

Regional Youth Service Provider Survey

Results and Analysis

VALLEY VISION



*Connecting Citizens
Shaping Solutions*

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the respondents who took their valuable time to complete this survey. Their dedication to our region's youth is admirable. We would also like to thank *Youth Development Network* for assisting in the development and distribution of this survey. Their relentless commitment to furthering the collaborative practices of our area's youth-serving organizations is inspiring. We would also like to thank the California Wellness Foundation for their financial support. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the hundreds of thousands of young people in our region, their caregivers, and their families. Our futures are in your hands.

Report Summary

This report summarizes the findings from a survey distributed to our Capital Region's community of youth services providers (YSPs). Valley Vision conducted the survey to assess the capacity and readiness of the region's YSPs to engage in highly collaborative practices that would contribute to enhanced service delivery for youth. Certain key ingredients must be in place for networks to engage in highly collaborative practices, and this survey sought to examine both the presence of these ingredients and their level of development.

The survey was sent to approximately 250 YSPs, and 45 of these organizations responded (18%). The responses were analyzed and interpreted and conclusions were drawn from these. The key findings of the survey included:

- While leadership exists among the community of YSPs, elements required for network leadership are still relatively undeveloped.
- The majority of youth-serving organizations do not share a common vision for our region's youth; however, most agree that such a vision should be further developed.
- The vast majority of respondents agreed that increased collaboration would benefit youth, and demonstrated a willingness and eagerness to enhance collaborative practices.
- Many respondents believe that competition for funding, lack of available information and resources, and the absence of a communications infrastructure to connect YSPs were barriers toward collaboration.
- The YSP community as a whole lacks commonly agreed upon metrics that inform the state of youth development in the region.

Background and Purpose of Survey

In 2009 Valley Vision began a youth development initiative that is primarily concerned with enhancing the effectiveness of the region's community of youth-serving organizations, or youth service providers (YSPs). The underlying assumption behind the effort is that our region's youth will be better served by the individuals and organizations committed to their well-being through more coordinated and integrated service delivery. Research suggests that community development is enhanced when organizations with similar goals and missions, sometimes called *collaboratives* or *networks*, coordinate their efforts with one another. Through enhanced coordination, "meta-strategies" (those that extend beyond the individual organization) can be created and implemented, gaps in service delivery identified and filled, and overall service delivery better coordinated. With better coordination, competitiveness for funding could decrease, improving communication and information sharing within the network or collaborative.

Collaborations or networks require certain ingredients, skills, and competencies to function effectively. In other words, collaboration does not "just happen." While there are variations across disciplines, research suggests that four to six key components must be present and developed for collaborations to function effectively. The components examined in this report include:

- A common need and readiness to engage in collaborative practices
- A common and agreed upon vision among members of the collaboration or network who share common values
- A recognized leadership function held by an individual or organization, that is participative in nature
- Metrics or measures of success used to guide strategic decision-making
- An enabling structure that promotes integration, communication, and information sharing.

During the spring and summer of 2009, Valley Vision created and distributed a survey to assess the YSP community's readiness and competence to engage in collaborative practices. The survey sought to measure the community's beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative practices, attitudes about network leadership, and whether the community shared a common vision for youth in the Sacramento region. Specifically, the survey was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Is there an agreed upon vision among YSPs for youth in the region? What is the level of agreement?
2. Is there leadership within and among youth-serving organizations spearheading efforts around youth development?

3. Are there metrics that allow the community of youth-serving organizations to critically appraise its efforts and results and make strategic plans? If so, what are the metrics? If not, what is needed?
4. What is the level of collaboration and coordinated effort in the YSP community?
 - a. What are the current beliefs and perceptions of YSPs around collaboration with others?
 - b. What obstacles inhibit collaboration among the YSP community? What practices promote collaboration?

Methodology

The survey consisted of 30 questions that both collected organizational information and assessed four broad categories: 1) Leadership, 2) Connection and Collaboration 3) Coordination and 4) Access to Metrics. A variety of question types were used including Likert-scaled questions, yes-no questions and open-ended text questions. In some cases, respondents were required to provide additional information if a question was answered in a certain way.

