



Recruitment Best Practices

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YouthBuild USA

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit offers best practices and tips to recruit YouthBuild participants and staff members, including helping you think about the WHY behind recruitment messaging.

The road to successful YouthBuild outcomes begins with a strategic program recruitment process! Leveraging strong program practices, partnerships, and community support will ensure prospective participants and staff members see YouthBuild as an impactful program that helps young people connect successfully to education and career pathways.

Generally, stay attuned to how you can leverage activities and communications to engage people in future recruitment efforts, even when you're not actively looking for participants or staff members. For prospective participants, recruitment for another cohort often restarts immediately upon completing a Mental Toughness orientation period.

In 2022, the social impact agency Fenton reviewed 31 programs' recruitment materials and survey responses from 83 programsⁱ. Their findings informed many of the recommendations for recruiting participants and staff members within this resource.

RECRUITING STAFF MEMBERS

Best practices throughout this resource can be used to recruit staff members, especially YouthBuild alums and young people. However, most of the language is focused on participants and may need some simple updating to gear more toward staff members.

If you're looking to recruit staff members, here are a few specific areas to focus on:



Referrals (page 5)



Word of Mouth (page 5)



Elevator Pitch (page 6)



Facebook (page 15)



LinkedIn (page 17)

MESSAGING

It is essential to engage young people with respect, understanding, and appreciation for their current situation.

Focus your materials, messaging, and all communications on the participants' assets, not deficits. Expectations should be framed as teaching skills for success in the workplace or postsecondary institutions, not as right or wrong actions. This reflects a belief in young people's abilities and an understanding of their circumstances.

Do/Don't Message Examples



YouthBuild can point you in the right direction with the support and care you deserve. We will partner with you, guiding you to define your life and career goals and what you want for yourself. **We are here to help you succeed.**



YouthBuild is a free-to-join career, learning, and life skills-building program for young people. If it's important to you, it's important to us.



We know you've had a tough ride, and we want to help you out of that. We have the experience to help get you on the right path.



We know what you need and can make it happen for you.

Recruitment efforts must persuade young people that YouthBuild offers more than just quick money; it provides career growth and personal development opportunities.

YouthBuild's impact goes well beyond a diploma, training, and career.

Emphasize that YouthBuild:

- Supports young people's independence.
- Is a welcoming, supportive, and fun community of peers.
- Offers young people a sense of belonging.
- Provides tools to build a career and increase earning potential.
- Includes leadership development and mentorship from relatable people.
- Has a process that holds participants to expectations of follow-through with guided and intentional support.ⁱⁱ
- Has a long history of youth-led initiatives and programming.

Two suggestions to **avoid** in your messaging:

- Avoid phrases like "evening classes" or "spring enrollment." This can give the impression that YouthBuild is a school with semesters and may dissuade young

people who either had negative experiences with or are generally avoiding academic settings.

- Avoid using a “limited space available” or exclusive language. This could trigger insecurities and self-doubt, leading potential applicants to think the program is not for them or that they will not get in, so why bother?ⁱⁱⁱ

Ensure consistent messaging in your materials and outreach (phone, text, email, social media, talking points, flyers, etc.) from the beginning of recruitment through the end of the application and selection process. Otherwise, people could get confused about the YouthBuild program or become uncertain about their next steps.

The Power of Influencers: Participants, Alumni, and “Grandmothers”

Most referrals come from word of mouth via influencers like participants, alumni, and “grandmothers” (a term of endearment and shorthand in this resource to signify a trusted family member, adult friend, or community member who is perceived to have the young person’s best interest in mind).^{iv}

Therefore, you should include messaging that enables those influencers to communicate the importance of building skills for a lifetime, having a career, and being part of a community.

Find ways to connect with the “grandmothers” in a young person’s life who can help nudge them toward YouthBuild. Some ideas are listed in the Facebook and LinkedIn sections below. You can also contact parents/guardians of current participants to see if they can share information about your YouthBuild program with others in their circles and community. Parent/guardian stories in both written and video form may be helpful. Consider stories from a family with multiple connections to YouthBuild or a testimonial about how an adult has really seen a young person impacted by your program.

Alums may be the most impactful and capable of participating in recruitment because they are non-judgmental peers with similar experiences. They can provide hope, inspiration, and persuasion as someone who has overcome or is still working through relatable hardships.

