



Youth Philanthropy to Support Career Preparation in Rural Areas

Youth Council: Mendocino County WIB Youth Council

Element: Youth Leadership and Career Preparation

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Youth Involvement, Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

The Challenge: Mendocino County is a large rural area in the north coast region of California. Most jobs are found in the incorporated areas (Point Arena, Willits, Fort Bragg, and Ukiah) although 68 percent of the people live outside of these areas. According to Kathleen Swain, staff to the Mendocino County Workforce Investment Board Youth Council, “Transportation can be a major barrier to youth trying to find jobs. The coast is about a one and a half hour drive on winding narrow roads through rugged mountain ranges to the inland region, where most of the jobs exist. We have many remote communities, Point Arena and Laytonville for example, where public transportation is limited or non-existent.”

In addition, Mendocino County is going through a change in employment opportunities. Swain says, “In the last ten years, the local economy has shifted dramatically. The county has historically been dependent on high wage industries such as timber, fishing, and manufacturing, and those jobs are declining. Like many counties, we have become service-sector oriented, and the jobs tend to be low wage. While this might indicate more available jobs for youth, instead they are competing for those positions with adults who have work experience. Even when it comes to subsidized vocational training opportunities, Worker’s Compensation becomes an expensive issue for our small businesses, who comprise about 81 percent of businesses in our county. And there are almost no jobs for youth ages 14-15.” The lack of jobs and training opportunities for young people was confirmed during youth focus groups conducted in 2002 by the Youth Council, in which youth also indicated a need for more access to leadership activities in their communities.

The Practice and the Evidence: In an effort to address some of these issues, the Mendocino Youth Council hosted two Youth Summits to stimulate youth engagement in local projects. The idea for the Youth Philanthropy Board (YPB) to oversee the youth-led projects was incubated during the second Youth Summit. The aim of this project was to provide youth with leadership and vocational skills and to encourage involvement in their communities (which may be otherwise thwarted by transportation, economic or other barriers.). According to Swain, the Youth Council envisioned that the projects funded by the YPB and Youth Council be “developed by youth, led by youth, and awarded by youth.” In addition, they hoped that the projects would focus on gaps within their communities as well as produce possible entrepreneurship opportunities for youth as they grow into adulthood.

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The Youth Council successfully applied for and received a \$9,000 grant from the S.H. Cowell Foundation in San Francisco for training purposes, and received additional Mendocino County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) funding to grant additional projects. Teens and young adults from throughout the county were recruited by the Youth Council to be YPB members, attend five trainings, develop a request for proposal, award funding, and oversee all of the ongoing youth projects.

Since 2002, the Mendocino County Workforce Investment Board Youth Council along with the YPB (beginning in 2004) have funded ten youth-led, community-based projects using funds donated by the MCDSS. At this point, the Youth Council has handed the grant making reins over to the group of young philanthropists. By conclusion of the pilot project in June of 2005, the YPB members successfully provided oversight for six local youth projects.

The Details: Before members of the YPB were selected, a five-member Youth Council subcommittee took the primary role for engaging and supporting youth involvement. They recruited fifteen youth to be YPB members (to compensate for dropouts) and in the end, eight members completed the project. Subcommittee members planned every training, and Youth Council staff supported logistics. Each youth was sponsored by one of the committee members who made sure that he or she got to the trainings. In addition, YPB members were given a \$30 stipend per meeting/training, and meals were also provided. Swain says, “One of the biggest challenges is not to take over, and to trust that the youth will figure it out. It’s easy for adults to step in and state their opinions. Part of the learning process for the adults is allowing youth to make their own decisions about how to fund the projects.”

Once the YPB was selected, the Youth Council subcommittee coordinated several trainings to support their personal/professional development and work on the board. In September 2004, an introductory training was held to provide general information about youth philanthropy to both YPB members and the Youth Council subcommittee. Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), a national organization with expertise in youth philanthropy, facilitated the training.

The Youth Council contracted with a local non-profit, the North Coast Rural Challenge Network, to lead a second training for the YPB and other youth who were potential project applicants. Approximately 100 students from throughout the county attended this training, which covered project development and documentation. Members of the YPB developed and distributed their Request for Application (RFA) at the event. In addition, the RFA was sent to schools and distributed through the Youth Councils regular email channels. Press releases to the local media also announced the RFA.

In January 2005, the YPB reviewed the seven submissions/applications for the project. Using a rubric tool, the YPB selected three youth-led projects. Each of the awardees received \$500. Project topics included an outdoor education and recreation program for teens, a video project about life on the reservation in Point Arena, and a high school coffee cart business.

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In addition, at the following Youth Council meeting, the members elected to give the YPB full oversight of three more projects, previously funded by the Youth Council, including a teen nightclub, cultural diversity training, and a presentation to high school students on the dangers of drinking and driving.

In March 2005, the YPB asked representatives from each of the projects to present updates on their progress. In addition, the Youth Council arranged for a panel of community funders to provide fundseeking advice for the project participants.

YLI facilitated the fifth and final training for the year, and the youth assessed their efforts to date. As the pilot project reached its conclusion, the YPB scheduled their final meeting to discuss ideas for sustainability and board structure without projected funding. Seven of the eight YPB members elected to stay on the board for the next year, even without stipends. They will also explore different avenues for meeting (due to transportation challenges) such as video conferencing.

Breakthrough Moment: As the funded projects are reaching completion, the Youth Council and YPB are seeing an incredible impact on the community and they are reaping local support. According to Swain, the breakthrough has been “recognizing that the projects have gone beyond the initial concept and have had a bigger impact than originally imagined.”

Swain reflects, “for example, a teen night club received the funding to establish a safe and drug-free environment for teens to have dances and concerts. [They] held a concert that about 200 youth attended. Community members are starting to come forth to support them, so it has a good chance of becoming a successful, long term project.” A second project funded a “cultural awareness training” at a local high school, with the intention of addressing concerns about race and ethnicity. An unexpected outcome of this event was the unveiling of issues related to a lack of awareness of gay students’ concerns. In response, the high school has formed a gay-straight alliance club.

What’s Next for this YCidea?: The next phase for the Youth Philanthropy Board involves fundraising, both to continue trainings for the board members and to acquire funds to grant to future projects. Recognizing the valuable contribution they have made to the community, seven board members elected to continue as philanthropists and will recruit additional members. They have assessed a need for additional training in project evaluation and formal board procedures.

Where to Go for More Information

Mendocino County WIB Youth Council

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Tools

[Sample Youth Philanthropy RFP Application](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/YouthPhilanthropyRFPApplication.doc>)

[Sample Youth Philanthropy RFP Proposal](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/YouthPhilanthropyRFPApplication.doc>)

[Mendocino Workforce Investment News June 2005](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/YouthPhilanthropyRFPApplication.doc>)

[Economic Scorecard](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/June%20Economic%20Scorecard.pdf>)