The survey was created in an on-line collection tool (Survey Monkey) and distributed via email to a variety of individuals and contacts known to Valley Vision. It was also distributed through a link included in the *Youth Development Network's* electronic newsletter. Individuals who received the survey through the email blasts received a reminder notice if they did not complete the survey within one week. Those who received the survey link in the *Youth Development Network's* electronic newsletter did not receive reminders.

Results

The survey was sent to approximately 250 different individuals and youth-serving organizations. A total of 45 responses were received for a response rate of 18%. Of these responses, 10 were incomplete. Individuals who received email reminders after the initial survey distribution had a significantly higher response rate than those who did not. The results of these responses were aggregated and analyzed to answer the primary survey questions listed above.

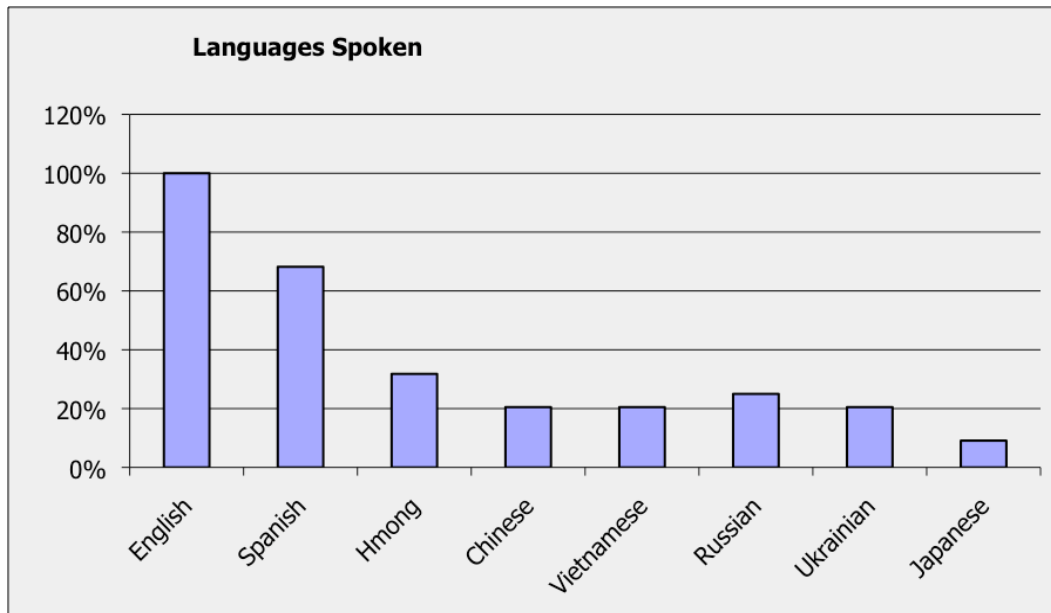
The low response rate is likely due to “survey fatigue” as another survey was distributed among the YSP community shortly before this one. We do not hold these responses to be representative of the overall YSP community’s beliefs and opinions, and do not represent them as such. We do offer these results as a collective point-of-view and opinion from those that made the effort to complete the survey.

Organizational Information

Individuals from a variety of youth-serving organizations completed the survey, as shown in the list below:

