professional development or building the capacity of staff to deliver quality customer services.**

Local level staff have enhanced their skills as peer-trainers and have developed effective programs as a result of the capacity building efforts of the entire Youth Practitioner's Network. A cultural change occurred with the implementation of the Youth Practitioner's Network. This change occurred in the manner in which state staff worked with and provided technical assistance to local level staff. There was a broadening of the lines of communication between state and local staff. With the Youth Practitioner's Network inception, local level staff are empowered to take their learning into their own hands, which provided a more effective learning environment. In addition, Relations between state staff and local level staff is relaxed because of the non-competitive nature of the Youth Practitioner's Network. This relaxed, non-competitive environment allows for more effective customer service to youth that the Youth Practitioner's Network is charged to serve.

- C. If similar projects/programs exist (in other states, for example), it is very important to distinguish your entry from these other similar projects.**

Not aware of another program/network like this in the country. The Youth Practitioner's Network is a collective voice for getting things done.