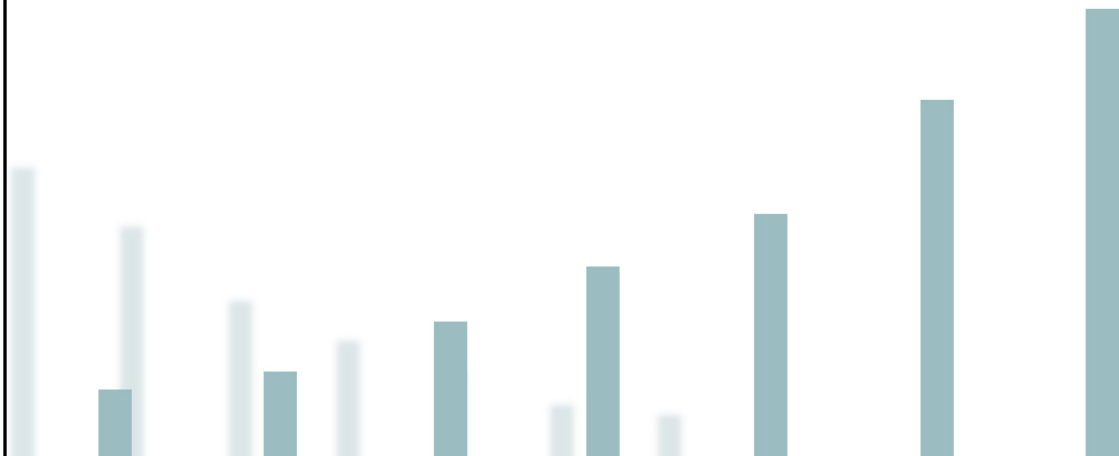


OCTOBER 2004

## YouthBuild USA

Achieving significant scale while  
guiding a national movement



## Summary

Through an unusual partnership with the federal government, YouthBuild USA quickly grew to remarkable scale. The majority of YouthBuild's sites have joined the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network, working as a community of peers held together with multiple levels of voluntary affiliation, standards of accountability, and a number of incentives. At the same time, a significant minority has elected not to join the network, leaving the organization with a set of sites over which it has influence but no direct control.

## Organizational Snapshot

**Organization:** YouthBuild USA

**Year founded:** 1990

**Headquarters:** Somerville, MA

**Mission:** "To unleash the intelligence and positive energy of low-income youth to rebuild their communities and their lives."

**Program:** YouthBuild engages unemployed, low-income 16 to 24 year olds who have either left high school without a diploma or who have a diploma but are unprepared for jobs or college. Participants build affordable housing for homeless and low-income people in their communities while pursuing their own academic education in a YouthBuild alternative school. During the nine- to 12-month program, students split their time between the construction site and the classroom, where they earn their GED or high school diploma, prepare for jobs or college, and learn to be community leaders. Programs provide group and individual counseling, and deliberately build small, mutually supportive communities of adults and peers. Students receive stipends, and some programs offer AmeriCorps college scholarships for their service building housing. After graduating from YouthBuild, students may continue to receive counseling, job and college placement, and alumni services. Since 1994, over 40,000 YouthBuild students have produced

more than 12,000 units of low-income housing. In 2003, there were more than 200 YouthBuild programs around the U.S., engaging approximately 7,000 young adults. An average of 87 percent of YouthBuild students entered the program without high school diplomas, 30 percent had been sentenced by the judicial system, and 27 percent had received public assistance prior to joining YouthBuild. In spite of these overwhelming odds, 59 percent completed the program and 81 percent of graduates went on to college or jobs averaging \$8 an hour.

**Size:** \$9.5 million in revenues (as of 2003); YouthBuild began 2003 with 64 full-time staff and closed the year with 39, due to a temporary loss of AmeriCorps funding; staffing is returning to previous levels now that AmeriCorps funding has been restored.

**Revenue growth rate:** Compound annual growth rate (1999-2003): -1 percent.<sup>1</sup> Highest annual growth rate (1999-2003): 40 percent in 2000.