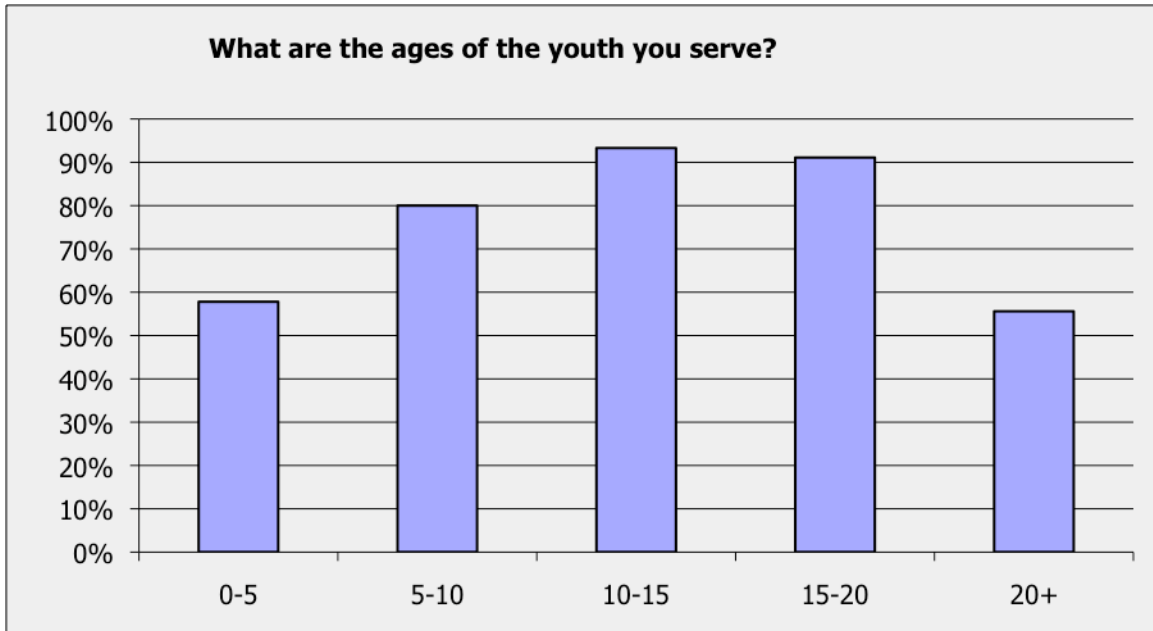
- Nonprofit (14)
- City or County Agency (7)
- School K-12 (6)
- State Agency (4)
- Higher Education (3)
- Faith Based (2)
- Funder (2)
- Health (2)
- Consultant (2)
- REACH Coalition (2)
- Military (2)

Languages Spoken by Staff



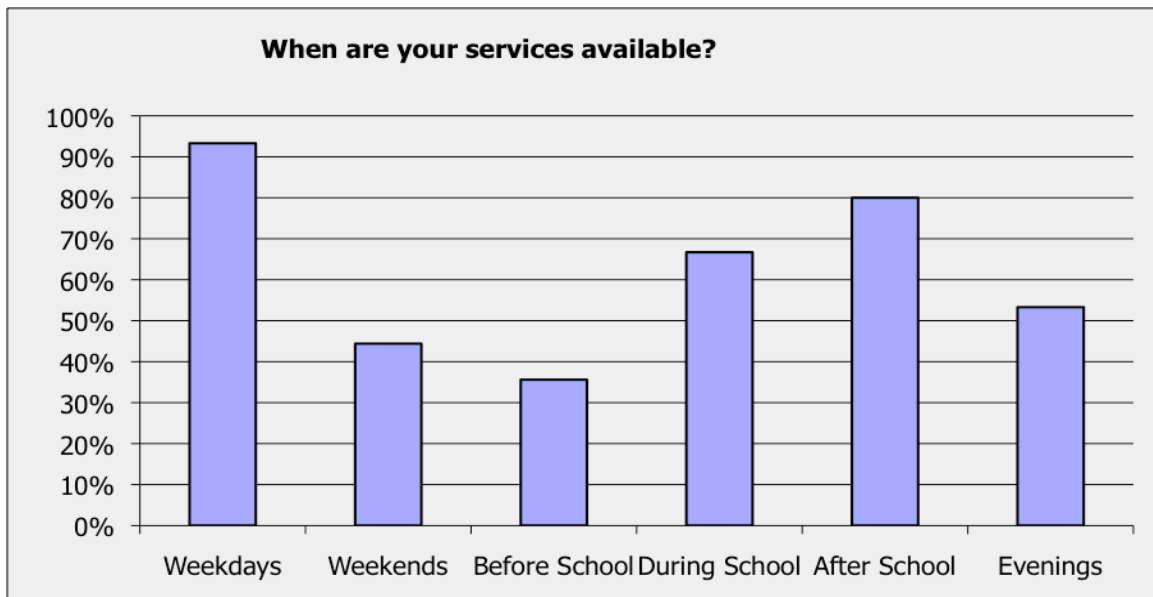
All of the responding agencies have English-speaking staff, and nearly 70% of the agencies also have staff members who speak Spanish. Over 30 % of the agencies have Hmong-speaking staff, and 25% of the agencies have Russian-speaking staff. 20% of the agencies reported having staff who speak either Chinese, Vietnamese or Ukrainian. Other languages spoken include Mien, German, and French.

