

UNFINISHED WORK: **BUILDING EXCELLENCE IN WASHINGTON D.C.'S SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM**

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DISCLAIMER

This study by Brandeis University identifies best practices and examines the potential of Washington DC's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) as currently organized to provide the city's young people with an introduction to work, with opportunities to earn money over the summer, and with positive learning experiences that support their future employability.

Information was collected through interviews with DC Department of Employment Services (DOES) program administrators and staff, visits to work sites, observations of young people's work settings, and interviews with work site coordinators and supervisors. DOES staff were asked to nominate exemplary work sites for study visits and Brandeis sought then to document the characteristics of nominated work sites to show what might be done when SYEP was "done well."

This study is not an evaluation of Washington DC's 2010 SYEP. The period of data collection was limited. Brandeis University did not select a representative sample of work sites to visit.

FINAL REPORT

Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, DC's Summer Youth Employment Program 2010

This report was designed for and reviewed by executive management staff of the Summer Youth Employment Program operated by the Washington DC Department of Employment Services. The contents have been used for strategic planning and continuous improvement. The report is organized in three parts: 1) overview of the unique, longstanding commitment to serve all eligible and interested DC youth, 2) summary of the investment in continuous improvement for summer 2010, and 3) key findings from the Brandeis study and documentation project. The findings focus on successes and challenges related to how young people are benefiting, and also include successes, challenges, key ingredients for success and continuous improvement strategies for worksites/host agencies and program administration and design.

1. Unique, Longstanding Commitment to Serve All Eligible and Interested DC Youth

Washington, DC's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) has been operated in various iterations for nearly 50 years. Though initially federally-funded and targeted exclusively to low income youth, the first locally-funded SYEP was initiated by then Mayor Marion Barry in 1982 and open to all District youth 14-21 and paid for with both Federal and local District Funds. After enactment of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998, which repealed the stand-alone federal summer job-program, the DC SYEP was maintained, employing close to 16,000 youth using almost entirely local funds. Each subsequent mayor since Barry has continued to embrace and value the highly visible SYEP. While largely supported by the public, the quality, scale and scope has been up and down over the years. Most recently, the low point in SYEP operations was benchmarked in 2008. Then Mayor Adrian Fenty set a goal of dramatically increasing enrollment from 10,000 to 20,000. It was soon discovered, albeit too late, that an increase of this magnitude would require significant upgrades in management infrastructure, capacity-building, payroll systems and the like. The program had numerous problems which were captured in the press and on television as well as in reports recommending remedial actions for 2009.¹

¹ These included reports by CapStat, the Mayor's accountability and efficiency program for the District government; the Brookings Institution Greater Washington Project; and the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates.

Responding to the problems of 2008, considerable efforts were made to fix and improve SYEP in 2009. New organizational, management, tracking, and payroll systems were instituted that prevented many of the earlier problems. Youth enrollment held constant in 2009 and 2010. More confident that systemic issues had been addressed in 2009, DOES focused its efforts on the quality of youth experiences in the 2010 SYEP and enrolled more than 21,000 youth working at more than 1,300 job sites provided by more than 500 employers, including community based organizations; DC government agencies; Federal government agencies; and private sector businesses.

The 2010 distribution of employers, worksites and youth job assignments is shown in the table below.

SYEP 2010: Employment Sectors and Participation						
Employment Sector	Total Employers		Total Work Sites		Total Youth Placements	
Community Based Organizations	221	43%	341	25%	6,457	30%
City agencies	104	20%	713	53%	13,205	62%
Federal Agencies	41	8%	95	7%	645	3%
Private Sector	148	29%	201	15%	990	5%
Total	514		1,350		21,297	

Source: DOES SYEP data systems

2. Investment in Continuous Improvement: Summer 2010

In the view of SYEP/DOES senior staff, *"Overall, the program and logistics have worked out well; however, there is much room for improvement."*

