

# Capital Region Workforce Development Board

## Youth Committee

### Five-year Strategic Plan – Executive Summary

June 2002

---

In the spring of 2002, the Capital Region Youth Committee developed a five-year strategic plan to address the needs of youth in 30 towns and cities in the Greater Hartford region. The Youth Committee's vision, "*Developing Tomorrow's Workforce Today*," reflects the region's growing demographic shift to a young, less educated, urban-based future workforce upon which the older, suburban population will depend for goods and services. As the average age of the workforce drops, the Region's economic growth and prosperity will become heavily dependent upon the success of its younger, urban, minority workers. Currently, significant numbers of these youth are living below the poverty line, dropping out of high school without achieving their diplomas, and struggling to attain the skills they need to find a job and make a career. The Youth Committee intends for its Strategic Plan to be a lightning rod to coalesce extensive resources from a broad range of sectors to meet the continuing needs of young people.

Over a period of six months, the strategic planning committee conducted focus groups with youth, parents, service providers, and other regional stakeholders. Through these focus groups, they identified strengths and weaknesses in current programs and services for youth. Based on these discussions and additional information collected by Committee members and staff, the Youth Committee adopted as its mission "*to serve as a catalyst to build a comprehensive youth delivery system that, through community partnerships, will give youth the skills and education they need to get good jobs and a career.*"

By working in partnership with parents, youth, educators, employers, youth service workers, community members and community leaders at all levels, the Youth Committee will serve as a catalyst to assemble the resources young people in the Capital Region need to become productive members of the workforce and contributing citizens.

To accomplish this mission, the Youth Committee identified four goals, each with concrete objectives and strategies. They are:

*Goal 1: The Youth Committee will develop a coordinated youth workforce development system in the region by facilitating community partnerships among service providers and key stakeholders.*

*Goal 2: The Youth Committee, through its partnerships, will promote youth development, employability skills, careers, and important life skills to develop tomorrow's workforce.*

*Goal 3: The Youth Committee will promote academic achievement by requiring providers to encourage young people to pursue not only high school diplomas and General Education Diplomas, but also training or post-secondary education.*

*Goal 4: The Youth Committee will assess and develop strategic action steps to address the needs of out-of-school youth in this region.*

### **A Closer Look**

**Goal 1: The Youth Committee will develop a coordinated youth workforce development system in the region by facilitating partnerships among key stakeholders.**

#### *Objectives*

1. Engage service providers and representatives from businesses, faith-based organizations, education and juvenile justice systems, youth and parents, in dialogue about workforce trends, their impact on job opportunities, and their relationship to opportunities for youth. Create opportunities for these key stakeholders to be involved and invested in youth development.
2. Work with stakeholders to identify strengths and weaknesses in the community's youth development efforts. Publicize these accomplishments and needs, and recruit untapped resources that can help address shortfalls.
3. Recognize, publicize, and replicate successful community programs and services that are helping youth succeed in the areas of academic achievement, youth development, employability skills and leadership.
4. Encourage service providers to become a part of building the comprehensive delivery system by facilitating connections among agencies/organizations. Foster open dialogue among providers to identify and share resources and information among key stakeholders, illustrate areas of need, and address duplication of services.
5. Collaborate with youth serving organizations to create a Youth Worker Academy to train and develop youth worker competencies and improve program quality.

#### *Strategies*

1. Recruit "executives on loan" from Hartford-area businesses and organizations, particularly those with public relations skills, to supplement Youth Committee staff resources.

2. Prepare an annual “State of Youth in the Capital Region” summary that disseminates research pertaining to Connecticut youth and highlights accomplishments and goals. Include a section with the opinion of youth, in their own words. Hold a press conference, with Hartford area luminaries, to introduce the summary, the needs highlighted in it, and the community response that will address those needs.
3. Host an annual spring award ceremony to recognize businesses that have created significant opportunities for youth development in the capital region. Engage luminaries as judges and presenters, and recruit sponsors and the media to underwrite and highlight the event.
4. Design and sponsor an annual “Service Provider Summit” that encourages service providers and businesses to learn effective strategies for improving their programs and building peer-to-peer relationships.
5. Leverage funding, such as the Youth Offender Demonstration Grant and the state/United Way INFOLINE, to build a database of programs and service providers in the Capital Region for use by the provider community, youth and parents to increase and improve the quality of referrals for service.
6. Collaborate with other institutions in the area that invest in youth development (government and philanthropic) and identify ways to collaborate or leverage funding for youth development activities and the implementation of the Youth Worker Academy.
7. Partner with the City of Hartford Youth Service Bureau to develop a “Hartford Access System” that will link youth who do not live in the Youth Opportunity target neighborhood with similar services provided by youth serving providers who agree to participate in the collaborative.

**Goal 2:           The Youth Committee, through its partnerships, will promote youth development, employability skills and important life skills to develop tomorrow’s workforce.**

***Objectives***

1. Appoint up to five youth members to the Youth Committee and actively engage them in the decision-making process.
2. Incorporate input provided and gathered by youth into the Youth Committee planning process and request for proposal process.
3. Require life skills/citizenship and employability skills training in all service provider programs.