**Funding sources:** As of 2003, YouthBuild's funding was 50 percent government, 35 percent foundation, 9 percent corporate, and 6 percent other (which includes endowment income, individual donations, donated services, and affiliate fees). Each local YouthBuild program secures its own funding, which is generally a mix of government and private support. Federal support comes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), AmeriCorps, and the U.S. Department of Labor. YouthBuild USA grants an average of \$5 million to its affiliates each year.

**Organizational structure:** YouthBuild USA is a nonprofit national intermediary and support center for YouthBuild programs nationwide. The majority of local YouthBuild programs are operated as affiliates by independent organizations, which have their own 501(c)(3) designations and are members of the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network (AffNet). But YouthBuild programs are not required to affiliate; some are funded by HUD and run by local public agencies. There are 200

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<sup>1</sup> YouthBuild USA's 1999-2003 compound annual growth rate was impacted by its 2003 loss of AmeriCorps funding, which was restored in 2004; its 1999-2002 compound annual growth rate was 5.4 percent.

local YouthBuild programs in 44 states, of which 125 have voluntarily affiliated with YouthBuild USA. Of these, 55 are YouthBuild AmeriCorps programs, and 21 have also become charter schools. All 200 receive training and technical assistance services from YouthBuild USA. Additionally, the YouthBuild Coalition is a network of over 1,000 organizations in 49 states that advocate for YouthBuild programs. The Coalition is managed by YouthBuild USA as an unincorporated advocacy entity which any organization may join.

**Leadership:** Dorothy Stoneman, president and founder.

**More information:** [www.youthbuild.org](http://www.youthbuild.org)

## Key Milestones

- 1978: Founded the first local program, called the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools
- 1984: Formed the first coalition to press for replication in New York City
- 1988: Published the first handbook describing the prototype program, and launched national replication project
- 1990: Named the program model “YouthBuild” and incorporated YouthBuild USA as a national non-profit to manage its replication
- 1990-1993: Established 15 local programs in 11 cities and worked with independent evaluators to assess first five demonstration sites
- 1989-1993: Secured a federal authorization and appropriation for \$40 million replication to be managed by HUD
- 1993: Formed the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network (AffNet) of sites; launched a determined effort to collect electronic outcome data from affiliates
- 1994: Selected by HUD to provide training and technical assistance to HUD’s Youthbuild grantees; funded as a National Direct grantee by AmeriCorps
- 1994-1996: Grew from 15 to 108 sites, mostly HUD funded

- 1996: HUD funding was reduced from \$50 million to \$20 million
- 1997: Some sites began transforming themselves into charter schools
- 1997-2001: HUD funding steadily increased back up to \$65 million; number of sites grew to 200, with a majority joining AffNet
- 2003: Temporarily lost HUD TA contract and AmeriCorps national direct funds
- 2003: Carried out an evaluation study of program graduates with Brandeis and Temple University
- 2004: Both HUD and AmeriCorps funding were restored

## Growth Story

The origins of YouthBuild USA date back to 1978, when Dorothy Stoneman set out to start a youth movement for a better society. She started by asking East Harlem teenagers what they would want to do to improve their communities, if adults like her would dedicate themselves to helping the teenagers achieve their goals. One group of teenagers said they wanted to take back empty buildings from the drug dealers and eliminate crime. Stoneman helped them select a building, raise funds, and hire adult trainers.

The teenagers' successful renovation of the building laid the groundwork for the Youth Action Program to form a citywide coalition of 70 organizations in 1984, to replicate the program and push for city funding for youth-development programs. This was the first step in taking the movement beyond East Harlem. They called themselves the "Coalition for \$10 Million." Youth and adults advocated tirelessly with city officials, even holding a vigil the night the City Council made its final budget decisions. The coalition received \$4.8 million in 1984, and undeterred, changed its name to the "Coalition for \$20 Million," expanded the coalition to 150 organizations, and went on to win \$12.8 million in 1985.

