



Case Study: Santa Fe

Santa Fe YouthWorks

Improving the lives of at-risk youth, while preparing them for the green economy of tomorrow

YouthWorks' innovative programs are creating green collar job opportunities for Santa Fe's disadvantaged and minority youth, ages 14-28, who face high barriers to employment including skills gaps, limited education, and discrimination. YouthWorks provides its participants, many of whom are high school drop outs, with education and training designed to open up new opportunities in Santa Fe's economy.

While helping these young people build better futures, the program also aims to address persistent social and economic problems facing the City of Santa Fe, such as the loss of tax revenue and local talent that occurs when these young people cannot afford to work and live in the community. YouthWorks built its program in close partnership with the City and many other partners. Its partnerships are held together by a deep commitment to common goals, and an agreement to maintain the flexibility necessary to adjust and improve programs over time as lessons emerge about how best to serve youth.



Two crew members from the EnergyWorks residential energy efficiency program

The Project

Getting Started

Founded in 2001, YouthWorks runs baseline programs for youth, including life skills and prevention programs, counseling, GED, and college readiness courses. Four years ago, YouthWorks began building a comprehensive approach to job training, focusing on "green jobs" long before the topic gained mainstream buzz.

Interest in providing green jobs training emerged from a conversation about the needs and the dynamics of the community as a whole. In a city often described as an ideal vacation destination, one half of high school age children are dropping out of school. Young people who cut their education short are often unable to support themselves or contribute to their communities. Anticipating future growth in green jobs in the region, Youthworks became interested in developing green collar training programs for low income, disadvantaged youth within their community. The first program trained conservation crews for restoration work.

Community issues addressed through YouthWorks' programming:

- ✓ High educational drop-out rates
- ✓ High levels of poverty and unemployment
- ✓ Lack of affordable housing and brain drain
- ✓ Youth violence and crime
- ✓ Global warming and climate change

Several years later, YouthWorks and the City's Economic and Development Department began discussing the problems facing youth in Santa Fe, and identified a common goal: getting young people off the streets and into programs that could prepare them to join the local workforce. The City agreed to fund YouthWorks' training for green collar jobs, creating a safer and better educated community, and a workforce for the emerging green economy. "Our kids are the future. Sure [they'll be the] installers and plumbers of the world, but they are also future city councilors, future principals, and future PTA members," said Tobe Bott-Lyons, Deputy Director of YouthWorks.

Current Jobs Programs and Accomplishments

YouthWorks currently has three green collar job training programs:

1. *EnergyWorks* is a residential energy efficiency auditing program. Trained three-person YouthWorks crews conduct an energy audit and provide simple energy-saving installations for low- and moderate-income households at no cost to the homeowner. The program is run in partnership with the Santa Fe Housing Trust, the Sierra Club, Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) and the City of Santa Fe. In the first six months of the pilot, over 150 homes were served.
2. *Green Collar Jobs Pre-Apprenticeship program*, started in 2008, is a program that combines education, skills training and on-the job experience. Participants take a common community college course, and select additional courses based on their career interests. To make sure that training graduates have the skills they need, YouthWorks sends case managers to speak directly to prospective businesses. Participants are then placed in apprenticeships with wages (subsidized to make them affordable for local businesses). In 18 months, the program has serviced 50 people and 25 businesses.
3. The *WIRED Green Building program* is a pilot project launched in 2009 that combines on-site green jobs training with education. Youth participants work with a local contractor to build a home for Habitat for Humanity, using green building techniques, while also attending GED courses at Santa Fe Community College (SFCC). The program was funded by the Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation for Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Program.

Accomplishments

- ✓ 125 youth served annually (although 500-600 seek to participate)
- ✓ 60% obtain full-time employment
- ✓ 15% return to public school; and 20% enroll in college.

Funding

- ✓ In 2009, the City of Santa Fe invested \$380,000 in YouthWorks' programs
- ✓ Another \$516,000 was leveraged through other sources, including federal grants (Community Development Block grants and Energy Efficiency Block Grants), private foundations, and federal Department of Labor Funds distributed by the state.

