

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)

OBJECTIVE: Development of a shared vision for positive youth development to ensure access, equity, and opportunity for youth in America.

CONTEXT: America's youth are the agricultural workforce of tomorrow. Nearly 60,000 high-skilled agriculture job openings are expected annually in the U.S., yet only 35,000 graduates become available each year to fill them. Today's youth must be prepared to fill this gap in agriculture and to supply the larger U.S. workforce. The various public and private sectors, including business owners and entrepreneurs, driving the innovations and technology required to feed the world's growing and increasingly diverse population, will need a workforce of individuals with relevant technical and non-cognitive skills. In addition, employers look for youth who exhibit three critical life skills: (1) physical and mental health and well-being and safety; (2) employability; and (3) social support, defined as the assistance and protection given to others.

Many youth—particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds—remain chronically unable to access resources to acquire the three critical life needs noted above. As a result, they are at significant risk for adverse life events, which could permanently derail their entry and success within the workforce and successful transition to adulthood. Some such youth run afoul of the law, become involved with the judicial system, and eventually find themselves incarcerated; while others could potentially become radicalized.

Positive youth development (PYD) is a demonstrated proactive and holistic approach to ensuring the critical life needs are met by: (a) engaging youth as empowered partners in positive self and community change; and (b) providing supportive environments, relationships, and learning opportunities that highlight their strengths, help them combat adversity, and develop resilience. PYD is a critical element of sustaining healthy communities.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has a long history of promoting positive youth development through the Cooperative Extension's 4-H program. 4-H as a model of PYD translates the sciences of engagement, learning, and change with youth and adults who work together to create sustainable community change. The ten-year longitudinal Tufts University Positive Youth Development study, (<http://4-h.org/about/research/>) demonstrates that compared with their peers, youth involved in 4-H programs are:

- Nearly four times more likely to make contributions to their communities;
- Are approximately two times more likely to be civically active;
- Are nearly two times more likely to participate in Science, Engineering, and Computer Technology programs, and 4-H girls are two to three times more likely to take part in science programs compared with girls in other out-of-school time activities;
- 4-H'ers are nearly two times more likely to make healthier choices.

In addition to the six million 4-H'ers, members of the National Collaboration for Youth serve millions more. However, there are still significant national gaps in PYD programming that leave many youth underserved or unserved entirely. These gaps affect youth education, employability, and health and well-being and prevent many youth from developing into healthy, contributing members of society.

These gaps must be researched and closed if the nation is to realize the greatest potential from its youth.

QUESTIONS

1. **Access** – 4-H reaches roughly 1 in 12 youth in the United States. Collectively, the member organizations of the National Collaboration for Youth serve more than 40 million young people (<http://www.collab4youth.org/about>), yet there are approximately 14 million youth who are who are under-served or unserved for PYD programming. (https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_DP02&src=pt)
 - a. How might we most efficiently and effectively scale up programming to expand reach while also maintaining a high rate of return?
 - b. How can we use historical success as a guide to successfully scale up to meet the present and future demands?
2. **Equity** - Three national indicators of successful PYD include youth: 1) physical and mental health and well-being and safety, (2) employability, and (3) social support. Youth fare best from coordinated services that address all of these needs, since they are highly interdependent.
 - a. What might be innovative strategies to ensure that currently underserved youth are provided the comprehensive, interdisciplinary PYD services for youth that encompass all three indicators simultaneously?
 - b. How might be these strategies be resourced? What new models of PYD delivery ought to be researched?
 - c. What evidence base is needed to demonstrate effectiveness, efficacy, and accountability of PYD programs?
 - d. How do we create and promote synergies in PYD to capture all efforts of all federal, state, local and non-governmental programs?
3. **Skills** – The most common skills requested by employers are: communication, teamwork, analytical and problem-solving, critical thinking, professionalism and ethical behavior, personal management, interpersonal effectiveness, digital competency, including computer/technical literacy, leadership/management, learning/adaptability, academic competence in reading and math, and strong work values.
 - a. What innovative PYD service delivery needs to be proposed to demonstrate empirical evidence of youth success in obtaining these skills and increasing their employability profiles?

- b. What approaches to overcome barriers in the attainment of these skills, particularly among vulnerable, disconnected, military or traditionally underserved youth must be considered?
- 4. **Program Evaluation and Evidence**– The field of PYD is generating several major priorities for national PYD programming. Among those are: (1) fostering additional evidence on the causal pathways between PYD and positive youth outcomes; (2) developing a uniform set of national PYD performance metrics and measuring the effectiveness of existing national PYD programs; (3) sharing PYD datasets among national researchers and practitioners and linking those to other national data (e.g., Census data, Workforce/Employment data, etc.) to build the PYD evidence base.
 - a. What practices to increase national evidence on the value of PYD must be developed?
 - b. How might research to practice be best employed to provide a robust evaluation and best practices amongst youth-service programs?