Over the years the coalition won city tax funds for an initiative called City-Works that allowed 20,000 New York City youth to obtain education and job training while

working on community improvement projects. These projects were not primarily YouthBuild programs, although nine YouthBuild programs – then called “Housing Related Enhanced Work Experience” – were set up. These early YouthBuild programs went up without a clear prototype to guide them, causing most of them to be shut down because of poor implementation. Out of this experience, Stoneman and her colleagues wrote a 250-page handbook for the program in 1988 that codified best practices to provide guidance for future implementers.

Program officers at the Ford Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation urged Stoneman to replicate the program beyond New York City. In 1988 Stoneman and 10 organizers from around the country founded the “National Coalition for \$200 Million” to start organizing for a national replication. In 1988, Ford awarded the organization a \$50,000 grant to fund the effort, and Mott promised \$100,000 per year for three years.

In 1990, it had become clear to Stoneman and Leroy Looper (YouthBuild’s founding and current board chairman) that a national nonprofit intermediary would be needed; running the program’s replication under the jurisdiction of the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools wouldn’t fit the bill. The two founded YouthBuild USA to coordinate the replication of YouthBuild across the country.

“We wanted to reach the largest possible number of young people,” says Stoneman. “We really wanted to build a movement toward reaching all the young people, and we had a broad stroke plan of 15 major fronts on which we had to move. It had to be orchestrated simultaneously over a period of years. It was built on what we had done in New York City, where we had used a similar set of steps to grow New York City.” (See Figure 1 for the 15-step plan for going to scale.)

The YouthBuild Coalition for \$200 Million set out to get government support for replicating the program nationally. It sent out information packets to every related organization it could find, asking them to join the coalition and endorse the goal of securing \$200 million in federal funding to bring YouthBuild to low-income communities. At the same time, it asked people to call YouthBuild USA if they would like to do the work of actually building a YouthBuild in their own community

even before federal funds were obtained. Within a year, YouthBuild had attracted 250 organizations, about 25 of which wanted to start a program themselves.

### Figure 1

YouthBuild's 15-step process of going to scale

- 1) Build a geographically diverse sampling of strong local programs committed to a common program design and a united national movement
- 2) Build a broad constituency of community support through creation of a national coalition
- 3) Build a new national nonprofit organization as the support center, to provide technical assistance, training, inspiration, evaluation, funding, and advocacy
- 4) Obtain sufficient private support to fund the effort prior to federal funding and to compensate for any weaknesses in the structure and process of federal funding
- 5) Gain bipartisan political endorsement and several committed champions in the Congress
- 6) Build strong partnership relationships with federal agencies which would administer and enhance the federal program(s)
- 7) Obtain independent corroboration and documentation of the value of the program
- 8) Develop youth leaders as spokespeople to communicate the depth of importance to them and their communities of this initiative
- 9) Obtain sufficient press coverage for a credible public presence and reputation.
- 10) Get federal legislation passed and appropriations made year after year
- 11) Influence effective operation of the federal agencies
- 12) Set quality standards and establish a strategy for inspiring and enforcing adherence to them
- 13) Provide the training and technical assistance necessary to all sites to meet quality standards
- 14) Diversify the funding sources and build private sector support
- 15) Learn how to manage the tendency toward turf and power struggles within local programs

Source: "The Growth of YouthBuild: A Case Study," The Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, February 2004.

By the early 1990s, YouthBuild had spread to 14 cities, with the replication carried out by individuals attracted through those initial mailings. Some of them founded new organizations; some of them attached YouthBuild to existing organizations. YouthBuild USA trained these individuals through intensive workshops and provided them further guidance with the prototype handbook.

The Boston site was the first outside of New York. The organizing process was led by Tim Cross (now YouthBuild USA's chief operating officer), and supported by Stoneman and a small YouthBuild USA staff. Cross spent two years as a volunteer gathering community support, building up a board of directors, and hiring an executive director before launching the new organization in 1991 with funds raised in the Boston area. This site served as a model for others across the country.

In 1989, the Ford Foundation, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation funded a five-site demonstration and external

evaluation as part of YouthBuild USA's process of establishing the viability of replicating the YouthBuild model. Through a competitive process, YouthBuild USA selected five demonstration sites from among the programs that had already started with YouthBuild USA's handbook and trainings as their guide.