The Common Thread: Addressing Barriers to Employment

Although YouthWorks' three green jobs training programs vary in objectives and partnerships, they share three core design elements:



Educating young people with more than “hard” skills

Through their close partnership with Santa Fe Community College (SFCC), YouthWorks provides its program participants with access to an integrated set of educational experiences for which they earn academic credits. Courses teach concrete skills that employers are looking for, but they also teach academic skills—from basic literacy to physical sciences—that help improve quality of life and long-term employability. In this way, the programs seek to fill what Bott-Lyons sees as an important gap in public education, where “[one] can graduate with a diploma and still not have the skills needed to go into entry-level college training.”

For example, YouthWorks teamed up with the community college to create a foundational course called STEM 111 (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) tailored for youth. All their participants are required to take the course. The curriculum looks at how sustainability, climate

Green Jobs Training Curriculum

- ✓ Designed in partnership with Santa Fe Community College;
- ✓ Delivered in a variety of settings;
- ✓ Addresses all skill levels;
- ✓ Tailored to participants’ needs;
- ✓ Incorporate sustainability and job readiness, basic skills and career exploration; and
- ✓ Offered for academic credit.

change, technology and society interact, and how those interactions will shape the job market of the future. “We don’t want to train people into a track,” Bott-Lyons explains. “We want to train adults who will pay attention to how the twenty first century is going to work.”

YouthWorks also emphasizes career and life counseling as the young people it serves move through a variety of educational and job experiences. Their goal is to create a continuum of opportunities—beginning with summer jobs and moving to apprenticeships, jobs with Santa Fe’s new green businesses, or higher degree programs. From this emerge career pathways that participants are ready to pursue.

Building cultural competency

YouthWorks carefully designs its programs to account for the cultural background of its participants, and to build an understanding of that culture among employers and educational institutions.

“We bring kids in by establishing ourselves as a safe, comfortable, welcoming, and open environment, where kids come first” says Bott-Lyons. For example, they make sure that all staff, regardless of their job descriptions, are always available to interact with and help their youth participants. Even the Executive Director knows and has relationships with all of them. The organization of the office—an open, airy space where doors are left open—helps to reinforce this culture.

YouthWorks also hires staff directly from among its program graduates. These graduates can mentor other program participants based on first-hand understanding of the obstacles they are facing. Mentors can speak to the participants in a language they understand about the importance of building relationships and trust with educators and current or future employers.

Another way YouthWorks addresses cultural competency is by holding training workshops to educate employers about what youth face in their everyday lives. “I’ll bring in music like ‘gangsta rap.’ First, I’ll ask, ‘what are your ideas about the content of this music’ and then we’ll listen to it and talk about what the values are and what they talking about within the music,” said Bott-Lyons. Conversations like this with Youthworks staff help reduce employer discrimination.



Youthworks sees employers as key partners, who do much more for young people than provide jobs. The best way to get them to see the potential for mentoring their young employees, suggests Bott Lyons, is by having them to talk with other employers who have already been part of the program.

Integrated workforce and economic development

YouthWorks' green jobs programs seek to support the City's economic priorities by providing a workforce for community projects and investment, and by expanding the capacity of Santa Fe's green businesses to grow. But aligning economic and workforce development priorities can be challenging. Santa Fe recently raised the minimum wage to \$9.85 per hour. The increase has reduced employer willingness to hire young people, some of whom criminal records, or no high



A trainee in the Green Collar Pre-Apprenticeship program installs a solar panel

school diploma or GED. Employers can instead hire an older, more experienced worker from outside the city, seeking a job in Santa Fe where the hourly wage is higher from that offered in his home community. To address this newly created competition for jobs, YouthWorks offers wage subsidies, providing \$4.00/hour and cutting employer costs almost in half. By subsidizing wages, the program reinforces the local workforce, tying program objectives to the City's economic development plans. Funding for the subsidies comes from the City's Economic Development Department.