Some ways to engage and leverage alums as influencers:

- Feature alums in social media posts and during in-person presentations.
 - Provide cash/gift card incentives to bring applicants to the program. These can NOT be funded by your DOL YouthBuild grant. Instead, solicit donations from local businesses or request unwanted gift cards from staff and other community members mentioned (“grandmothers”).
- Establish and maintain a formal online YouthBuild alum group and provide them with incentives (see examples in the prior bullet) and resources like talking

points, flyers, and social media graphics to support recruitment efforts within their sphere of influence.

- Create a bank of written and video testimonials from alums that can be used for various online/offline recruitment efforts.

YouthBuild participants can also be great ambassadors and recruitment agents as they are uniquely positioned to share their YouthBuild experience with friends and peers in the community. They can share their unique experiences, how good they feel about the next step in their lives, and the continuing support they receive from the program. They can share this news with family members, community members, peers, professors, and employers.

To successfully recruit young people with their peers, you must view YouthBuild participants as recruitment partners, as they represent your program model and outcomes. Equip your participants with ways they can inspire their peers to contact the local YouthBuild program, learn more about educational options and career exploration, and apply to join the program.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Ensure you acquire all related permissions associated with video/written testimonials.

Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a concise way to share your program's impact. Ensure all staff members and partners (including your recruitment partners!) have a unified message when discussing your program.

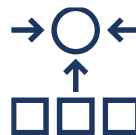
In an elevator pitch, include the following:



Who are you?
(YouthBuild)



What do you do?



What makes
your program
unique?



How do you do
your work, and
how does it
transform lives
and communities?

The general time length for elevator pitch content is approximately two minutes (ideally, closer to one minute).

Consider providing partners talking points and practicing together during a staff meeting or training.

PARTNERSHIPS

Education and employment placement partners may not necessarily provide a steady stream of young people who might enroll in the program. Still, they are key partners that you should engage with throughout the year. If a partner knows you're recruiting and can elevate or share that message, that can help put you in front of different audiences.

Consider existing partners and community assets before developing specific recruitment and outreach strategies. Who are they? What do they believe is your program's value-add to the partnership or community? How can you best engage a partner throughout the program cycles in ways that keep your partnership strong?

Your partners have a strong understanding of the return on investment you bring to companies, and you should use this! Approach your most vital partners to see if they can advocate or promote the YouthBuild program.

Ensure you keep your community partners in mind when planning for recruitment, including other youth-serving organizations, local American Job Centers, local courts, police officers, local businesses, and local community leaders.

As indicated in the "Power of Influencers" section, some of the strongest advocates and sources of promotion for the YouthBuild program are the young people who have completed the program successfully and are thriving in their lives beyond YouthBuild. A strong alum network is a key recruitment ingredient because it encourages former participants to stay engaged and helps promote the program. This ongoing contact with participants and alums ensures your program can keep tabs on who may be a great alum recruitment partner for a particular recruitment cycle.

Check out [Rethinking Recruitment: Partnerships and Strategies](#) for more insights and the [Partnerships Resource Collection](#).

MARKETING PLAN/ACTIVITIES

A strategic plan for recruiting participants and staff members is critical. Start with a successful recruitment strategy. What are you trying to do, and how will you get there? Whom will you engage?

Creating a marketing plan ensures a consistent message and aligned activities.

It is integral to have a timeline and a strategy for who will be handling recruitment efforts, which staff members/partners will be engaging outside of the organization, methods of engagement, in-person or virtual outreach, clear recruitment goals, and benchmarks for success.

Here are the basics:

- Start with a strategic marketing plan mission statement.
- Be realistic and SMART when setting goals.
- Lay out recruitment objectives.
- Do a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.
- List your recruitment methods.
 - ◆ Word of mouth*
 - ◆ In-person events*
 - ◆ Virtual info sessions
 - ◆ Referrals
 - ◆ Flyers
 - ◆ Social media
 - ◆ TV, newspaper, and radio ads^
 - ◆ Advertising^
 - ◆ Direct mail^
- Prepare and implement your plan.
- Track what works and what doesn't. Include a question on your application/intake form to capture the way(s) each young person heard about your program.



What is a marketing plan?