Meanwhile, the national coalition worked nonstop to build support in Congress for expanding YouthBuild, gaining strong advocates in the House and Senate, led by New York Congressman Major Owens and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry. By 1992, legislation authorizing the federal YouthBuild program passed Congress, followed in 1993 by an appropriation of \$40 million.

In 1994, local YouthBuild programs received their first federal grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which administers the federal Youthbuild program. HUD awarded 31 implementation grants (of about \$1 million each) and 105 planning grants (between \$60,000 and \$100,000 each). YouthBuild USA was at the same time selected as HUD's training and technical assistance provider through a competitive process. Between 1994 and 1996, YouthBuild grew from 15 to 108 sites.

Significantly, HUD selected and funded sites but did not require them to join the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network (AffNet) or to meet its standards. HUD grantees could choose to join the AffNet, and receive increasing levels of benefits in return for meeting the organization's program standards. But HUD neither encouraged nor discouraged joining, having decided that it would be "too prescriptive" for the federal government to set such defined program design and performance standards.

Stoneman attributes the success of this stage of rapid expansion to a combination of factors: the comprehensive program design; YouthBuild USA's comprehensive training for all new directors; the two handbooks it had written describing both the program design and the program philosophy of leadership development; a close relationship with dedicated local directors; the responsiveness and funding from HUD management; and the flexible support of private foundations that filled the gaps in public funding.



“During the entire history of YouthBuild, fast growth did not turn out to be a problem, despite conventional wisdom that fast growth would be hard to manage,” Stoneman is quoted as saying in a 2004 Fuqua School of Business case study.<sup>2</sup> “The most significant problems were caused later by slowed growth through decreased federal funding when the political winds changed.”

In 1994, YouthBuild USA was funded to develop AmeriCorps programs in 12 communities and to provide education awards to graduates at 15 additional sites. Stoneman had been active in the service movement to help create a federal program like AmeriCorps. “Being part of the service movement was valuable to YouthBuild,” says Stoneman, “both because it uplifted the young people’s sense of service and because it provided supplementary funding and college scholarships.”

When control of Congress shifted to the Republicans in 1996, YouthBuild’s HUD funding was cut from \$50 million to \$20 million. Over the next several years, 50 YouthBuild programs closed because of this funding cutback. The most entrepreneurial sites hung on, finding local and state funds to provide long-term support. YouthBuild was able to rally its supporters in Congress to increase funding to \$65 million by 2002. During this period, although many sites closed, new sites opened because HUD had reserved \$10 million for new sites every year. As a result, the total number rose steadily, obscuring the churning that was going on below the surface.

After the 1996 cutbacks, YouthBuild created several state coalitions to seek state funds for local sites. By 2002, eight state coalitions had generated state funding for YouthBuild programs.

YouthBuild joined the charter school movement in the 1990s. Between 1997 and 2003, 19 local YouthBuild programs succeeded in becoming charter schools that served students who had dropped out of traditional high schools. In 2001, YouthBuild USA was also funded by the Department of Labor to run a

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<sup>2</sup> “The Growth of YouthBuild: A Case Study,” The Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, February 2004.

demonstration welfare-to-work program at 10 YouthBuild sites, using the same model with a targeted group of young mothers reaching their time limits for welfare. Outcomes for this program compared favorably with other welfare-to-work programs, building YouthBuild's credibility and providing another funding source.

The process of setting standards and collecting demographic and outcome data is one that YouthBuild USA has been committed to since 1993. The organization has invested substantial sums of money in developing software, training local staff, enforcing the data submission process, and collecting and analyzing data. YouthBuild USA has provided demographic and outcome data to HUD, the Office of Management and Budget, and Congress every year as part of its advocacy process.

There are now more than 200 YouthBuild programs nationwide that have received over \$500 million in government support. But Stoneman isn't satisfied with 200 sites. YouthBuild's 10-year goal is to reach 60,000 students in 880 communities, funded by \$1 billion in annual government funding. "I feel like we have hit a glass ceiling," she said in the Fuqua case study. "We have achieved incremental gains but not the breakthrough to really fund at the level of need and capacity. (We) would like to see federal funds expand and make YouthBuild comparable to Head Start and Job Corps<sup>3</sup>."

