



**ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION:** Briefly describe each of the following:

Some of the most at-risk youth in the City of Worcester are actively participating in Worcester Youth Center activities. Many of our members live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, physically deteriorating surroundings, a shortage of affordable housing and areas where crime, drugs, and gang activity abound.

The Center attracts a diverse clientele including Latino, African-American, White and Asian. Many of them face barriers to work and school including low academic success, foster care/juvenile justice involvement, homelessness, teen pregnancy, disability, substance use and dependency, and live in families that routinely experience economic hardship.

The lack of job opportunities for Worcester youth contributes to increased youth violence and apprehension about the future. Young people ages 16 to 24 account for 39% of the city's unemployed, despite comprising 16% of residents. A youth violence prevention report, published by Clark University in February 2014, identifies financial insecurity as a source of toxic stress for youth. In a recent report, "Signaling Success: Boosting Teen Employment Prospects", employers cite skills teen job seekers lack include: Critical Thinking, Communication, and Computer Literacy (CommCorp, 2013). A good first job is crucial for building self-worth; the more a teen works, the more likely they become a positive force in their community.

**Goals and how you are achieving them**

Worcester Youth Center's goals are to ensure that young people are healthy and are on a pathway to success by completing regular high school or equivalency, obtain work and/or enter post-secondary education. The Center employs a multi-pronged approach with four main drivers which are foundational (stability): health/wellness and leadership/creative arts; and aspirational (outcome driven): workforce preparation and education programs.

**Metrics indicating successes**

In 2014, 140 at-risk and proven risk youth completed the work readiness program activities and 100 of them had a successful work experience. In addition, 80 very low academic achievers participated in high school equivalency program, 10 completed the new HiSet certification, while the others continued towards this achievement.

**The director's level of commitment to the cause**

Worcester Youth Center's Executive Director is totally committed to the work preparation program for at-risk youth and specifically expanding the type of internship offerings to them, as will be described later in other parts of this proposal. Given his background in community organizing, youth development and workforce development it is clear this is his priority.



### **Past recipients' ongoing involvement in the organization's work**

The Center offers a variety of opportunities to former members. Youth seeking college support have access to several scholarship opportunities administered by the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. The Center also offers direct support for college bound seniors whenever financially possible. Three of the Center's current employees were at one point in time, members of the youth center as were several volunteers. In addition, one former member is a member of the board of directors. We anticipate continued and increased involvement for participants as a result of this UCAPT program.

### **Other sources of funding**

\$4,000 from Greater Worcester Community Foundation for youth-led planning  
\$10,000 from Fallon Health to ensure high-risk girls are involved with work preparation training  
\$27,000 from Youth Connect for Work-readiness  
\$35,000 from United Way of Central MA for Employer Engagement staff and internship stipends  
\$58,000 from Mass Dept. of Public Health for violence prevention through Culinary Training tract

### **How your organization has addressed challenges**

The Worcester Youth Center throughout its 20 year history has been at the forefront of addressing challenges in the community. In fact, the very founding of the Center was an action to address what teens at the time felt were inadequate places to go for them. After a confrontation between youth and police outside of City Hall in 1991, a group of community leaders, adults and youth, met to address the concern resulting in the incorporation of the Worcester Youth Center in 1994. The spirit of that youth and adult partnership has survived the history of the organization. Other examples including getting a bar closed near the Center, incubating the HOPE Coalition, and having an impact on reducing current day youth violence.

In addition, the Center has internal controls to address a variety of challenges including funding, programs-focus and individual youth progress. Some of the protocols include a monthly meeting of the board of directors where systems, fiscal and policy matters are address. The monthly all staff meeting is where program reporting and correction occurs. There is a weekly case conference where individual youth issues are diagnosed and a plan of action implemented by a team of professionals. In addition, there is a daily huddle at the end of the night to go over what worked and did not for that session.

When internal concerns arise the staff and youth meet to resolve matters in partnership. The very activity we are looking to get funded through this proposal supports the youth's ability to be empowered in decision-making.

### **Mention of any legal troubles the organization has had**

Worcester Youth Center has had no legal trouble.



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **Amount requested and for what specific purpose**

The request for \$10,000. The funding will be used entirely for payroll stipends, as describe in the project overview below and payroll taxes (.0965 of payroll). Other program element are paid through other resources as listed previously on page 2.