It's a series of structured activities designed to achieve a specified goal, such as increasing brand awareness or driving attendance at an open house.

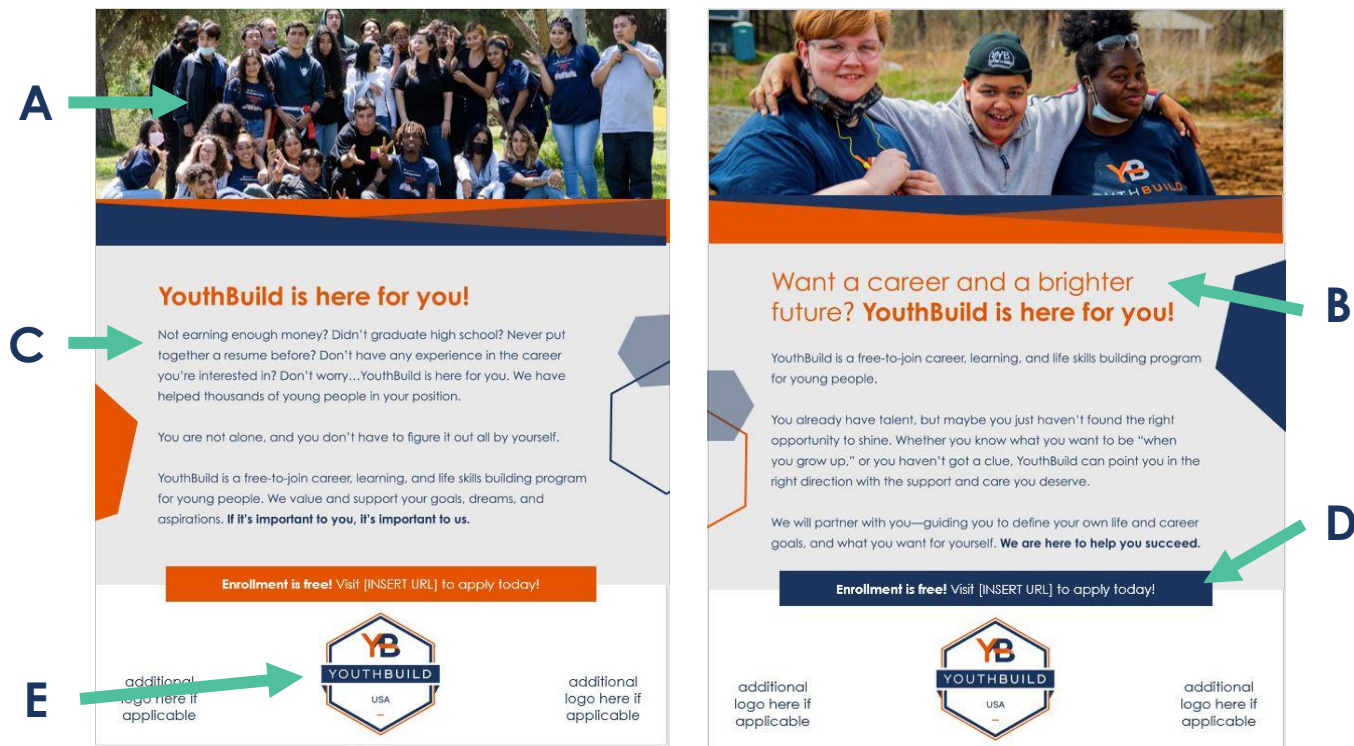
Check out this [Recruitment Marketing Tool and Activity resource](#) to learn more about a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and find examples of how to organize your marketing activities.

*** The most effective means for reaching and engaging potential applicants.^v**

^ Not as practical, but if these activities work for you, keep using them!^{vi}

FLYERS/DESIGN

Maintain a suite of customizable outreach materials designed specifically to reach possible participants and engage a mix of trusted influencers.

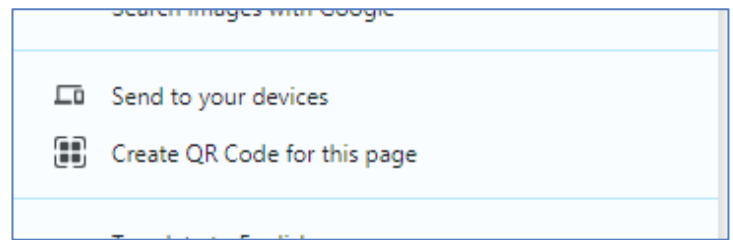


What does a quality YouthBuild recruitment flyer include?