In an effort to help inform the continuous improvement process and continue the unfinished work of building excellence in SYEP, DOES contracted with the Center for Youth and Communities at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University to provide a combination of professional development / capacity building and evaluation services for the 2010 SYEP. Major tasks under the agreement included 40 training sessions on quality programs² for DOES supported worksite supervisors and a documentation study of the program. The onsite study included: Interviews with DOES leadership and staff to document the overall administrative approach, program goals, key decisions, implementation strategies, perceived strengths, challenges and lessons learned; and 25 SYEP worksite visits

² The training focused on best program practices identified in the youth employment and youth development literature including: meaningful work; relationship with competent, caring adults; opportunity to combine work and learning and acquire marketable skills; project and work-based learning; age and stage appropriate placements; and supports and opportunities for youth to get, keep and advance in jobs.

including interviews with supervisors and participants in July and August 2010.

The Brandeis study team used a qualitative approach to data collection in the context of “appreciative inquiry” which is defined as follows:

“An approach to organizational change that focuses and builds on the strengths and potential of an organization. Every organization has something that works right – things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities. AI [appreciative inquiry] begins by identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten the energy, vision, and action for change.”³

Appreciative Inquiry starts with the notion that “something is working here” and then asks “what is it, and how, and why?” It acknowledges problems and challenges but frames them as lessons learned.

To that end, DOES selected the 25 study sites that, in their opinion, offered the greatest potential for learning and continuous improvement. The key findings identify current successes, challenges and key ingredients for success going forward in three areas: youth; worksites; and program administration and design.

3. Key Findings from the Brandeis Study

Key Findings: Youth

A. Successes: How youth are benefiting from program

Across the board, worksite supervisors and host coordinators reported that youth benefitted from participating in the SYEP program. The specific benefits depended on where each youth was in terms of education, future-orientation, current life obstacles, previous work experience, and work readiness skill level. For college-aged and college-bound youth who had the supports necessary to succeed, had given thought to future career aspirations and had already begun on pathways for achieving these aspirations, the SYEP program became an opportunity for a high quality, learning-rich summer work experience. For youth who had more limited understanding of workplace expectations, had far fewer supports and greater obstacles to succeeding, and had not had opportunities to dream and plan for future aspirations, the SYEP program became an initial connection to the workforce and an opportunity to learn and practice foundational workplace readiness skills, such as communication, presentation of self, and following expectations. There were also youth for whom the benefits may have

³ David L. Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, Jacqueline M. Starvos, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change*, 2nd edition (Brunswick, Ohio, Crown Custom Publishing, Inc. 2008)

seemed negligible. Often these youth had a preconceived notion that SYEP was about free money – a right rather than a responsibility. In addition, there were host agencies that were not as committed to investing in youth, understanding barriers to employability and providing youth with quality work experience. These agencies saw youth as free labor, rather than a future member of the workforce worth investing in now.

Based on interviews and focus groups with host agencies and worksite supervisors and observations of youth, youth benefitted from the SYEP program in the following ways: exposure to world of work, workplace skills and transferrable skills, learning about workplace expectations and culture, college and career planning, opportunities for growth and maturity, learning about specific career options, and participation in additional enrichment activities sponsored by the host agency.

B. Challenges

Worksites with adults who understand youth development principles and the specific challenges SYEP youth faced seemed better able to handle and address problems with youth. Worksites who were able to provide youth with some choice and freedom in what they were doing and made connections to youth interest tended to experience youth with more passion, buy-in and commitment to the workplace and the work experience. Overall, host agencies reported that most SYEP youth did meet basic workplace expectations.

When there were problems with youth, these problems tended to be in the following areas:

- Dress code/attire
- Punctuality and Attendance
- Importance of communication – especially around giving notice for absence or tardiness
- Attending to detail
- Cell phone use/texting
- Respect toward supervisors

Some worksites brought up childcare or other personal issues that come up for youth that make consistent attendance difficult. These supervisors did not feel youth had the supports from parents or other support services to effectively manage these issues. Several worksites noted their desire for job coaches who could work with supervisors as needed to assist in dealing with home difficulties and other obstacles to attendance and productivity. Others noted the need for more ongoing workplace readiness skills development to occur before or concurrently with the program. Two areas in particular that worksites found challenging included 1) youth preparation and work readiness and 2) youth motivation.