Ages of Youth Served



Over 90% of the respondents serve youth in the age ranges of 10 to 15 years old and 15 to 20 years old. Nearly 60% of the respondents serve youth between zero and five, and approximately 55% serve youth over 20 years of age.

Hours of Operation



93% of the respondents offer service during weekdays, while only 44% offer services during the weekend. 80% of respondents offer programs and services after school, and 67% offer services during the school day. 53% of responding agencies offer services in the evening and 36% offer services before school.

Service Area

Most of the survey respondents provide services in Sacramento County. Several areas and neighborhoods in Sacramento County were represented, including Natomas, North Highlands, Rancho Cordova, South Sacramento, Folsom, Arden Arcade, Fair Oaks, Carmichael, Citrus Heights, Elk Grove and Galt. Providers from the following counties also responded to the survey: Amador, Alpine, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, San Joaquin, Solano, Yolo, Yuba. One survey respondent provides programs or services at the national level.

Types of Programs or Services Provided

Close to three quarters of the survey respondents provide direct services to youth. One quarter of respondents are involved with indirect services such as managing funding programs, training and technical assistance for adults, professional development, resources and referrals, organizational administration, and consulting. Broad categories of direct services represented include education, health and mental health services, after school programs, youth leadership programs, gang and violence prevention, civic engagement and volunteer programs, and services for foster and homeless youth. Juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies were not represented among the survey respondents.

Beliefs and Practices of Collaboration Among YSPs

The results concerning beliefs and collaborative practices among YSPs are derived from the four key questions described earlier in the report and are presented in the following format. First, we explain the importance of each practice, component, or ingredient of effective collaborative efforts. Next, we report the results of the survey that speaks to this area. Finally, we offer our interpretation and perspectives on the findings of the survey. We base our interpretations on the survey results as well as our observations of and interactions with the YSP community.

Leadership

Why is this important?

What is the significance of determining the level of leadership in the YSP community? In order for collaborative efforts to be successful, an individual or organization must fulfill a leadership function among network members. Further, because collaboratives or networks are informal arrangements, the leadership function must be participative in nature.

This is what we found....

Over 40% of respondents agreed that there was a clear sense of leadership among the community of YSPs. However, 25% disagreed, while over 20% of respondents remained “neutral” on the question.

What does this mean?

This suggests that among those who responded to this survey, opportunities exist for leading organizations to bolster their place among this community of YSPs. Since the survey respondents did not identify one clear leader within the YSP community, this also suggests that elements of participative and servant-oriented leadership may be present in some situations.

How do we interpret these results?

It is promising that a few organizations were identified as leaders among the YSP community. However, it appears that this leadership among YSPs is still developing. Organizations may emerge as leaders in relation to a specific issue or opportunity, but there does not appear to be an organic ebb and flow of leadership within the community as a whole. Some organizations may engage in “turf wars” and struggle to position themselves as THE leader in youth development instead of stepping up and stepping back based on who is best suited to lead at a given time. The community would benefit from a collaborative structure that supports leadership based on expertise and capacity to address an issue and mobilize the community, as opposed to the current state where power struggles hinder the community’s ability to support an emerging leader that is best equipped to fill the role.

Additionally, the struggle between organizations around leadership of the community can lead to a lack of communication and reinforce the “siloes” approach to delivering services. Organizations may withhold information about their programs and initiatives in order to maintain their perceived roles as experts or leaders about an issue. This practice often results in the existence of several initiatives or programs addressing the same issue, and these disparate efforts cause confusion both within the youth development community and among the general public.

