

# Beyond HUD Funds

## Sustaining and Expanding Rural YouthBuild Programs

May 2006

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### Introduction

Most YouthBuild programs go through a painful rite of passage at least once in their operating lifetimes: the loss of HUD Youthbuild funding. The fact is, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has a tremendously competitive grant process with many more applicants than available grants. For a rural program, this news can be especially devastating, as finding operating dollars in rural communities is particularly challenging. So, what is a committed YouthBuild program to do? The answers include conducting careful, up-front planning, diversifying the funding base, building relationships, and increasing the visibility of the program. This resource paper will examine a variety of ways to bring more resources into a rural YouthBuild program in order to increase its visibility and sustainability. The recommendations found in this paper are based on the learning and experiences of local YouthBuild programs and on the gleanings of six years of work of the YouthBuild USA Rural Initiative. We offer this resource paper in the hopes that increasing numbers of rural programs can ensure the long-term sustainability of YouthBuild in their local communities.

### How Rural Funding Differs

There is not much funding readily available in rural areas, but still plenty of need to go around. This calls for thinking outside the box to locate the resources necessary to ensure the long-term viability of your program.

Some of the challenges facing rural YouthBuild programs include:

- Lack of resources
- Fewer opportunities for in-kind procurement or partnerships
- Fewer funders: a lack of corporations, foundations and large businesses available to support community development efforts
- Unique youth issues and needs: barriers for youth such as limited or unavailable transportation and fewer job opportunities
- Youth exodus: youth leaving rural areas looking for broader opportunities around education and careers in more urban settings.

On the other hand, rural programs have some distinct advantages over their urban counterparts:

- Easier relationship building: often the people who can help are neighbors or friends, people you see around regularly.
- Projects have a higher impact (if YouthBuild is the only nonprofit program of its type in the area): This means that a rural YouthBuild program can make a big difference in the lives of the youth and in the entire community.
- Less competition with other housing and youth programs for available resources: less competition means less need to work on distinguishing the program from others.
- Higher visibility: With less competition comes higher visibility. Newspapers or radio stations may be more likely to do stories or updates on YouthBuild activities. People will notice what and how the program is doing.

These challenges and opportunities provide the clues about how to address rural program sustainability and visibility.

## When HUD funding does not come through

If your program, then, is not on that HUD award list, there are some immediate steps to take:

**Assess.** What does this mean for the program financially and programmatically? Can you adjust your operational timeframes accordingly?

**Inform.** Get the word out to the board, parents, and the community, and rally program support. Let people know about the loss of funding.

**Brainstorm.** Meet with the board, staff, young people, and the community to come up with ideas for bridging the gap. Identify other funding possibilities and in-kind resources.

**Implement.** Set short- and long-term goals for the program. Identify ways to meet these goals financially and programmatically. An ongoing long-term sustainability plan revised at annual intervals is an excellent operational tool. It can help guide development of relationships that lead to funding. It also helps identify gaps in your program and areas not funded by the HUD grant. Finally, it provides a timeframe for maintaining grant solicitations so that applications are in the pipeline all the time, helping your program avoid disaster should any one grant not come through.

**Connect.** Work with YouthBuild USA staff to learn about support and technical assistance options. A clear piece of a sustainability plan could be becoming an affiliate of YouthBuild USA. Although a program must operate for a year before full affiliate membership is obtainable, full member benefits include pass-through grants, loans and grants for your young people.

**Reflect.** In times of change and financial woes, always get grounded in the program's mission. YouthBuild is known as a youth development and transformation program that uses construction as the vehicle for change. This idea can be applied in many directions to ensure that youth succeed and that your program sustains itself for the long haul.

As you know, it is not only about building houses, but about creating change and opportunity for the youth in your community. Help others in your community understand that the loss of funding means more than just losing housing.

### Looking Ahead

Above all, do not lose hope. Sometimes funding challenges make a program stronger and more integrated into a community. The key is to develop partnerships and sources of funds that embed the program in the community and result in solid, stable streams of support. For some programs this means integration into the region's economic development strategy. Others may focus on a specific program niche, specializing and translating that expertise into program income. Some programs may vary from the YouthBuild model and, in addition to construction, address a community need such as utilizing new funding streams to focus on environmental work. Finally, programs with solid organizational development and capacity may choose to expand into areas of sophisticated construction development such as subdivisions and entrepreneurial activities. Ultimately, there are many other variations and combinations of ideas that can sustain your program through the lean times.