4. Support and research programs that help young people make clear connections between education and career and encourage youth to stay in school.
5. Encourage all service providers to meet the PEPNET criteria and become PEPNET-certified.
6. Require service providers to connect with mental health and substance abuse programs and services to assist youth overcome these barriers to employment and education.

### *Strategies*

1. Meet with leaders from youth advisory groups, such as the City of Hartford Youth Commission, Common Ground Program sponsored by Leadership Greater Hartford, and the Connecticut Youth Forum, to identify youth who would be interested in participating in the decision-making process of the Youth Committee.
2. Sponsor and, where possible, expand the Youth Employability Skills Academy (YES) that teaches youth job training skills and offers them an opportunity to interact with area employers.
3. Review the best practices of the School-to-Career initiative in the Greater Hartford region with the region's School-to-Career coordinators and promote those practices that best establish the intrinsic link between school and careers.
4. Manage the Youth Opportunity Hartford initiative to meet its goals and monitor the success of the project for "lessons learned" in the target area that could be replicated in other youth programs across the region.
5. Incorporate PEPNET criteria into the RFP process and program reviews, and work with service providers to ensure that their programs meet these standards.
6. Continue to hold public capacity building sessions on topics such as grant writing, PEPNET criteria, elements of successful programs, and evaluation factors for the award of WIA youth funds.

**Goal 3: The Youth Committee will promote academic achievement by requiring providers to encourage young people to pursue not only high school diplomas and General Education Diplomas, but also training or post-secondary education.**

*Objectives*

1. Require programs that receive Workforce Investment Act funds to:
  - reinforce academic skills that are complimentary to those in the school system
  - encourage youth who are not participating in post-secondary education to participate in job training opportunities that result in certification, apprenticeship opportunities, or vocational credentials such as cosmetology, nursing, automotive technicians, computer repair
  - provide “workplace readiness” skills and ensure that all youth receive and master these skills
  - encourage youth programs to support participants’ highest educational attainment.
2. Work with region school system to recognize Board funded programs and curriculums for high school credit that assists students in attaining their high school diploma.
3. Support alternative education strategies that target youth who have not been successful in traditional learning environments and provide students with alternatives to achieving a high school diploma or GED.

*Strategies*

1. Incorporate access to academic skill remediation, tutorials, ESL and GED services into the RFP process and program reviews, and work with service providers to ensure that their programs meet these standards.
2. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding with regional and local school systems to offer academic credit for participation in programs that receive state and federal funding.
3. Create a marketing strategy geared to youth that is based on the economic benefits of graduating from high school. Recruit donations of PR services from Hartford-area firms and from Connecticut celebrities who appeal to youth to participate in a stay-in-school campaign.
4. Utilize school systems and community providers to identify students who are at risk of dropping out and refer them to appropriate programs.
5. Engage employers, specifically human resource departments, to develop a curriculum that helps demonstrate the link between academics and career.
6. Award certificates and incentives to youth for completing training/modules that assists youth in becoming “workplace ready.”

**Goal 4: The Youth Committee will assess and develop strategic action steps to address the needs of out-of-school youth in the region.**

*Objectives*

1. Encourage out-of-school youth to return to an educational program to obtain their GED or high school diploma.
2. Identify alternative methods of instruction or incentives to engage out-of-school youth in meaningful activities.
3. Identify programs in other communities that are effectively addressing the needs of out-of-school youth and assess whether they could be replicated in the Capital region.
4. Collect information on the intense needs of out-of-school youth and disseminate it to key stakeholders to begin developing a holistic system to address their needs.
5. Advocate for out-of-school youth to be provided with similar services as in-school youth that encourages them focus on their future and develop a career path.
6. Develop strategies to replace Youth Opportunity Grant funds and maintain YO! programming after the federal grant expires.

*Strategies*

1. Make connections to the City of Hartford Out-of-School Youth Task Force and Workforce Competitiveness Task Force and the Alternative Learning Strategies Workgroup hosted by the United Way of the Capital Area to share information and seek ways to work collaboratively to address the needs of youth.
2. Recruit resources for, and develop a, marketing campaign directed at youth ages 16-24 that highlights opportunities to obtain employability and skills training, including Individual Training Accounts, One-Stops, Workforce Investment Act programs, Youth Opportunity programs, and Job Corps.
3. Support service provider programs that incorporate GED/ABE /high school diploma activities into their program model.
4. Host focus groups with out-of-school youth to discuss their needs and how they feel providers and key stakeholders can help them.
5. Incorporate mental health services, substance abuse services, recreational, leadership, and civic activities for out-of-school youth into program designs

funded by the Board to help youth network with their peers and caring adults in positive social settings.

6. Support non-traditional methods of instruction, such as entrepreneurial skills, to engage and motivate youth to learn and work.
7. Actively engage stakeholders in developing replacement sources of funding for YO! Grant programming.