Who among the YSP community are perceived as leaders in the region?

Youth Development Network was identified as a leading organization by over half of the survey respondents. *Sacramento ACT* was next on the list, receiving mentions from slightly more than 20% of respondents. The difference between the first and second highest ranked organizations is noteworthy, as is the fact that the *City of Sacramento’s Office of Youth Development* was number three behind *ACT*. *Sierra Health Foundation*, a funder that does not provide direct services, was also included among the top four organizations identified as leaders.

Common Vision and Values

Why is this important?

Research suggests that in order for communities to engage in concerted and collaborative actions, a key ingredient must be a vision, goal, or objective that all members of the community agree upon. Another key ingredient is commonality among values and beliefs held by community members. In many instances, this commonality of purpose and values serves as the glue that helps to unite and hold communities together.

Since there are several organizations taking a leadership role in the field, it is important that there is an overall common vision for youth in the region. In the absence of a common vision, organizations may be unintentionally working against each other, or, in some cases, duplicating efforts.

This is what we found...

Approximately one-third of all respondents agreed that there was a common, agreed upon vision among the community of YSPs working the Sacramento region. Virtually all of the remaining two-thirds disagreed or remained neutral concerning beliefs around a common vision. However 44% of respondents indicated that they would not allow disagreements over beliefs, methods, and values keep them from working collaboratively with other YSPs. Finally, over half (55%) of those surveyed strongly agreed that the region would benefit from a blueprint for youth and a coalition to guide its development.

What does this mean?

While it is promising that YSPs indicate some willingness to work with others with whom they disagree over values, beliefs, and methods, the apparent absence of a commonly held vision inhibits more collective and concerted action among providers. However, with over half of the respondents indicating a positive belief that a region-wide “blue-print” for youth would be beneficial, the development of a common vision is feasible.

Some responses indicated a lack of agreement about whether a common vision exists. This may be attributed to differences in how practitioners define youth development, or to differences in beliefs about the best methodology for working with young people. As a community, youth development practitioners do not yet share a common language around youth development, which creates challenges in articulating a common vision for youth in the region.

How do we interpret these results?

Although the question was not posed in the survey, our experience is that members of the YSP community hold a shared belief about the validity of the youth development approach, and the importance of providing safe and healthy environments, relationships and experiences for the region’s young people. The challenge lies beneath this conceptual view, where individual organizations tend to focus on one part of the “big picture.” At this level, competition for resources often eclipses commonly held beliefs, and organizations may be compelled to focus on their individual missions or goals to secure funding. While organizations express a willingness to work with others despite differences in values, operating in a highly competitive environment with scarce resources can impede collaboration despite the best of intentions.

Collaboration and Coordination

Why is this important?

Some problems or issues are so large and complex that no single organization or institution can solve them alone. Further, some things are too important to be left in the hands of one or a few organizations and institutions; the youth of our region and the challenges they face fall into

these categories. Many of the issues our young people face require a community's concerted effort to address, and when we are faced with these issues it is important that YSPs are able to work collaboratively. In an environment of increasingly limited funding, it is also important that youth-serving organizations have the ability to come together and leverage existing resources. Furthermore, as the number of regional efforts aimed at policy and systems change increases, the youth development community's ability to work together effectively will become increasingly important.

This is what we found...

In general, respondents feel that the YSP community and the youth they serve would benefit from increased opportunities for collaboration and improved coordination of programs and services. While only one third of respondents agreed that the YSP community is well-coordinated, over 80% reported that they currently collaborate with other organizations, and over 90% would welcome more opportunities for collaboration. The majority of respondents (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that working more collaboratively would improve outcomes for youth. Additionally, most respondents indicated a general awareness of the other organizations in the region engaged in similar work, an important first step in the collaborative process.