## Strategies for Expanding or Sustaining the Program

### Increase Visibility

Do people in your community know about YouthBuild? How many families have been touched by the work you do? Does the community understand the link between the program, youth development, affordable housing, and the future of the community? Do local officials and other community leaders know what your mission is? If not, the first step is to educate anyone interested in the YouthBuild program. The goal is to become a beloved community resource that everyone understands, supports, and wants to see succeed.

In the process of diversifying funding and developing partnerships, the program's visibility will increase. Plan a communications strategy for the program. Include all staff, youth members, and the board. Brainstorm different ways to get the word out about your work, and then utilize all your best people to get the word out in the community. Here are some specific ways to do that:

- Hold an educational event. Invite a speaker or have program staff and participants talk about the program.
- Meet with elected officials and talk about program and funding needs.
- Conduct a fundraising event or an annual meeting and invite community members to participate.
- Attend and speak at community forums focused on community economic growth and development.
- Get YouthBuild stories out there. Tell the community, using whatever means available, about the successes and struggles of your program (mostly the successes!). Write articles for the local paper, get radio time, develop a newsletter, create a brochure — anything to spread information about YouthBuild activities.
- Encourage youth in the program to go to community events and become active participants in community activities, committees and events. This represents a leadership and community development win for the students and your program.
- Set up a display or information table where community members can gather.
- If the program has a van or a truck, put the program name on it.
- Send out news releases to local media with program news such as recent donations, accomplishments, and graduation stories.
- Encourage community involvement in your program whenever possible. Invite volunteers to participate at the construction site or to help at the office or with a fundraising event.

- Think of every staff and youth member as an ambassador for the program. Encourage them to speak publicly about the program and help them develop the language and presentation skills to do so effectively.

As you increase the visibility of the program, community members will better understand how it makes a difference, and hopefully feel more connected to the work you do. Community support is an essential ingredient to long-term sustainability and success of the program. Before people can support the program, they need to understand it and see the community benefits.

### **Diversify the Funding Base**

When a program has only one major source of funding, it is always at risk. For this reason, it is best to create a diverse funding base, for which program income and resources come from a variety of places, to ensure financial stability. A diverse funding base may consist of grants, grassroots fundraising, in-kind donations, program income, resource sharing, and partnerships.

***Generate program income.*** One of the first strategies programs can use to increase funding is to look at possible income-generating activities. In all YouthBuild programs, construction of affordable housing is one of the vehicles for job and skill attainment. However, spare time, downtime, and set-aside time can present great opportunities to teach the young people a related skill. Such opportunities include metal work with recyclable materials (few material costs are involved); building doghouses, sheds, picnic tables, backyard open grills, and furniture; and creating painted artwork. Students could learn how to price and market the product, gain customer-service skills, and negotiate contracts and production. The sold products provide program visibility and incentives for participating youth. The YouthBuild Sea Islands

program, in South Carolina, does this with the Annual Master Building Arts Fair. Students design and build a project and then present at the fair. A YouthBuild participant had his design chosen for use in the fair. Fair conveners pay for the materials for YouthBuild trainees to make the project and will ultimately purchase the project from the program.

Key aspects of developing a program income strategy are investment in the project at all levels, and a commitment to the end result. At Bi-Cap YouthBuild, in Bemidji, Minnesota, program income comes not from production of an item, but from a solicited service. Several years ago, the local Head Start contracted with the YouthBuild program to provide some construction on their facility and landscape a new building. This ultimately resulted in \$32,000 for the program. This year, the trainees will build a fence for the same organization. Program director Ann McGill says that other organizations approach them to take on work. If there is a possibility for income, they will negotiate for it. If there clearly is not, the work will become a service-learning project for the trainees.

Is your program worthy of replication? Perhaps another rural community is willing to pay for the service of your assistance in developing a YouthBuild or similar program. Many funders are also interested in projects that can be replicated.