C. Key ingredients for success in working with SYEP Youth

Key ingredients to reducing frequency of problems working with youth and increasing their sense of ownership and dedication include:

- Good, responsive relationship between host coordinator and DOES liaison to effectively address problems with youth in a preventative and effective way.
- A host coordinator and supervisors who understood youth and some of the issues they were dealing with and how this contributed to problems with youth attendance and productivity (e.g., a home issue or childcare issue would come up). Some coordinators and supervisors seemed to have a natural passion and instinctual understanding about “how to get the best of these kids.”
- Host coordinators and supervisors who can self-reflect and see the bigger picture, who understand that, despite feeling frustrated about the problems, they are having with SYEP youth, young people are not the only ones who have problems meeting workplace expectations. One business owner put it this way, “Everyone has baggage. It’s important we don’t assume it’s only young people who are going to be late or have problems.”
- Build in either formal or informal reflection time with youth to build youth ownership and investment, address problems in a preventative way, and learn about the youth and their strengths and barriers.
- Clear expectations upfront and ongoing. Though worksites were trained in orienting youth to the SYEP program, many worksites felt DOES needed to continue ongoing workplace readiness/lifeskills training for youth over life of summer program. Some supervisors tried to do this in ad hoc way (teaching communication skills, reviewing workplace expectations, etc.), but felt they needed additional support of a job coach working with supervisor and youth when there were multiple problems.
- Address the image some youth have of summer program – that it is free money, based on having had previous experiences where they did not have to do much and did not feel vested in the agency and so came to expect SYEP as a source of free money.
- Investing in making youth feel part of the agency, creating a sense of belonging and providing a safe place for youth tended to motivate youth and lead to youth commitment and investment in the work of the organization.
- Parent involvement when possible: A few programs took a holistic view of the youth and also worked with families to some extent either during the interview process to highlight workplace expectations or in an ongoing way, in the cases of CBOs that were located in neighborhoods where the youth participants lived.

Key Findings: Worksites/Host Sites

A. Successes

Overall host agencies were committed to SYEP and eager to find ways to add value to the program, create meaningful and positive experiences for youth and agencies and limit negative experiences. Those we talked to openly shared both what was working and what was challenging about being an SYEP host site.

Quality often depended upon the host agency and its supervisors':

- history/experience with SYEP;
- understanding that SYEP is a youth development program that provides skills and learning to young people, and is not an "employment agency";
- understanding of the expectations of the program re: what youths' and employers' experiences should be;
- capacities to work effectively with youth and understand their strengths and barriers.

When these factors came together at a host site, youth were an integral part of the team and engaged in learning-rich work experiences, and value-added went in both directions host site to youth and youth to host site.

We observed a range of work experiences from work-based learning experiences to classroom-based models to traditional summer jobs program experiences. In cases of more traditional summer jobs model, key elements of success included motivating and engaging youth and building their commitment to being there. In the case of classroom-based models, supervisor skill in effective and engaging teaching methods and links between classroom learning and the world of work were key to success. In the case of work-based and project-based learning models, the key to success was the investment in capacity building and training of supervisors in project-based learning principles and practices. Some of the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation's "veteran" sites have been doing project-based learning and youth development work for many years and were capable of offering a quality SYEP experience for youth. Staff at some of these agencies had had AYD (Advancing Youth Development) training. Some new SYEP sites were also serious about incorporating youth development principles into their SYEP programs and had the benefit of having worksite supervisors with an instinctual understanding and skill to implement project-based learning without the benefit of formal training. Several worksites needed additional orientation, training and support in order to improve quality and provide meaningful work experiences to young people.

B. Challenges: Youth to Supervisor Ratio and Supports

All supervisors seemed to agree that the worksite needed an adequate number of adult supervisors in order to make this a meaningful experience for youth. Worksites that accepted larger numbers of SYEP participants found it difficult to provide a good ratio of supervisors to youth. Some supervisors had between 5 and 10 youth. Others had much higher numbers of youth. These host sites had difficulties recruiting supervisors because of this high ratio.