- A. A quality (not blurry), compelling image that resonates with your audience.
- B. An engaging heading that shares why your program is a great option for young people.
- C. Basic information and inspirational language so people want to learn more.
- D. A simple call to action that links to a recruitment-oriented webpage so someone can easily apply or learn more information. Ensure that any link or QR code is easy to find/use and clear about where the link will take people.
- E. Your logo or program name so people know who the flyer is from and can easily search online if they don't use the link on the flyer.
- F. Optional: QR code, hashtag, and/or social media handles.

QR Codes: QR (quick response) codes can quickly and easily direct applicants to online information. Ensure the QR code link takes users directly to the YouthBuild page with the application or inquiry form front and center. It's important to make it easy for applicants to take the next step.

To create a QR code, simply right-click on a webpage and select the “create QR code for this page” option from the menu (see the screenshot to the right). A QR code will then pop up on the screen for you to use. This works for most browsers.



Review the QR code regularly to ensure it still works and is taking people to the right location.

IN-PERSON EVENTS

In-person events yield results because spending time with potential applicants to learn more about their circumstances and establish trust can generate leads that convert to enrollments.

Set up days and times for program recruitment staff and a few young leaders from the program to visit partner sites. Speak to your stakeholders who often engage with young people and perhaps even a group with multiple individuals interested in enrolling in the YouthBuild program. This type of person-to-person contact will give all parties an understanding of the type of engagement and support they can expect if they enroll in the program and the relationships that can be built to support their long-term education and career success.

Types of in-person events:

- Presentations at high schools, colleges, job fairs, religious centers, partner events, and other community events.
- Tabling at colleges and job fairs.
- Street canvassing/distributing flyers in high-traffic areas and door-to-door.
- Events hosted at your program location, such as a panel, recruitment Q&A, open house, or fundraiser.

Hosting Luncheons

Here's an example of how to host a luncheon. Please note that your DOL grant dollars **cannot** be used to purchase food for this type of event.

- 1-hour luncheon: determine a regular cadence - 2X a month, once a quarter - for consistency
- 15-20 guests per luncheon.
- Lunch includes a meal and program literature.

- Guests can include youth interested in enrolling in YouthBuild and community members, employers, and other partners.
- Program staff share information about program services and community impact.
- Participants and graduates share the impact of YouthBuild on their lives and career success.
- Short video of YouthBuild participants in action.

Remember: Go to where your potential participants/staff already are (e.g., parks, barbershops, fraternity/sorority events, nail salons, shopping areas, schools, community events, and Head Start programs). This is especially important as you decide where to post flyers that young people OR “grandmothers” (referenced in “The Power of Influencers” section) will see the information about your program.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We know that YouthBuild participants are deeply connected to their communities and each other via social media platforms.

Therefore, it's important to use social media to amplify your message and highlight the work and impact of your program, where young people can see and share information about YouthBuild.

A December 2023 [Pew Research Center social media usage report](#) found that the majority of teens ages 13-17 say they use TikTok (63%), Snapchat (60%), and Instagram (59%).

In a [Pew Research Center January 2024 fact sheet](#), the top three social media apps for ages 18-29 and 30-49 are YouTube (93%, 92%), Instagram (78%, 59%), and Facebook (67%, 75%). See the table to the right for more social media application usage from the [same resource link](#).

Ages →	18-29	30-49
Facebook	67%	75%
Instagram	78%	59%
LinkedIn	32%	40%
X/Twitter	42%	27%
Pinterest	45%	40%
Snapchat	65%	30%
YouTube	93%	92%
WhatsApp	32%	38%
Reddit	44%	31%
TikTok	62%	39%

Using this age-related data, create compelling videos (see the video section below) and content that people can view on their mobile devices and then easily share across the social media platforms they use.

Finally, consider hiring an intern or engaging an alum skilled at social media. They can either help you get started or support you regularly.

Best Practices and Tips

1 Schedule your content in advance – daily, weekly, or monthly – with consideration of application deadlines, admissions cycles, and important program dates. Use an online calendar ([Adobe Content Scheduler](#), [CoSchedule](#), [SPRINKLR Social Media Posting Schedule](#)) to plan your posts. In addition, stay attuned to current events or disasters such as a mass shooting or severe weather in case posting suddenly becomes inappropriate.