***Fund a component or find a niche.*** Leadership-skill training is an area that YouthBuild programs are committed to, but it may not be as fully developed as is optimal or as programs would like. Is there a niche that you can create that will not only spark the interest of the young people and engage them, but also leverage funding dollars? YouthBuild Sea Islands has been able to find such a niche, as expressed through the following interview with program director Jim Hughes.

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## The Gullah Initiative

Interview with Jim Hughes, Program Director, YouthBuild Sea Islands, John's Island, South Carolina

### How did the Gullah Initiative begin?

We noticed some distinct traits among our young people. They seemed to have no connection to anything in their cultural history even though extended families had lived on the rural Sea Islands for generations. We attributed this to a practice, which began in the 1950s and 60s, of downplaying the Gullah cultural heritage in order to better fit in. Not claiming this Gullah heritage means our youth have lost their connection to their past and future. Because this lack of connection was reflected in extreme behavior, we hoped that re-connecting them with this heritage would promote pride, self-esteem, and improved behavior. Activities included Gullah Tours of the significant island spots, which are led by our students as tour guides in coordination with the County Parks and Recreation Caw (Gullah) Center.

### Has this opened up other funding streams for the program?

The niche has been very attractive to funders especially because our projects have lent themselves to project- and service-based learning. To a point we have been able to integrate these activities into our leadership curriculum. I believe we could secure a lot more funding through this focus, if we chose to focus on this. Going after this niche was a strategic decision but probably not as well thought-out as it could have been.

### Have there been challenges to the project?

There have. The sources of funds have ranged from \$5,000 to \$30,000. The challenge is managing these small sources when the program mandates of the funder begin to restrict or dictate our program activities. At that point meshing YouthBuild and Gullah activities becomes very difficult and time-consuming, taking focus away from other education and work-site learning.

### What is the vision for the future of the Gullah Initiative?

A lot of our efforts focus simply on getting the youth to reconnect to a heritage that they initially care very little about. Strong partnerships and potential funds are continuing to build. Within the next several years we will assist the recreation department in the development of display boards to complete a large exhibit about the people who made Charleston's rice production and wealth possible. And our Gullah Tours are leading to the actual documentation and structuring of a Gullah/Geechee tour guide certification through Charleston Area Tourism.

Another example of developing a niche is the development of a special construction technique. While not a rural program, Casa Verde Builders, of Austin, developed a reputation for being the best green builder in the city of Austin. They are well-known throughout Texas.

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## Casa Verde Builders Go Green

Interview with Dick Pierce, Casa Verde Builders, Austin, Texas

### How did the green building that Casa Verde Builders are known for get started?

Chester Stienhauser, director of the local YouthBuild program, was the science teacher at the American Institute for Learning. His students went to work on a Habitat home as a field trip for service learning, and science and homebuilding was the by-product. The conclusion was that funding a crew of young people to build a house would be a good idea. Funding was secured from the city, whose municipal electric and utility companies and neighborhood housing organization were interested in energy efficiency. The city's sustainability officer was interested in impact on the environment. He was an early advisor of ours and later went on to found Austin's nationally known Green Builder Program. All of this happened in 1994 and was great stuff for a crew of young people led by a science teacher. HUD Youthbuild funding and AmeriCorps money came along shortly after that to help us produce over 80 green-built homes with three- to five-star

Energy Star ratings. They were high quality, low maintenance, healthy homes and neighborhoods with significantly less crime, higher property values, and a sense of pride.

**Was the initiative a strategically thought-out process or did it just happen? At what point did it take on a life of its own and you knew you had something innovative and special?**

The executive director, Richard Halpin, probably saw the value and vision potential from the start, as did Chester, from an education standpoint, but also as a way to get motivation and buy-in from the students. This was attractive because it went beyond building a house, which many had helped their fathers do, and considered a low-level building trade with no environmental virtues. Having the city and Austin Energy as partners — and Austin being a very environmentally conscious city — helped a great deal. We have been fortunate to “grow up” alongside the city’s program, Casa Verde being a great test bed for green building materials and techniques while the city has put out some excellent publications and guidance on green building.

Chester also built a curriculum centered on green building. This allowed high school credit for our site work and captured the math, natural, and environmental science education that is latent in a job site. This level-three curriculum has been documented and illustrated and is available through our new fee course: Green Building for Construction Trainers.

