



Youth Inclusion Facilitator Instruction Staff Development

Staff in a positive youth development program must balance program requirements, planning and delivering activities, and the individual needs of the youth in the program.⁶⁰ Many programs suffer from high turnover with recruitment and retention as constant challenges,⁶¹ leaving youth program managers to hire new staff with potentially less experience in key skill areas.⁶²

Professional development gives program staff the time they need to learn and practice skills. It provides the support the staff needs to adapt to current topics and delivery methods required for ever-changing youth needs.^{63, 64} If done correctly, professional development helps to mitigate issues often caused by high staff turnover by indoctrinating new staff in the foundational elements of the program (i.e. rules, systems, language, and program structure) and ensuring consistency.^{47, 48} Through professional development, program staff can develop positive and open attitudes toward all youth and families.²²

A good training program includes both formal and informal professional development practices.¹⁹

Formal. Training programs with set curricula ensure youth staff receive uniform training and materials. Formal training can improve youth program staff skills concerning adult-youth relationships and program development and delivery.⁶⁵ Formal professional development opportunities may take a variety of forms and may be facilitated by in-house trainers, program managers, or fellow youth program staff with expertise on specific topics. If your youth program is part of a larger organization, set curricula may already be selected for a variety of topics or may be offered via online modules or certificate programs.

Informal. Informal staff development doesn't rely on set curricula or uniformity. Informal staff development occurs through modeling, reflection, discussion, sharing, and relationship building. Informal professional development positively affects pride, ownership, communication, and development⁶¹ and leads to program staff mirroring the same techniques with youth in the program.⁶⁶

Strategies for Engaging in Community Collaboration

A staff development program that uses both formal and informal strategies can support a more inclusive environment and program.



Youth Inclusion Facilitator Instruction Staff Development

- Review:** Review program staff individual development plans and ensure that staff receive training to understand the impact of the positive youth development approach within their first year of employment. Key points to cover include the following:
- When equality, cooperative learning, and positive peer relationships are intentionally developed, attitudes change and bias and prejudice decrease.¹⁹
 - The presence of prejudice and harassment creates a hostile climate that becomes a barrier to learning and positive youth development.¹⁹
 - High levels of conflict and bullying in environments erode a young person's sense of safety and are associated with increased aggression and low levels of youth learning.²⁶
 - When youth programs are intentionally welcoming and safe for youth, programs are able to provide environments that develop all youth²⁹ and increase their ability to recover and ability to thrive.
- Formal:** Review program staff individual development plans and ensure staff receive formal training on the purpose of the foundational aspects of an inclusive environment within their first year of employment. (Note: Training on the impact of the positive youth development approach and the purpose of the foundational aspects of an inclusive environment should be integrated into the topics you already cover, not additional topics added to the training plan.)
- Informal:** Identify where informal staff development is happening successfully.
- Brainstorming:** Brainstorm with your staff on ways to further incorporate informal professional development (i.e. mentoring, modeling, or discussing and sharing)
- Reflect** Reflect on how you will know if the informal professional development is systematized and successful.
- Distraction** Reflect on how you will know when informal professional development becomes a distraction from the work.



Youth Inclusion Facilitator Instruction Staff Development

Design: Design staff development targeted to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills for working with diverse populations and focused on the known diversity present in the program.²⁷

Understand: Train youth program staff to understand that not all differences are visible and that they need to remain open to the idea that they may not always know an individual's history, cultural identification, sexual orientation, or gender identity.^{24, 27}

Promote: Use informal professional development practices to promote positive interactions,³⁶ and use close relationships and strong rapport to enforce rules and develop respect rather than doing so through authoritarian means.³⁶

Workshops related to Staff Development

Informal Professional Development.

Most of us could describe formal training and professional development if asked. It includes seminars, workshops, training, etc. But informal training and professional development can be just as important.