2 Keep a social media directory of important individuals and partners to track, including X/Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and websites. This will help you connect with the right audiences.

3 Always use eye-catching photos and captivating videos that are fun and engaging. Tell stories, share data and statistics, and highlight successes.

4 Give people snippets of information and encourage them to visit your website to learn more. Include the website links and the posts you share in your profile bios. Regularly check to ensure your website has the current program, correct contact information, pictures, and success stories of participants.

Share/repost others' posts about your recruitment.

5 Tag partners/people involved in your content and use hashtags when relevant.

6 Cross-share content when possible. Share your Facebook posts on X/Twitter and link them to your Instagram social feeds. This will elevate your content and keep it front and center. It will also help expand your social networks and increase the visibility of your messaging.

7 Repurpose content for various platforms but remember the best presentation on each. For example, you may share a link directly in a Facebook post, but on Instagram, you would need to post a photo and put that link in your bio.

8 Create content that can be used beyond recruitment. Your program likely already has a library of photos and videos used for other campaigns and initiatives. Pull existing content and tweak it to fit your recruitment goals. If you create new content, consider how it can be applied to other program areas.

9 Sort content into categories and try to post a variety within a week (e.g., info-sharing, participant spotlights, day-in-the-life, etc.).

10 Make social media policies or guidelines. Even if only one person manages your social media, this will help you determine how and what to share and keep content and messaging on-brand. It also sets clear and consistent guidelines for posting and sharing content externally.

11 Invest when necessary. Some social media platforms offer additional features for a small fee, ranging from targeted ads to more robust analytics. Determine your program's needs and, if it makes sense, explore these options to supplement recruitment efforts.

12 Develop [templates to pop in photos and text](#) for a consistent look or branding.

13 Consider telling a story over several days.

14 Know your audience. Consider what kind of information you share (about YouthBuild, your program, who you serve, etc.) with your audiences, depending on their knowledge level.



Videos

Create a bank of short videos cued to music (always cite or give credit!), as this format is most relevant and engaging for young people.

This content should have the look, tone, and feel in young people's feeds as if someone their age created it (maybe you can find a young person to make it!). Videos should be designed according to the specifications of YouTube, Instagram Reels, and TikTok.

Always add captions to any video you intend to share, either in the actual video or in a comment on the post (and mention in the post that the captions are in a comment). This makes every video accessible to all.

Video content ideas:

- Success stories/testimonials with alumni (approximately 1.5 minutes with shorter variations).
- Behind-the-scenes at YouthBuild: show applicants what it's like to participate in the program. Try to appeal to young people looking for a place to belong where they are valued and not judged for their life circumstances.
- Quick-cut, step-by-step videos – show how to approach YouthBuild and become involved.
- A mix of shorter-form “snackable” videos for social media platforms (10, 15, and 30 seconds).
- A one-minute animated video that takes a potential applicant through the program from the application phase to starting a career.
- Funny content or content with a twist or surprise at the end requires creativity, and the best place to start is by finding online trends to react to.



Metrics

Collect metrics regularly to evaluate which of your content gets the most engagement.

Track clicks using trackable links (e.g., Bitly or Rebrandly) to understand how many people click on something and where people click from. This can help you decide if you need to share it more or if enough people have seen it.

Use hashtags (#) for key phrases to track your posts and user traffic across platforms. You can create your own AND include ones that connect to your posts.

Include social media (generally or specific apps) as an option on your intake form where you ask how someone heard about your program.



Gaming

[Discord](#) or [Twitch](#) can be used as an additional effective outreach method, as these video game watch-along/play-along platforms are becoming primary entertainment outlets and virtual meeting places. Potential applicants could watch and participate in Q&A sessions while the hosts play through a video game – one that is popular and appropriate.

Trying this method may involve collaborating with alums who are active gamers on the platform, or potentially gamer influencers willing to support your program.