**Has this green focus opened up other funding streams?**

Yes. We have had funding from the EPA, the Texas Architects Association, and The Home Depot because of our green efforts. Also, funding tends to follow publicity and green building; straw-bale, photo-voltaics, and geothermal heating tend to draw the media, as do the young people of Casa Verde, for a lot of free press.

**Where would you like to see your program go in the next several years?**

In the next five years we will stay about the same. We must remember that despite the hoopla over green building, we are still a youth program, helping young people with issues reach jobs and careers, further their education, and lead rewarding and productive lives. We will continue with three to four crews producing three to five homes a year.

That said, we plan to expand as well. The training business will teach four-day fee courses to youth programs, and sell the curriculum. We will also teach a two-day course to the construction trades. This should lead to consultant contracts and may lead to a for-profit subsidiary doing green materials installation and energy panel fabrication and installation. We have proposed a start-up business where a small staff with graduates would provide consulting packages to local builders and homebuyers to maximize their Energy Star rating and energy efficiency. This would reduce energy costs, reduce negative environmental impacts, and provide a market advantage with an increasingly conscious buyer.

Finally, take the case of Chadron YouthBuild in Chadron, Nebraska. This program covers a 50-square-mile rural area consisting of two towns and an Indian reservation. Program director Marguerite Vey-Miller has solved some of the funding challenges by creating a housing niche for the organization. As she puts it, “We are the only affordable housing game in the region.”

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## YouthBuild Chadron

Interview with Marguerite Vey-Miller, Director, Chadron YouthBuild, Chadron, Nebraska

**How did your housing initiative evolve?**

First and foremost, the organization is an affordable housing agency. The rural region we cover is huge geographically and has numerous factions of people and builders with a lot of self-interests. Because of this there is often conflict and difficulty when it comes to getting housing projects accomplished.

As one of a few affordable housing nonprofits in the region, we have had to work extra hard to obtain construction work and funds and compete against the other builders. Certainly, our primary push is to obtain housing funding for the YouthBuild construction sites and sustain the organization.

**What have been the results of these efforts?**

Our strategy has been to be present at all housing and related-issue meetings regardless of which area of the region

they were located in. We have, mostly successfully, cut across all factions. We have stayed abreast of housing issues and economic development trends in the area. We have built a reputation of being a solid and dependable organization of integrity. This has provided us with excellent credibility; we are now called upon for our expertise in housing and related issues.

### **How has this credibility translated into benefits for YouthBuild and the overall organization?**

Our community housing development organization (CHODO) status has helped ensure administrative and operational funding along with the construction dollars we receive. It has also increased our credibility to be a competent construction player in a very divided area. We are always being asked to sit at the table where housing and economic development strategies are the topic, and our concerns and comments are taken very seriously. Finally, it has translated into additional construction funds and information about upcoming funds and projects.

What we can see in all of these interviews is that all three organizations identified an area of expertise, and leveraged it to one degree or another, to increase funding and visibility for their program. In the case of YouthBuild Chadron, it involved the program embedding itself in the economic development system of the region. For Casa Verde Builders, it was a method of production that the agency sees as a priority and is aligned with a city priority. For YouthBuild Sea Islands, the effort involved reviving some of the lost cultural traditions that set the geographic area apart. However, in all three cases, the initiatives evolved out of solving an issue that was affecting the young people in the program.

**Encourage entrepreneurship.** Another strategy that can be used to increase sustainability is the development of entrepreneurship and cooperative structures and training. Cooperatives are groups or individuals working together as a unit to accomplish a task or project. Entrepreneurship gives young people the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to operate their own businesses

successfully. This could ultimately increase program visibility and funding, provide work placement for the youth, and develop a source of program income. Ask YouthBuild trainees what they want to do when they complete the program and many will say, “Run my own business.” We know most of them need and want more experience, support, skills, and resources to make that happen.

Consider developing a subsidiary of your organization (profit or nonprofit). Take on jobs in the region and train the young people to become entrepreneurs at the same time. Funding opportunities increase through this microenterprise (if nonprofit) and strong transitional entrepreneurial curriculum can be put in place. Hewlett Packard has a very successful curriculum called Mission Project Management (see [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com) for information). Paychecks for the young people can come through the projects or diversified grant funding. If choosing the for-profit route, finished jobs can generate program income.