## **CONFIGURATION**

When YouthBuild first started, Stoneman envisioned a national organization to support the national movement the organization had rallied. In initial replication sites, YouthBuild USA offered close guidance through weekly telephone calls with program directors, limited funding, and frequent gatherings of site directors for training and sharing of best practices.

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<sup>3</sup> Job Corps is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16 through 24 get a better job, make more money and take control of their lives.

The national office developed new instructional materials regularly in response to the needs of the members who attended the trainings. But in the early days, the national office did not own, control, or even have licensing agreements with the sites. Sites were autonomous organizations sponsoring the program and using the YouthBuild name. Stoneman at the time was not thinking about branding or intellectual property, but local site directors persuaded her that brand protection should be an important element as they scaled up the organization.

“The whole affiliated network was really generated by the grassroots,” says Stoneman. “It wasn’t us. We started by giving everything away. But then the first fifteen sites sat us down and said, ‘We need some way of making sure that the YouthBuild brand stands for something and that others can’t use it without meeting YouthBuild standards.’”

Site directors worried that the organizations HUD funded might turn out to be opportunists who were just in it for the money. They wanted to distinguish programs that were true to the YouthBuild philosophy and to control the good reputation they had worked hard to build and upon which their fundraising depended. The Affiliated Network (AffNet) was created in 1993 to protect the philosophy, brand, and long-term existence of YouthBuild. These directors were not confident that public funding would be long-lasting, and they were determined to build something that could withstand political ups and downs and fads.

Because of its unique history of Congressional funding, YouthBuild is a contractor to HUD responsible for advising YouthBuild sites, but it does not control all the sites. Once HUD establishes a site, it can apply to join YouthBuild’s AffNet or remain as an independent HUD-sponsored site. As of 2004, 125 of the 200 YouthBuild sites were part of AffNet.

Applicants are accepted either as provisional affiliates (if their program has not yet completed a program cycle) or as full affiliates (if their program has completed one or more program cycles and met certain program design and outcome standards). Full affiliates may, after attending an orientation session, apply to go through the AffNet’s accreditation process, which assesses fidelity to 86 elements of program design and program outcomes. If they pass this voluntary process they become accredited affiliates, the highest level of affiliated membership. Accredited affiliates

get to provide peer technical assistance to other sites and have priority for certain grants.

Affiliates, accredited affiliates, and provisional affiliates are all entitled to designate their programs as YouthBuild programs and to use the YouthBuild logo in their own materials. But only full affiliates get access to pass-through grants and loans ranging from \$2,500 to \$250,000 that YouthBuild receives from the government, foundations, corporations, and individuals. All members have access to leadership opportunities, internships, scholarships, exchange programs, and national conferences.

All members also get to participate in a democratic process to set the standards and programmatic direction of the network. The AffNet has a national directors association led by an elected directors council; a national alumni association led by an elected alumni council; a national young leaders council elected at a national conference; and a central policy council made up of directors, youth, and YouthBuild USA staff in equal numbers, and chaired by the president of YouthBuild USA. These councils all meet for at least two days, three times a year.

This institutional design thus offers significant benefits and leadership opportunities to induce sites to become affiliates, rather than mandating top-down control.

“People at YouthBuild USA sometimes find it frustrating that we don’t come down harder on folks not complying,” says Stoneman. If sites do not provide outcome data, they get a personal call and an offer of technical assistance. “The tone is one of respect; they’re on the front lines,” she says. “If they still don’t submit their data, then they get a phone call to tell them the letter is coming, and that they will be suspended from the network until they submit a plan for data management. But we proceed respectfully and carefully with any kind of sanction.”

“Some say, ‘All I would get from joining the AffNet is more accountability and more meetings to go to.’ ...The amazing thing is that [so many] people choose to affiliate — they want to be part of building long-term movement ... Furthermore, there is a benefit in the voluntary nature of affiliation, in that it provides accountability for us: the fact that they can get HUD money without affiliating keeps us on our toes.”