Worksite supervisors expressed the importance of additional mentors, such as job coaches, college interns, and more experienced peer mentors. It was important for mentors to be qualified and provided training in working with youth of various backgrounds. "A relationship with a caring adult is key, and yet we need support. We have to get our work done, too." If a supervisor has enough support and a smaller number of students, he or she can take advantage of mentoring and coaching moments.

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C. Key ingredients for success at worksites

Passion and Presence of Champion: In SYEP, a relationship with a caring adult is key. DOES host sites that exhibited the most effective supervision had someone in the host coordinator position who was passionate about the program and about helping kids – a champion for the program and for the individual youth. A good example of this was found in the Department of Transportation (DC of Federal DOT) worksite. The person appointed as the coordinator for 2010 was brand new to the position and did not have an HR background. The host site ended up relying more on a young woman from security who had more experience with the program and a good rapport with the students. She was interested in them and spent time talking with them about their experiences. Her cubicle was always open to them, and they visited her often, asking for more work. This young woman spent time with the students, showing them the value of work. This dedicated adult mentoring relationship provided a positive experience for the DOES youth participants. Other site visits confirmed that supervisors who "loved kids" and had passion and dedication were the most invested in the success of the program. One supervisor explained, "*You can be the one person here who touched them. They take away something.*" The most effective supervisors were the ones who were sensitive and empathetic to the situations faced by SYEP youth. Because they had a true sense of what was going on in the

youths' lives the supervisors were able to create a relaxed, safe environment where youth can grow, think, and learn.

Low Youth to Supervisor Ratio: In all the worksites visited, it was shown that those who had low student to supervisor ratios were the most effective. Conversely, the ones that had large numbers of students assigned to smaller numbers of supervisors faced the most obstacles. Several worksites found it difficult to even recruit supervisors because of the large numbers of students. Other sites had supervisors working with 5-10 students and finding it difficult to take advantage of teachable moments. Worksites that were satisfied with the supervisor/student relationship were able to maintain ratios of 1:1 or 1:2. This was accomplished by taking advantage of other available mentors, such as college interns and older peers with more experience. Other worksites met with success by matching students with supervisors from the previous year, who were familiar with the students and their abilities.

Mentoring and Teaching Skills: The skills of the supervisor are also an important ingredient to a successful SYEP program. It's not enough just to like youth and "get them." Supervisors and mentors must be skilled in teaching strategies and developmental learning. They should have an understanding of the stages of youth development and skill in determining what a specific youth is capable of tackling and areas of potential growth. They should be adept at taking advantage of mentoring and coaching moments. Training should be provided to less experienced supervisors.

Reciprocal Relationships: Opportunities for Youth Decision Making and Empowerment

In some cases, worksites had difficulties convincing supervisors to participate, especially if the supervisor had had a previously negative or overwhelming experience. One manager stated, *"Some youth are dealing with big issues like homelessness or their parents deceased... and we don't always know how to deal with that. We need good screening and then there's the million dollar question, what does lead to success for some of these kids, despite all these challenges... If we had a better understanding of that, there's no telling what could happen."* Several host sites discussed the importance of creating opportunities for youth to add value to the host site so that it was a reciprocal relationship, rather than the host site, "babysitting youth for the summer." Host sites that found ways to make youth part of the team with opportunities for choice, decision making and empowerment, created win-win situations where youth were invested in and contributing to the host site and the host site was invested in the young person. One business owner explained, *"The SYEP were part of our team. They felt part of our team. They were not just summer workers but part of our organization."*

Opportunity for Reflection: Of the worksites we visited, the most effective work experiences were those that weaved in time for reflection among students, supervisors and mentors. This dedicated reflection time took place either immediately following specific projects, or on a daily (or regular) basis. These supervisors or mentors took time to talk with SYEP youth about what was working, what was not going well, and what changes might be made to the overall experience. Reflection was also used to enhance and reinforce learning.

Collaboration: Many supervisors spoke of the importance of supervisors talking to and learning from each other. Successful worksites built in either formal or informal collaboration among supervisors. At various worksites, they helped one another solve problems and difficult situations, talked about the progress of individual students, and shared ideas for improving the program and overall experience for the youth. This level of collaboration was particularly helpful to supervisors who were responsible for larger numbers of students and worked most effectively under the leadership of a skilled and invested host coordinator.

