

Youth Cohort Challenge

What Does It Take to Effectively Engage and Retain Out of School Youth Throughout the Program Lifespan?

Connecting with, and engaging out-of-school youth (OSY) is one of the biggest challenges youth providers of all types struggle with. From finding and recruiting OSY, to keeping them engaged throughout their program lifespan, success can often be a moving target, and difficult to achieve. Effective engagement and retention requires planning, a skilled staff and ongoing efforts to sustain success. When looking at this issue at the local level, discussion often focuses on:

- ◆ Program Design, Elements and Participant Flow
- ◆ Positive Youth Development Principles and Relationship Building
- ◆ Community Partnerships, Collaboration and Sustainability

Is effectively engaging and retaining OSY a challenge in your local area?

How would you like to be part of a diverse and dynamic group consisting of participants from around the country that focuses on tackling this issue head-on?

The mission of this group, which we will call a Cohort, is to research and unpack the issue of OSY engagement and retention and develop an innovative solution that can be presented and disseminated to the field. We want YOU!

What is a Cohort?

This cohort will consist of teams of 3-5 participants from a local area that will collaborate through an organized process to develop solutions to improve system integration around the question, “What Does It Take to Effectively Engage and Retain Out-of-School Youth Throughout the Program Lifespan?” The cohort will combine “team time” (within own local area) with cross-local/state/regional collaboration. We welcome all formula and non-formula grantees serving OSY, including but not limited to WIOA Title I Youth, YouthBuild, NFJP, INAP, and REO grantees. Groups should include formula and non-formula local level staff and partners that support out-of-school youth and should include different levels of staffing.

The Cohort process will cover 12 weeks during February-April, 2018 and will work towards the following outcomes:

- ◆ Help cohort members address the challenge in their own local areas
- ◆ Develop a practical solution to the challenge to be disseminated to the field nationally
- ◆ Serve as an overall “Innovation Lab” for ideas that could drive integration and promote increased efficiencies and improved outcomes.

The cohort challenge will be delivered virtually. We will meet as a group for a series of six to eight facilitated webinars. In addition to the larger cohort meetings, there will be independent activities required, both individually and in small groups.

We believe that the cohort model will yield innovative and highly effective solutions to this crucial problem the field faces every day around integrated services to engage and retain OSY. By bringing together bright and creative minds, unique perspectives and experiences, and providing a forum that is designed for innovation and free-thinking, this cohort will create something special; something that will enable OSY to more efficiently and effectively tap into the high-quality services that we provide across departments and agencies.

This is not another pilot or webinar or online forum. This is unique opportunity for you to represent your local area. You will bring problems, pain points and insights to the table, share and learn from others over an extended period, and ultimately develop solutions that you implement in your community. As a cohort, you will design the framework for potential best practices, rooted in focused research and collaboration. This is a chance to lead the charge of innovation and opportunity, for you and for the country. We hope you join us.

What Makes for a Good Cohort Team?

- ◆ Groups that have an identified need
- ◆ Groups that can articulate their challenge
- ◆ Groups where members are excited about this effort
- ◆ Groups with established collaboration and communication
- ◆ Groups that can commit to the cohort process and timing

How Do We Apply?

We have developed a short application for your local team to complete. Applications should be submitted to cohorts@mahernet.com with the subject line “**Youth Cohort Challenge**.”

**The application due date is December 15, 2017.
Cohort members will be announced in early January 2018.**

Important Dates:

- ◆ Application due date – December 15, 2017
- ◆ Selection announcements – January 2018
- ◆ Cohort period – February – April 2018

For more information, please contact us at cohorts@mahernet.com.