“We fell into our institutional design,” Stoneman continues. “Programmatic expansion was bottom-up. It was a balance between centralized control and local initiative. And managing that balance has been key to what we have done, because we wanted to generate maximum entrepreneurial initiative. We didn’t want to step on any local organization or leader’s toes because most of us came from a local perspective, but we also wanted to have integrity and fidelity to the model and develop it further. We try to run a national organization that ‘thinks locally and acts globally,’ to turn the usual phrase upside down.”

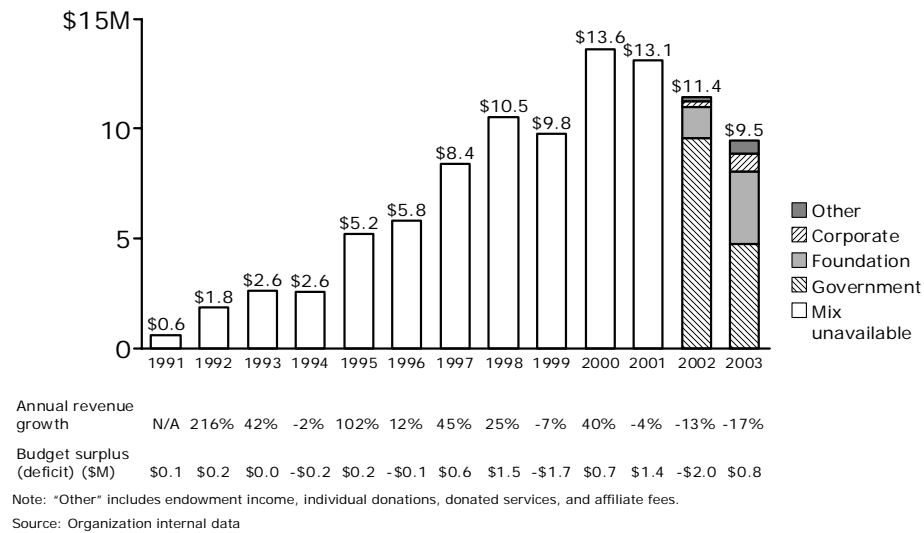
YouthBuild USA’s handbook gives new sites a strong blueprint from which to build. The handbook grew out of the experience replicating sites in New York in the 1980s. “What we discovered,” says Stoneman, “is if you’ve got a bottom-up movement and you have no cookbook, you’ve got a problem: people won’t know what to do.” The key to YouthBuild’s success, she points out, was that the affiliates themselves were the ones who have asked over time for additional guidance and definition of the YouthBuild brand and standards. “They’ll read it and use it, so long as they choose it.”

## **CAPITAL**

Stoneman’s philosophy has been that it is the responsibility of government and foundations to support the work of organizations like YouthBuild that are addressing core issues of poverty, education, and workforce development. “We went straight for two things: federal money and big foundations,” she says. “The strategy at the beginning was that if we could pull down one new major foundation per year and build that support and go for the maximum federal money, that would be the most efficient way to grow and we did that. We are still largely federal and foundations. We have a little bit of diversification from corporate and individual supporters, but we have never really built that as some others have. We also on principle were not trying to finance YouthBuild USA through our affiliates. We felt our job was to get money to them, not take money from them.” (For a breakdown of funding sources in recent years, see Figure 2.)