Several worksite supervisors noted the benefit of the site visit process itself as a rare opportunity to come together and talk about what was going well, what was not working, and to share ideas for improving the experience for both students and the agency/organization. They wanted more times like this but found it difficult with day-to-day time and resource constraints.

Support: Most worksites indicated the need for levels of support for supervisors. The time-consuming nature of paperwork – particularly background checks – was a big issue for many supervisors. The most successful worksites were able to delegate this administrative work to other personnel at the worksite, freeing the supervisor to spend more time mentoring and teaching. Where additional personnel were not available, supervisors expressed the need for DOES to provide more support in these areas.

Key Findings: Program Administration and Design

A. Successes

Despite the challenges inherent in operating the largest summer youth employment programs in the country, significant improvements have been made in program administration and design since the watershed summer of 2008. Many of these improvements were noted and appreciated by the SYEP supervisor, monitors, and other staff. Most significant accomplishments that were brought up at site visits, focus groups, and other meetings:

- Communication was significantly improved, in large part due to the assignment of a liaison to each site. The liaison was able to inform

worksites of last minute changes, resolve problems, and provide additional support to worksites. Because of this, many worksites felt that DOES did a good job in responding to their needs and requests. In a post-SYEP close-out meeting among all SYEP staff on September 29, participants expressed a strong desire to maintain the framework of having liaisons specializing in particular sectors, and having worksite issues directed to supervisors and liaisons rather than to the SYEP central office staff.

- A major SYEP improvement since 2008 has been the development of an array of information and data gathering/management systems that collectively provide DOES with the capacity to retrieve information rapidly, and put it to productive use in planning and implementation. Washington DC's IT department produces virtually any analysis reports requested by DOES. These IT systems have received generally high grades from staff and host agencies, and SYEP staff noted that the DOES IT Team was very responsive and able to provide most any data that staff request, and adjusting various data-bases to handle numerous new requirements.
- On-line registration was also noted as an improvement this past summer. Most youth appreciated the capacity to register for SYEP on-line. Participants were able to use computers located at the youth office, schools, libraries, or private computers. In many cases, SYEP staff were available to assist the participants with registration.
- Improvements are continuing to take shape in the area of job matching and job assignments. As much as possible, participants were able to choose their work category, transfers were available for safety issues, health issues, or for a site closure, hosts were able to choose the worksite participants, and youth were able to return to the same worksite they'd worked at in the previous year.
- Other successes include the creation of online payment resolution and improvements in ease of supervisor accountability timekeeping.

Given the size of the DC SYEP, these improvements are significant and have reduced a number of the most serious problems with the programs. Moving forward, SYEP staff and SYEP worksites have identified a number of administrative and program implementation challenges that still remain.

B. Challenges

Planning

Brandeis heard repeatedly from numerous stakeholders that time was their major enemy. All DOES stakeholders interviewed by Brandeis said that they

could have done so much more to make SYEP 2010 of higher quality if they had “just had more time.” Indeed, SYEP staff were universal in their belief that work on the program started too late and left everyone doing things at the last minute. For example, the worksite supervisor training was very last minute. Staff needed more advance notice to schedule trainings and meetings. There was a general consensus among worksite supervisors that because they are juggling other job responsibilities and time constraints, advance planning is needed in all areas of program implementation.

Some CBOs did not know during the time of SYEP application what their own (non-SYEP) funding was going to look like in advance of the summer. Some could then not do what they had hoped, and their capacity to take summer youth later diminished. DOES did not give CBO Hosts enough time to submit lists of “their kids” for enrollment in SYEP.

Communication

Numerous people Brandeis interviewed reinforced the fact that, even though communication was significantly improved this summer, additional work must be done to improve internal and external communication. Connected to this issue was a confusion of agency and individual roles in communication processes – what should be communicated, who is responsible for communicating what to whom, when, how, and through what channels? There is a need to strengthen communications within DOES so that its own staff each know what the others know and can effectively and clearly communicate this to worksite host coordinators and to youth.