Facebook

- [HOW TO USE FACEBOOK](#)
- Largest audience age: 25-34
- This could be a great place to spread the word about staff member openings and reach “grandmothers.”
- Share detailed posts in addition to photos/videos.
- Think about ways to build ongoing online connections. Facebook is the most effective platform for this, and some programs are already leveraging it to reach the “grandparents” audience due to the [older skew of its users](#). You could start a group for current parents/family/guardians or alums who can answer questions for new families and where prospective applicants can interact with alums in a group setting.
- Ads can be worth it. Learn more about the cost and how it may work for you.
- Leverage hashtags and tags.



Instagram

- HOW TO USE INSTAGRAM
- Largest audience age: 25-34
- Instagram is designed for more frequent content. You can share multiple posts of photos, Instagram reels, and longer Instagram stories each week.
- The audience is slightly younger than Facebook, the majority 18-34.
- Create highlights of stories with important information.
- Use as many high-quality images as possible.
- Reshare posts from partners, alums, and community leaders.
- Share multiple links with a bio link platform like Linktr.ee. You can also add a link to a story. (Do NOT add a link directly into a post because it won't be clickable.)
- Pay attention to the aesthetic of your grid. Does it have a consistent look and feel? Are the images high-quality? Consider archiving irrelevant posts that don't fit the aesthetic.
- If your post involves another organization or individual, you can ask them to collaborate and cross-post. This will help the post reach a wider audience.



YouTube

- USING YOUTUBE AS A NONPROFIT
- Largest audience age: 25-34
- Make playlists for different topics, like recruitment!
- Be concise and engaging.
- Direct people to your YouTube video(s) or channel from other platforms or content (e.g., newsletters, your website).
- YouTube content can be shared as often as it makes sense for your recruitment strategy.
- Consider planning to do one video a day for one week.



X/Twitter

- HOW TO USE X/TWITTER
- Largest audience age: 25-34
- Keep posts short but always catchy.
- Make your pinned tweet about recruitment (e.g., application deadline, who to connect with, info session details).
- Content can be frequent, but make sure that if you share multiple posts, they don't detract from each other.
- Engage in conversations via hashtags.
- Consider a planned Q&A about recruitment at a pre-determined time. This way, people can participate live or view the content later.
- Retweet, like, and mention others.



LinkedIn

- BUILDING COMMUNITY ON LINKEDIN
- Largest audience age: 25-34
- Make easy-to-share content so your partners and staff members can personalize and share it with their networks.
- Use mainly for staff member recruitment and for family members or friends of young people who could be applicants.
- Create and share long-form articles related to your work ([example](#)).
- Ask your staff members about LinkedIn groups they're in (perhaps alum associations) where people share job openings.
- Find groups to join where you can share job openings.
- Leverage your board of directors and partners as brand ambassadors and collaborators.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ❑ Who on your staff is responsible for recruiting?
- ❑ What materials do you already have or need to create?
- ❑ Are you noting referral sources and places to do outreach? (e.g., schools, streets, neighborhoods, laundromats, storefronts)
- ❑ Do you know who you are recruiting? (e.g., participants, staff members, age groups, foster youth, young parents, young people formerly detained)
- ❑ Do you have a social media plan for recruiting?
- ❑ Are you recruiting for a specific career construction/C+ pathway or staff position? If so, does your language make this specification clear?
- ❑ How are you targeting your messaging to best leverage your partners and their communication channels?
- ❑ How are you engaging partners in your recruitment efforts?
From your Statement of Work, how many cohorts have you proposed? Does your proposed cohort number still work for the program?
- ❑ Did you calculate from the end of the second year of your grant and work backward to give you a calendar for recruiting and enrolling?

We hope you find this toolkit's resources, information, and examples valuable and inspiring as you recruit young people and staff to your program.

ⁱ In 2022, [Fenton](#) collaborated with YouthBuild USA to develop a survey open from May 16 through May 31. Fenton received 96 responses representing 83 YouthBuild USA affiliate programs nationwide. Nine organizations submitted more than one response. Fenton also reviewed 108 recruitment materials shared by 31 YouthBuild USA affiliates. The materials included flyers, social media posts, print or outdoor advertisements, pamphlets, posters, and videos. Several pieces of information in this resource come from Fenton's findings and recommendations upon reviewing the information received from programs.

ⁱⁱ See above.

ⁱⁱⁱ See above.

^{iv} See above.

^v See above.

^{vi} See above.

^{vii} See above.

^{viii} See above.

^{ix} See above.