
Start-Up Challenge: Recruitment for the Young Fathers Project

By Laine Renfro Sedillo, Executive Director, New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition

The New Mexico Young Fathers Project began in 1999, with funding from the Office of Population Affairs and its collaborative partners: Planned Parenthood of New Mexico and the Father & Family Center. The program received funding to develop and provide a multifaceted educational program to address the needs of young parenting males at 10 teen parent sites across the state. One of the biggest start-up challenges was recruitment of AmeriCorps members. Through the process of recruitment, program staff learned some valuable lessons:

■ **Position descriptions help you recruit the “right” members.** In the New Mexico Young Fathers Project, members needed to be male with at least two years of college, experience in health education or social work, and experience in male involvement activities (such as Boy Scouts). Without a clear position description, you can waste a lot of energy recruiting members who are not qualified for your program. A comprehensive position description is essential to help you focus your recruiting efforts.

■ **Recruiting is best done locally.** Although websites and e-mail discussion groups can be good places to advertise for interns, most recruitment involves the local media and traditional “low tech” ways of networking within the community. Start with local colleges and vocational schools or other places where the types of members you are looking for might be found. Also, use other AmeriCorps members to help get the word out about your project. Personal recruitment seems to work well.

■ **Network with other AmeriCorps sites on a coordinated recruitment strategy.** If several programs in your area are recruiting members, share position descriptions and member applications. A member not suited for one placement may be perfect for another.

■ **Be prepared for lots of paperwork.** Even though some of it is computerized, there are lots of documents to read, forms to complete, and reports to submit.

■ **Once you find members, invest heavily in them.** Members are in it not for the money but for the experience and sense of purpose they gain. Start the members off right with a well-

designed pre-service orientation that builds the ethic of service, unifies the team, and gives them the knowledge they need to begin service. Setting clear expectations in the beginning will reduce confusion and misunderstandings later in the year. After pre-service orientation, train your members thoroughly and often, since they have a lot of desire, but not as much technical expertise as you might expect.

■ **Seek to learn about the skills members already have.** Members may possess skills and knowledge that you do not know about. Try to build upon the unanticipated skills of members in ways that strengthen the program efforts.

■ **Don’t let the small stuff get you down.** Recruiting is hard work, and there is no way around the time and effort it takes to recruit good members. But if the details of recruitment start to get you down, take some time to remember the big picture: careful recruiting will ultimately increase the success of your program. ■

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Building a Strong Peer Network

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Give back to your network. A final principle: Always give back to your network. As you gain experience, you will have more experience to share, and in a couple of years you will no longer be the “new kid” on the block. Then, it will be your turn to provide support when a new director says, “Help, I don’t know anything! Where can I turn?”

There are two approaches when starting out as a new director. The first is to go it alone, struggle to find resources, and when things go wrong, blame it on lack of preparation or proper training. The second approach is to intentionally develop and nurture professional relationships, ask for help, and, whenever possible, establish more formal mentoring relationships. Though we may still struggle at times, this second approach will give us a broader network for support, because we are all in this work together. ■