In addition, there is a need to share internal communications between DOES and other partner organizations, such as the *Trust*. DOES and the *Trust* experienced multiple situations in which communication was lacking or late. In addition, communication may also have been hindered by role confusion between DOES and the *Trust*. As DOES and the *Trust* communicate more and define and negotiate roles to reduce duplication of effort and confusion, relationships will improve and clarity will increase.

Staffing

At the September 29 SYEP close-out meeting, participants suggested that improvements might be made in additional areas such as reviewing and establishing clearer tasks for SYEP staff, increasing communications with/to SYEP staff, utilizing all SYEP staff, and drawing upon other DOES staff as needed, along with data runs and trouble shooting by the City’s IT department.

The SYEP Director came on in April 2010. He had to work very quickly to oversee a broad array of complex processes and functions including, but not limited to: youth applicant registration, certification, enrollment and notification, identifying and confirming hosts/worksites, assigning youth to

worksites, organizing payroll processes, orienting multiple players, and handling a myriad logistics and other issues.

Among liaisons, it was universally agreed that there is a need to restructure liaisons' work and look at how their tasks are divided among them and organized. The liaisons serving CBOs are especially overworked. The current way of organizing work by sector would work well if it were sufficiently staffed; however, currently, there are too many tasks and too much work for some liaisons particularly those working with CBOs (2 liaisons handling approximately 240 host agencies). This overload reduces DOES' capacity to respond to agencies' needs in a timely fashion.

The primary challenge facing monitors is that their ability to invest in longer-term activities to ensure program quality is hindered by the day-to-day trouble-shooting that is necessary. Trouble-shooting and handling immediate crises or safety issues takes precedence over activities that would contribute to long-term program quality improvements at host agencies – such as capacity building and technical assistance activities.

In general, decision-making authority and processes also sometimes hampered efficiency and the ability of staff at multiple levels to address problems in a timely manner as they came up. Seeking approvals from those in higher-level positions tended to slow progress and hinder continuous improvement and responsiveness to what DOES was learning from host agencies. Resulting delays hindered forward movement when fast actions were necessary.

Outreach, Recruitment, and Enrollment

The capacity to do on-line registration for SYEP is generally appreciated by lots of youth; however, the full process of applying and being accepted is not clearly understood by many youth. Youth apply electronically then assume that they are accepted because they applied. Actually, it's a 2-step process and some miss the second step. Also, some non-computer-savvy youth or youth who lack computer access may have a tough time gaining entrance into SYEP. DOES might consider working with schools to offer a brief class/workshop devoted to applying for SYEP.

Continued work is needed in educating the public about the SYEP certification process. Dates and deadlines for registration were unclear, and host sites were not always informed of registration deadlines. Several staff pointed out that registration information was not as precise as it could have been. It was noted that in some cases, earlier registration would be helpful, such as for college students who are applying for federal positions and therefore need background checks.

Other logistical challenges brought to the surface that affected enrollment and registration were:

- College students' resume requirement.
- Supervisors need youths' addresses.
- Some youth were not DC residents.
- Youth with disabilities were not identified on the SYEP application, so that worksites could provide accommodation.

Under-18 Youth

Many supervisors expressed frustrations or concerns with hiring youth under eighteen years of age. The process of obtaining supervisor background checks was not organized or efficient, and this turned off many worksites. It added too much to their workload and became easier to just request eighteen years and older. Worksites reported losing supervisors over background checks because of the time it took to go to the police department.

Recruitment of Host Employers

Sector liaisons noted that there is sometimes a struggle to balance selling a potential host site on participating in SYEP versus acknowledging the realities of participation and possibly discouraging participation.

One issue that came up in 2010 had to do with resumes. The sector liaisons made a commitment early-on to provide federal agencies and some private employers with resumes of the young people they might be working with. However, comparatively few of the youth had resumes and there was not enough time to help them prepare resumes prior to job assignments. So liaisons were left in the uncomfortable position of apologizing to hosts/employers. Some hosts/employers walked away. And the liaisons felt that this reduced their credibility with hosts/employers.