YouthBuild McLean County, in Bloomington, Illinois, serves a partially rural population. The program used federal and private funding to establish a nonprofit housing development department that serves graduates and builds entrepreneurial skills. U.S. Health and Human Services money assisted in the program during its start-up phase. From either a profit or a nonprofit mechanism, youth can spin off to full-fledged entrepreneurial or cooperative businesses, or simply become better prepared future employees.

**Seek donations.** In-kind donations, resource sharing, and creative financing can all help diversify a budget. Here are some resource-sharing ideas that focus on transportation:

- Develop a relationship with a local car dealership and then ask for a vehicle. Be persistent and ready for the long haul as this process can take two to three years of relationship building. Figure out a win-win arrangement prior to pitching the idea (for instance, their slogan or advertisement may go on the side of the vehicle).

- The Ford Motor Company has a program that will provide programs with a vehicle for teaching new drivers and letting them take the drivers test (for details, call 1-800-233-3293, or contact DriverEd@fordprogramhq.com).
- Sign up with the state surplus program and develop a relationship with the staff. To locate your state surplus office, contact the office of the secretary of state. Often very serviceable vehicles turn up at low or no cost for non-profits and schools.
- Advertise in the local paper — an individual or business may donate a used vehicle.
- Labor unions — such as those representing longshoremen, electrical workers, or ironworkers — are often willing to assist in the purchase of vehicles. If these unions operate in your area, this could lead to negotiating opportunities for YouthBuild members to job shadow or gain entry-level employment. It could also provide your program with a rich source of volunteers and mentors.
- An example from the field is Chadron YouthBuild. The program purchased its vans inexpensively at annual federal auctions, usually held in the fall. The program has gotten good deals on previously used U.S. Forest Service vans. Check with the different federal departments located in your state to find out about these auctions.

In-kind donations of time, materials and other resources exist in every community. Sometimes they come from the least expected places. Keep your eyes peeled for possibilities, and never be afraid to ask.

**Employ good grant-writing strategies.** Most organizations receive some type of grant funding. Grants come from either public or private dollars and each with its own set of grant-writing rules. The preparation piece of this cannot be stressed enough. It is critical that you or your staff spend time identifying grants that are appropriate for

your organization so that your time is targeted toward funders that share your interest and goals. This area is often addressed in workshops, and YouthBuild USA has plenty of materials available. Feel free to ask your program advisor or consultant for more information.

Private funders can present a challenge for grant applicants because:

- Boards of directors usually set the funding priorities and make the decisions.
- Requested proposal formats vary widely, ranging from a short letter of inquiry to a sophisticated proposal.
- Reporting requirements vary from none to regular complex reporting.
- The frequency and length of funding cycles varies from funder to funder.

To help your program meet the challenge of seeking private funding, look for information on grant opportunities on the Internet (the funder's own Web site is often one of the best sources of information) or in foundation directories.

Obtaining and managing public funds offers its own challenges. When seeking public funds, consider the following:

- Federal funding opportunities are listed in the *Federal Register* (a daily listing is generated). Many federal newsletters and Internet sites exist that can keep you updated (for an example, contact [notifier@fedgrants.gov](mailto:notifier@fedgrants.gov)).
- Federal or state budget process usually dictate grant cycles.
- Applications can be complex, and they need to be followed to the letter.
- Congressional offices often announce the grants.
- Funding priorities are set by the government and are often awarded based on attainment of a certain rating score.
- Regular reporting, both financial and programmatic, is required.

Regardless of whether you are pursuing private or public dollars, some tips on successfully completing the funding sequence include:

- Define program needs within an overall community development strategy. This will allow you to discuss the broader impact for your work.
- Complete an asset map by looking at your organization and the community. Use the findings to document the community's needs. Involve YouthBuild members in the mapping—it's a great learning tool for them and will strengthen a proposal. Asset mapping strategically looks at a community to determine its resources and needs, answering such questions as *What youth or housing or education services are provided? Who provides them? Where are they located? How effective are they and what is the basis for that determination? Where are the service gaps? Can we fill the housing or youth or education or community service gaps?* Assess both services and resources.
- Research rural trends by keeping up with current publications from the Housing Assistance Council, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and others, as well as by attending regular related regional conferences. For further information about these organizations, see "additional resources" at the end of this paper.
- In your proposal, stress exit opportunities that will keep youth in rural communities, and demonstrate that you are addressing a larger systemic problem. For example, a HOME grant for residential construction may give youth enough experience for placement in a construction firm or manufactured housing facility upon program completion.
- Cultivate relationships when targeting public foundations, corporations, and family foundations. Invite them to speak to a policy committee to explain their role in the philanthropic process. Ask for a site visit. Meet with their program officer to see how you fit their interests. Find information in foundation reference books at the library and on the Internet.

- Hold a regional grantmakers forum or breakfast with youth development as the topic. Identify grantmakers for the particular region; they may be a community foundation staff member, the president of a local department store, or a representative from the local arm of a company based elsewhere.
- Follow the directions when writing grants. Simply and honestly answer the questions asked. Have clear outcomes and measures. This really goes without saying, but include the youth in everything and at all levels, demonstrating commitment to keeping them involved in the program and the community.

Remember, as with many initiatives, these relationships may be a year or two in the making before you see any results. It will be important to maintain your contacts updated on program activities, progress, and accomplishments.

**Utilize The Board.** It is an absolute necessity to get the board involved in fundraising efforts. If the board of your sponsoring organization is too far removed, create a YouthBuild advisory board to fill the role. Some steps and considerations that will help create a fundraising board include:

- Help the board assess its own willingness and ability to raise funds.
- Ask board members to give financial support.
- Assess membership: Does the board need new members? Do old members need to resign?
- Is there a strategic plan in place calling on the board to fulfill this role?
- Do board members understand and agree with expectations of their roles?
- Can staff support an active fundraising board?
- Has the board received fundraising training?
- Are the goals attainable?
- Board members should be last on the list to do "busy work."
- Celebrate the involvement and initiative of the board.

Source: *National Center for Nonprofit Boards*

**Learn these rural funding tips from funders.**

Once you are prepared to draft a letter of inquiry or a federal grant, take advantage of and keep these rural funding tips in mind:

- The community is a huge asset to your organization and operation — their money and support is essential.
- Be sure to have continued contact with funding sources and their staff. Get to know them and speak with them frequently.
- Take advice from the funders.
- Develop friendships with local celebrities.
- Keep your news out there in the community.
- Stay in touch with potential and existing funders through newsletters and mass mailings.
- Begin the long-term task of building local funding resources.
- For all of your grants, be sure that yours is the one that reviewers will pick up twice. Try to add an innovative twist to your proposal.

Several publications assess trends in funding and track distribution of philanthropic dollars. The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* is one such publication. Web sites such as [www.grantstation.com](http://www.grantstation.com), [www.enterprisefoundation.org](http://www.enterprisefoundation.org), or [www.secf.org](http://www.secf.org) offer important resources. The Southern Philanthropy Consortium produces the *Philanthropy Index* ([www.philanthropyindex.com](http://www.philanthropyindex.com)), a facilitated tool for developing assets and funding sources within rural communities.

All of these ideas for diversifying the organization's funding base require strategically planned components, and sustainability plans with clear outcomes and investment by the board and staff.

**Build Relationships**

Relationships can make or break an organization. In times of need and prosperity it is important to cultivate strong positive relationships in your community. These relationships can help provide or find resources for sustainability. Identify your key stakeholders; these are the individuals and

businesses that care, or should care, about your program. Get to know them; draw them into your work; and invite them to be your partner.

**Develop Strategic Partnerships.** Develop partnerships where the money is, or where the resources provided by the partnership will offset a cash need. Brainstorm a list of program needs and potential partners who could help meet them. Invite the partners to meet with program staff and YouthBuild members. Help them understand the role that they could play in your organization. Once you have a partner on board, hold regular partnership meetings that celebrate success, and also identify positive common strengths of the partners that are “wealth-building activities” and collectively expand them.

One program, Bi-Cap YouthBuild, in Bemidji, Minnesota, originally began its project with rabbits as a leadership development project to assist a student. This grew into a full-fledged animal husbandry leadership project that involves all students, with many now placing in annual 4-H shows. Their success led them become an official 4-H chapter. This work is beginning to open a new stream of funding through 4-H, local foundation, and agriculture-related dollars. This represents strategic partnership development that benefits both the program and 4-H as a partner.