### **Project overview**

Worcester Youth Center (WYC) will implement the Urban Community Action Planning for Teens (UCAPT) model used at the Youth Center to engage youth in peer led activity that supports their ability to become civically engaged in matters important to them. This activity will offer opportunities for youth to gain employment, leadership and skills for community service learning. Four youth leaders are employed for 30 wks, 6 –9 hrs per week, at \$9/hr. Youth will plan community events and manage a @ \$4,000 annual budget as part of a paid internship.

Our work preparation program has 4 stages which includes:

- Stage1: 20 hours of basic work readiness
- Stage2: up to 100 hours of training (depending on the tract)
- Stage3: paid internships and
- Stage4: ultimately, unsubsidized work and/or entrance into post-secondary education

This project would involve youth who are at stage 3.

The goals of the UCAPT program are:

- 1). Provide youth with skills necessary to enter the workplace: Youth participants receive 20hrs of career readiness. The training includes group and individual lessons. Participants create a resume and cover letter; job search; learn to dress for interview; and develop soft skills. They develop a work portfolio for future use. Participants also receive 90hrs of subsidized work experience as a youth leader at WYC.
- 2). Youth gain knowledge about their community, develop skills for change, and acquire leadership skills including communication, event planning, research, and presentation skills. The youth design monthly activities open to the community and control the budget in the process. They work with the leadership, staff, volunteers and others associated with WYC.
- 3). Raise community awareness of issues relevant to today's youth: Youth research issues affecting their community, propose a solution and communicate it to a larger audience through an action of their choosing.



### **How this project stands out as distinct**

By design, UCAPT gives youth who are selected for the program the voice to make the critical program decisions. These decisions include strategy about the direction, funding choices and implementation plan. The funding being requested now, will allow for UCAPT “graduates” to be leaders at the Youth Center and become involved with civic minded activities and to have an employment experience beyond just a summer job.

UCAPT is a participatory, experiential program model designed to engage young people, who are affected by oppressive conditions in their communities, in a group problem-solving and planning process in partnership with adults. Ask any youth in the city and despite their positive outlook, they’ll reply that there is no shortage of situations they could define as oppressive. This model was used by youth more than twenty years ago to found the Youth Center.

The youth who are selected for the program are those who actually decide the details of the activity; however, it is done in a team and in collaboration with professional staff at the Worcester Youth Center.

For several years, the UCAPT model has been used in our art program. In the past two years youth have choose to raise awareness of issues related to “Violence” “Addiction” and “Homelessness” through visual art or video projects and shared the results with the public in art galleries or showcased at community events. This funding allows youth to be leaders at the Youth Center, mentor other youth and become involved with a civically responsible activity.

UCAPT teaches leadership skills including communication, research, and presentation skills. The youth design their own projects and work as a team and with staff and professionals. They learn how to advocate and how to connect to organizations that are already working on the issues they want to address or provide momentum for issues not being addressed. They also gain valuable leadership skills helping them become a beacon, a shining example of our motto: it’s not just a place to go, it is a place to go further”.

### **Future directions of the project**

Over the past three years, the Executive Director has been expanding the number, quality and types of internship placements for youth. Our placement system has transformed from one of placing large number of youth in single worksite settings to looking for the individual interests of youth and finding suitable internships to match their desires and developmental needs. We are looking to build upon the UCAPT model and offer longer term placements for youth. In the future, the youth who are involved with this part of the program will be the “go to” youth on issues involving the Youth Center and for youth-focused issues in the community at-large.



### **Metrics indicating local impact**

The first indicator to measure will be the number of youth successfully completing a work readiness portfolio. We expect four youth leaders assigned to this project and that 100% will complete the portfolio.

The second measure will track of the number of youth leaders that show an increase in job skills. Our goal is that 100% will show an increase on two or more goals set for them over the course of 30 weeks. WYC uses the MA Work-based Learning Plan to diagnose challenges in the work setting and set attainable and meaningful goals for youth to achieve.

The third success measure will be the number and level of attendance at youth-led events. The target will be an average attendance of 50 people at 12 events.

A fourth measure will help us determine whether or not attendees/community have benefitted from the event. We will look to see if the perspective or position has changed on any given subject or if they have acquired new knowledge or understanding. The audience will be surveyed after every event to see what has changed and how we could improve.

Fifth will be whether or not the program has an impact on the individual youth interns. We will use surveys and facilitated feedback to determine if the experience is making a difference in their lives. We want to know if they feel more confident, their desire to attend post-secondary school, and if this activity is keeping them safe from the streets as a few examples.