

## **Youth Program Design Components**

It is the desire of the Merced County Youth Council that the Youth Council fund recipient design a program around the framework of a youth development model, such as Search Institutes Developmental Assets Model; Cooperative Extensions Targeting Life Skills or the Workforce Preparation Model.

Therefore, the Youth Council will review each request for funds on the tenets of the above components and the following youth development concepts.

### **Advancing Youth Development**

#### **The Emerging Consensus: Youth Development**

Recent youth program research and emerging best practices suggest that youth services and supports that are grounded in a developmental approach not only help young people avoid self-destructive behavior but can also enable them to acquire the academic and work-readiness skills and personal attributes sought by employers. The research recommends the implementation of comprehensive youth development initiatives that provide young people with access to engaging learning environments, leadership development opportunities, personal challenges, nurturing mentors, sustained supports, consistent structure, and incentives that promote achievement.

Through these types of services and supports, young people develop resiliency and self-awareness; gain teamwork, problem solving, and communication skills; and build personal and professional networks and support systems. Once equipped with these skills, attributes, and tools, as well as recognition of the importance of lifelong learning, young people are better prepared to navigate an increasingly challenging labor market, build a career, and achieve progressively higher earnings.

Dorothy Stoneman, founder and president of Youth Build USA, recently outlined “essential elements of successful employment training programs.” Stoneman’s essential elements reflect the emerging consensus that youth employment training programs, like programs targeting early teens, should fully embrace the principles of youth development. She suggests those successful programs for unemployed and under-educated young people should include:

- ◆ opportunities to perform meaningful work in a well-supervised context that enables trainees to learn marketable skills and good work habits while producing something of value, preferably something visible and important to the community;
- ◆ warm ongoing relationships with caring adults who serve as teachers, trainers, counselors, and mentors, committed to assisting each trainee achieve his or her potential and gain the skills available through the program;
- ◆ systematic and extensive attention to improving basic education skills including reading, math, writing, analytical, computer, and communication skills, toward the attainment of a high school diploma to prepare for college;
- ◆ development of a positive peer group with a set of positive values and a philosophy of life that can compete with the negative values encountered on the streets;
- ◆ careful linkages with the private sector and trade unions providing employment opportunities, and follow-up with both trainees and employers for an extended period after job placement, with counseling and job development support available;
- ◆ involvement in significant decision making regarding the policies followed within the program itself, building the leadership skills of negotiation and problem solving among the trainees through a hands-on process and simultaneously improving both the accuracy of the policies and the students’ commitment to them;
- ◆ opportunities to play a public leadership role influencing policy affecting the community; and
- ◆ participation in some form of direct human service that improves the quality of life in the community and builds an ethic of service among the trainees.