Respondents also indicated several obstacles that inhibit more collaboration among YSPs. Lack of time, competition for funding, and lack of awareness of other providers and programs were identified as barriers to collaboration. Several respondents agreed that the lack of a centralized way to communicate with one another and share information inhibits collaboration. When asked what could help increase collaboration and coordination, several respondents stated that an easily accessible repository of current information and a way to network online would be helpful.

Additionally, staff turnover was frequently identified as another barrier to collaboration. Relationships between organizations often exist at the individual level, and those relationships do not always stay with the organization when an individual leaves for another position. When a new staff person joins the organization, a substantial amount of time must be invested in renewing those connections.

What does this mean?

An important first step in improving collaboration among our community's YSPs is the "readiness" factor. Here, it appears that a strong percentage of respondents indicated a readiness and willingness to increase collaboration. Another important step is recognizing and identifying commonly held barriers to collaboration and ameliorating or minimizing them. The YSP survey results help to begin the process of identifying barriers to collaboration. These early steps can offer guidance for others to focus their efforts when trying to improve and enhance collaboration among the community of YSPs.

These results indicate that while many feel the community of youth service providers is well connected, lack of time and access to common information inhibits many providers' ability to

achieve the level of connectedness they desire. Several respondents noted that having access to a web-based tool or a continuously updated database containing information about organizations and events would vastly improve their ability to connect and collaborate with others in the community.

What does this mean to us?

The YSP community indicates a strong desire to find ways to work together more frequently and more effectively. This is important as a community's readiness is a key factor in the success of any initiative. Respondents also highlighted the need for improved access to current information about programs, events and providers to foster collaboration and reduce duplication of services.

Access to Metrics

Why is this important?

Research shows that organizations that monitor their results are more effective than those that do not. By monitoring results, organizations can adjust their strategies, tactics, and plans to increase their effectiveness. Further, networks or collaborations must both agree upon, and have access to, metrics they can use to monitor their performance at a community or regional level. Knowing how the community-as-a-whole is performing in serving our region's youth is a vital step in improving the lives of our children.

This is what we found....

Respondents indicated that most organizations use their own metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services, and that it is difficult to find common measures for the region as a whole. Further, results indicated that there is no mutually agreed upon set of metrics used by all YSPs. According to comments from survey respondents, organizations typically use their evaluation data for internal purposes such as quality assessment, program planning and to secure additional funding.

Nearly half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is difficult to monitor important information about youth development in the region. Several respondents indicated that having access to current information about programs and services, and the ability to network with others online would enhance the community's ability to serve youth. Opportunities to network and share information in person were also mentioned among things that would improve the YSP community's ability to monitor its progress.

What does this mean?

These results appear to indicate that more regionally focused metrics and measurements of youth success would be of benefit to the community of YSPs. However, results did not indicate a strong preference from survey providers for the type of metrics needed. This seems to suggest that collaboratively developed youth success measures could be beneficial to the performances of both individual organizations and collaborative efforts.

What does this mean to us?

The lack of common metrics makes it difficult to gauge the overall performance of the YSP community. In the case of the *e:merge Coalition* and the *Regional Compact for Children and Youth*, the absence of agreed upon regional indicators initially made it difficult to establish a baseline from which to measure progress. Many agencies wanted to know the specific measures for which they would be held accountable before adopting the compact. As accountability measures were developed for the compact, many entities, including government agencies and school districts, became more willing to adopt the compact. This may indicate that willingness to collaborate can be effected by the level of clarity about the standards by which the group's efforts will be evaluated.

Conclusion

Collaboration among YSPs is an important part of improving the lives our community's young people. Virtually all of the respondents included in this survey hold a belief that increased collaboration of service delivery is important and will improve the lives of youth. Moreover, all respondents indicated a strong desire, readiness, and willingness to enhance collaborative practices among YSPs. Even with this high level of readiness and desire, some obstacles continue to inhibit our community's ability to engage in collaborative practice. Some of these include a developing, yet immature, leadership structure; the absence of an integrative structure to support collaboration; and more. Despite these challenges, our community also holds the promise and potential to reach collaborative success, and by doing so, improve the lives of the young people we are called on to protect and nurture.