Challenges that host coordinators indicated might affect their decision to participate in the program were a lack of input on job application, no control over orientation, and a lack of time in getting back results from criminal background checks. SYEP host participants suggested that host registration should start before youth registration, and host agreements should include whether post-program employment is possible. One host site wondered if there was a way to create a preferred provider network that would eliminate the need for certain host sites with proven effectiveness to have to re-apply each year, as the process affects their planning from year-to-year. She stated, *"If we knew we from year to year without having to re-apply, I could have more continuity in the planning from year to year than I have now."*

Job Matching / Assignment of Youth to Host Agencies

DOES staff, host coordinators and worksite supervisors all noted how important it was to match the right youth to the right job. A poor match will result in a negative experience for both youth and supervisors. Supervisors believe the stakes are high and DOES needed to do a better job linking kids to jobs connected to their career interests. This could be more effectively

done during the screening process, using a simple interest and skill inventory. One supervisor gave an example of a college-bound youth with an interest in pursuing computer programming. He was already in his second year of college pursuing a programming degree, yet he was put in an accounting department. The supervisor had to work harder to help the student link this job experience to his career interest. Another supervisor told of an employee whose attendance was terrible because it was clear she did not want to work with children. Her lack of interest in the job itself affected her motivation and job performance.

During the 2010 SYEP program, there were many issues considered when matching a youth with a job that included:

- Was the youth in SYEP last summer?
- What did the young person learn and achieve in his/her previous summer experience?
- Did the youth learn and prove that s/he could handle a job?
- Could the youth be advanced to a higher level of summer job?
- Does the youth wish to return to the same site this summer?
- Is the youth required to go to summer school?
- Does a host organization have a list of "its kids" that it wishes to enroll?
- Does a youth have career interests that might be conducive to a particular job site? (*"We attempted this, but weren't great at it."* – SYEP director)
- What is the geographical distance that a youth would have to travel from home to worksite?
- Does the youth have a medical condition that would influence his/her job placement?

Washington DC's SYEP data system allowed some matching of career interests and location with available job opportunities. Additional matching was done manually by DOES staff. Host sites could also submit lists of youth they had been working with and request assignment of these youth, although staff commented that there is too little time for agencies to submit their lists and for DOES staff to review the lists and make timely work assignments.

A significant number of host coordinators stressed the benefits of getting returnees, but indicated their requests weren't always successful because the program is so big. SYEP participants who return to the same worksite for a second or third summer already have a familiarity with the policies and culture of the workplace. They understand the expectations and often want to come back.

Some logistical issues regarding job placement included sending participants to closed worksites, placing too many participants at a worksite or placing additional participants at the last minute, changing participants' worksites a few days before the program begins, and paying participants while they are

attending summer schools.

Orientation for Host Agencies and Youth

Orientation of Host Agencies: SYEP staff suggested that this past summer's *Supervisor Training* should be continued in the future and that attendance at the *Supervisor Training* should be mandatory for all SYEP supervisors. In a post-SYEP focus group, Summer Program Monitors stated that because of the 2010 *Supervisor Training*, host sites and their supervisors entered their jobs knowing what they would be doing. They also noted, as a positive that host sites then might be (perhaps) able to conduct their own (worksite specific) orientations for young people assigned to their sites. The primary issue with host agency orientation was the last minute nature of the trainings and the fact that not all who needed the training received it. In addition, some people interviewed noted they would like ongoing opportunities to come together with other host agencies and supervisors to share challenges, lessons learned, and ideas for creating win-win, meaningful and high quality experiences.

Youth Orientation: Many host agencies indicated that last year's large-scale training in the convention center was not sufficient. However, a majority of host coordinators and worksite supervisors interviewed noted that the decision to have host agencies take over youth orientation also had its drawbacks. They felt that DOES did not oversee the training of young people to the extent they would like, and should consider alternate ways of providing this kind of training and orientation to youth. Several host agencies also suggested that workplace readiness training should be an ongoing part of youth's summer experience, particularly for youth who have been assessed as lacking workplace readiness skills.