Insights and Lessons for Other Cities

YouthWorks' has build partnerships with both the City of Santa Fe and many community-based partners. Important lessons emerge from this collaborative approach.

Create a partnership with the City to scale up successful programs that address mutual goals

In 2008, Santa Fe's Economic Development Department began talking about how to align economic development and the Sustainable Santa Fe Plan. Developing a local green workforce emerged as a priority, as did investing in youth. The City's Economic Development Department surveyed existing community organizations and sought to identify successful initiatives that it could advance.

YouthWorks stood out as an organization that could work with the City to develop programs meeting multiple goals. Rather than forge a typical City-contractor relationship built on a "fee for service" contract, Santa Fe provided ongoing annual funding, and YouthWorks agreed to work closely with City staff in designing training and job placement programs.

"The single biggest lesson is to listen," said Kate Noble, Economic Development Specialist, Santa Fe's Economic and Development Department. Often [a City] forces organizations like YouthWorks to contort [through a contractual agreement], but you get better results if you pay attention to what they really need to be effective. Don't put [organizations] into a contractual straight jacket. Treating each other as partners is really beneficial," said Noble.



Build a partnership that meets the needs of all parties

YouthWorks relies on other organizations to help deliver its green jobs programs, which expands its capacity, but also creates challenges. Bott-Lyons explains that one key to holding these relationships together is keeping focused on what each partner needs. For instance, the Energy Works program is a partnership among the Santa Fe Housing Trust, the City, and Santa Fe Community College. All of the partners have varying missions and different metrics for measuring their performance. The Affordable Housing Trust needs to track how many houses were built, whereas the college cares most about enrollment and retention rates. To deal with this complexity, the organizations spent time talking about how to meet each set of organizational goals through program design, and how to choose targets and measures of success that would meet diverse organizational needs.

Working through multiple partnerships also necessitates a flexible program design. Flexibility also helps support continuous improvement. The Green Jobs Apprenticeship Program, for example, was designed to have three cohorts of young people take the STEM 111 class one at a time. But through discussions with employers, YouthWorks discovered that their planned schedule for graduating participants didn't coincide with businesses hiring cycles. The Program revised the training schedule so that the three cohorts could overlap, and graduation dates would coincide with times when employers wanted to begin apprenticeships. The Program changed a second time to account for problems that arose with Santa Fe Community College's larger course schedule. The program now has standing classes on the books, but keeps start and end dates flexible according to when participants start apprenticeships. In the end, YouthWorks was able to adapt and improve its program because of strong relationships with its partners and a common understanding that attaining program success necessitates flexibility.

Seeing is believing: allow the community and its leaders to witness successful programs

YouthWorks places a premium on showing elected officials and other community leaders first-hand what their programs do in the community. Santa Fe Mayor David Coss is often invited to join crews on the job site. He has learned the names of crew members, and has even attended YouthWorks' graduation ceremonies. In turn, YouthWorks goes to the Mayor's State of the City speeches. Bott-Lyons said that there is no better way for the program to cultivate its partnership with the City than to have city officials witness participants' hard work and the positive atmosphere created on the job site.

YouthWorks' green jobs training programs have also built steadfast community support just by making their work visible to residents. Crews can be seen in the summertime restoring the river, in front of someone's house doing a weatherization project, building a house, and working for green businesses. "[People] have seen that what we are doing is effective and worth investing in," said Bott-Lyons "We're a cost effective, high leveraged investment in terms of creating change in the community."



Santa Fe Mayor David Goss and Youthworks participants

For More Information

Santa Fe, "Economic Development Strategy for Implementation," (21 May 2008), 18 pgs.
<http://www.santafenm.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=3022>

City of Santa Fe's Economic Development Department website, <http://santafebiz.org>

YouthWorks! website, <http://www.santafeyouthworks.org>



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