Partnering with contractors on infrastructure development could help lower their labor costs and offset your stipend payments. This will require some negotiation as you will compete with or will need to integrate with existing contractors. Note too, that this may not be possible in a union state depending on the work involved. An example might be bidding and receiving the contract to complete replacement housing for the town. In a different scenario, an affordable housing organization could bid on and receive the contract in which you work with your YouthBuild alumni to complete sections of the contract. Parks and recreation departments, community planning and development departments, weed-and-seed projects, environmental departments, and safety and departments of public works are all departments to look

into. Many of these departments receive funding for infrastructure projects that YouthBuild could bid on. Work with the contractor to bid on and secure government contracts that can put some alumni to work and lead to job placements. A good memorandum of understanding is essential to designate tasks and compensation from the start.

Partnerships with local government offices could lead to coverage of some operational costs including administrative, stipend and insurance expenses. Potential job placements for young people lurk in these partnerships as well. If local coordination works, try broadening to the state level. For example: A local town purchases playground equipment for a small park. The parks department does not install playgrounds, so the town bids the job. The local YouthBuild receives the bid. They look to their local Home Depot to obtain some specialized training in installation through Team Depot. They then build the playground and the parks department inspects and approves the work. Funds received pay for stipends and provide some sustainable program income. With this experience they then look to child-care centers and state facilities (through their department of education) to identify similar projects.

***Join community economic development efforts.***

Make YouthBuild part of the town's, region's, or state's overall economic development strategy. The first step is to learn about the town, state, or regional economic development plan. Meet with the town manager or economic developer. Read the local or state consolidated plan (try the local library for a copy). Identify when the next round of community planning will happen and get invited to the meetings. Starting the process can be simple. For instance, the YouthBuild program in Washington Courthouse, Ohio, began integrating with the local community development department by joining one of its workforce expansion committees.

Apply for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The main goal of the CDBG program is to develop viable communities by providing funding for decent housing, development of suitable living environments, and by expanding economic opportunities, primarily for people of low and moderate income. It is a principal revenue source for local communities to address the roots and consequences of poverty. This program is tied directly to local or statewide economic development plans. These funds can be used for some program costs and infrastructure projects.

## **Conclusion**

By working to increase the visibility of the program, diversifying the funding base, and developing strong relationships, YouthBuild programs can sustain themselves through the ups and downs of funding swings. Rural areas have very special challenges but they also possess tremendous assets and hidden opportunities. The ability to organize around the community and the young people's assets and needs will help you plan strategically to obtain resources that will ultimately sustain the program. We wish you well in your endeavors and hope you will share your successes with other programs and with the YouthBuild USA Rural Initiative.

## Additional Resources

### *The White House*

(links to faith-based initiatives)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov>

### *AmeriCorps*

<http://www.cns.gov>

### *Council of Federal Home Loan Banks*

(links to regional banks)

<http://www.cfhlb.org>

### *National Endowment for the Arts*

<http://www.nea.gov>

### *National Endowment for the Humanities*

<http://www.neh.gov>

### *Department of Agriculture*

(links to rural housing, rural business and rural cooperative services) <http://www.usda.gov>

### *U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration*

<http://www.doc.gov/eda>

### *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services*

<http://www.os.dhhs.gov>

### *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*

<http://www.hud.gov>

### *U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs*

<http://www.doi.gov>

### *U.S. Department of Justice*

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>

### *U.S. Department of Labor*

<http://www.doleta.gov>

### *U.S. Department of Transportation*

<http://www.dot.gov>

### *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

<http://www.epa.gov>

### *U.S. Small Business Administration*

<http://www.sba.gov>

### *Council on Foundations*

<http://www.cof.org>

### *The Foundation Center*

<http://www.fdncenter.org>

### *Rural Development Leadership Network*

<http://www.ruraldevelopment.org>

### *Rural LISC*

<http://www.ruralisc.org>

### *Surface Transportation Policy Project*

<http://www.transact.org>

### *Transportation Equity Network*

<http://www.communitychange.org>