Communication between DOES and Worksites

Smaller and newer worksites tended to be in regular email and phone contact with the DOES liaison and found DOES to be responsive to their requests and challenges. Larger agencies and agencies who have been doing SYEP for years often had an internal point person working with youth, and this person tended to handle issues directly with youth and rely on the DOES liaison less.

Almost all worksites reported that they were satisfied with the accessibility and availability of the DOES liaison. However, problems with adequate and timely communication still exist and cause problems. SYEP providers need to be made aware of registration timelines and program duration. Some site supervisors report that DOES is often slow to respond to questions. They report that communication sometimes feels reactive, last minute, or does not filter down efficiently. For example, one worksite was not informed that \$25 was put on participants' cards for transportation. A common thread in Brandeis interviews was last minute changes and late information on the part of DOES. There was a feeling that DOES needs to better plot details out in

advance and share that information with worksites. Another supervisor noted that it was not easy to find information on the website.

Supervisors also felt that DOES could do a better job providing information to youth regarding logistics such as money, transportation, etc. Youth did not seem to have all the information they needed and did not know how to ask for it or find the answers.

Termination issues were also identified as a challenge by several supervisors. It takes too long for DOES to investigate the termination and let the student know she or he has been terminated. One supervisor explained that she sent the termination letter to her DOES liaison and explained to the youth that they were terminated. However, since it is not official until the youth receives a termination letter from DOES, it meant that she was fielding complaints from the youth and parents in the meantime.

Database Management and Tracking Youth

One of the primary lessons from the review of problems in 2008 was recognition of the importance of timely and accurate data entry into a comprehensive data management system. A typical comment from staff familiar with the problems of that summer was, "In 2008, we had all bad data. Before that, everything was on paper."

A major SYEP improvement since 2008 has been the development of an array of information and data gathering/management systems that collectively provide DOES with the capacity to retrieve information rapidly, and put it to productive use in planning and implementation. The City's IT department produces virtually any analysis reports requested by DOES.

SYEP worked during 2010 with three primary data systems:

- *PeopleFirst* is the basic participant database. It includes all the data from the application. It also includes links to any certification documents collected and scanned to their account, records of calls to the 311 call center if any, their job assignment history, and a section for us to link notes applicable to their accounts.
- *ETime* is the electronic time reporting and payroll system managed by ADP.
- *QuickBase* is the online project management software used to handle data from host sites. It includes all the information in the host site application.

These IT systems have received generally high grades from staff and host agencies, although staff cited one limitation that each system is a "silo." The systems are not linked and updates in one system are not automatically carried to the other systems. This affects operations when, for example, absences are captured in the payroll system but not flagged for the participant data base or the host data base.

Another lack of communication comes with the tracking of kids in various worksites. The biggest challenge is tracking youth transfers within hosts. It is not uncommon for a monitor to visit a site and find that the youth is not there, because they were moved within a site. Monitors are not always informed of these changes.

Payroll Systems

Another area of improvement was in the area of payroll systems. There were improvements in supervisor accountability around time-keeping and the creation of on-line payment resolution. SYEP staff suggested that improvement might be made in the following areas:

- Simplify and merge data, payroll, and registration processes.
- Providing mandatory training on timekeeping.
- Making supervisors more accountable.
- ETime rosters are updated as soon as transfers happen.
- Call center needs to log follow up instead of logging new issues every time.

Host sites also cited that payroll went better and timekeeping was easier than in previous years.

They noted some additional challenges including:

- Entering time for summer youth who did not get paid.
- Delays – waiting for youth to get paid.
- Many youth did not call in to let agency know that they would be absent or had problems with password login.

Suggested improvements included having DOES at every high school during the first week of every pay period and allowing every supervisor to enter time.

Overall, the study findings suggest a vast array of improvements both short-term and technical and longer term developmental strategies that would address the “unfinished work” necessary for building excellence in the Washington, D.C. SYEP program.

Five broad recommendations to consider include:

- Streamlining decision making authority and dividing roles and responsibilities between DOES and the Trust.
- Creating a preferred provider list of host sites.
- Designing a three-tiered system based on age and stage appropriate work sites and levels of employability.
- Committing to a capacity building plan and blueprint for continuous improvement.