Figure 2

YouthBuild revenue

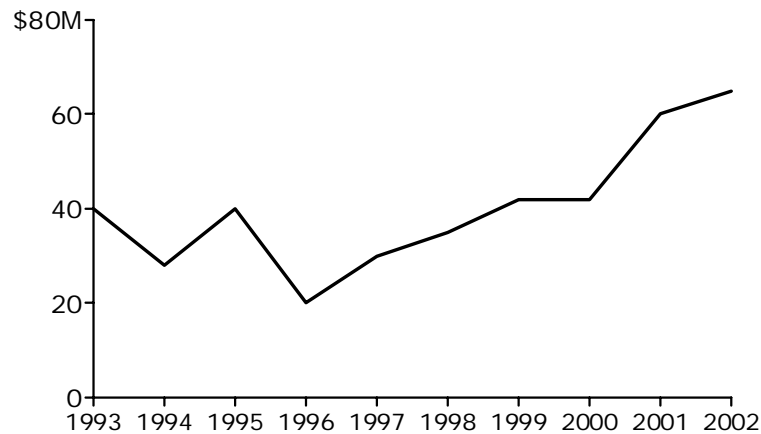


Since the mid-1990s federal cutbacks, YouthBuild has been sensitive to its dependence on government funding. “We are totally at the whim of politics,” says Stoneman. “They could wipe us out in a minute if they decided to erase our appropriation. So a big part of what we have done has been to build incremental, expanded, deeper relationships with every Republican and Democrat we can find who has anything to do with policy at the federal level.”

In 1996, HUD eliminated planning grants and cut the size of implementation grants from \$1 million to a maximum of \$700,000 per site, with a range from \$400,000 to \$700,000, to spread the limited funds more widely. YouthBuild was able to get back to a level of HUD funding greater than it had before the cuts, only because it had worked over many years to gain bipartisan political support with several champions on both sides of the aisle in Congress; built strong partnerships with federal agencies that would administer and enhance the program; and got federal appropriations passed year to year. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3

HUD's YouthBuild appropriations



Source: YouthBuild USA website

HUD funding has put certain constraints on the organization. “HUD is chronically slow in its contracting,” says Stoneman. “The Ford Foundation rescued us three times from very long delays that would have forced us to shrink while waiting for a contract. And between Ford and [the] Mott [Foundation] being loyal to us over this entire period of time – we’ve never not been funded by Ford and Mott since 1988 and they’ve given us expanded funds, not shrinking funds – they’ve rescued us with big chunks of money at critical moments when the government could have slammed us. A lot of that was unrestricted funds, with a little bit of guidance, but not a lot of intrusiveness.” Foundations also provided crucial support early on as the group planned its national expansion, and Ford and Mott gave endowment gifts in 2000 that now generate a small amount of flexible annual revenue.

In 2003, YouthBuild lost its AmeriCorps funding as part of the massive cutbacks in federal spending for the program. These funds were restored in 2004.

## CAPABILITIES

YouthBuild USA's organizational capabilities have evolved organically, Stoneman says. "There was no point where we said we were going to make a radical change in internal organizational structure. There has always been an effort to build increasingly strong management – both the middle-management and more senior management team."

During the early growth phase, John Gallery — the chairman of YouthBuild Philadelphia's board of directors and long-time friend of Stoneman's — provided Stoneman with key assistance in building the organization's management capabilities. When he detected some staff discontent, he called Stoneman to offer his assistance, and she hired him as a consultant. Gallery systematically met with every staff member over a six month period and came up with several recommendations, including the development of regional teams, the consolidation of several departments, and the creation of a vice president of field services.

Gallery went on to serve as vice president of field services, commuting from Philadelphia for several years, at a salary a fraction of what he could have earned in Philadelphia. During that same period, Gary Daffin, the former development director at YouthBuild Boston, served as vice president of development and administration.

YouthBuild went through another transition when Gallery left in 2001. They hired a new vice president of field services from outside of YouthBuild who only lasted six months. Then Daryl Wright, Tim Cross, and Peter Twichell offered to serve as a "triumvirate" that substituted for the vice president of field services. After a successful year as a triumvirate, Wright and Twichell proposed that Tim Cross become vice president. Meanwhile two other vice president positions were created: vice president of finance and administration, filled by a former board chair of YouthBuild Boston, and vice president of program investment, filled by the then director of the loan fund who was promoted. According to Stoneman, "This was a key transition point in our history. There was a perception in our organization that there was not enough upward mobility. Seeing them step up was helpful for everybody. Now Tim [Cross] has become COO after three years as vice president."

"My board chair had been telling me for at least 10 years to get someone to run the organization, in a position like a COO, but the right person was never there," she



says. Stoneman ultimately chose Cross to assume the COO because, in Stoneman's words, "Tim had proven himself an able and trusted administrator, admired by the whole staff. [We shared a] belief that we could get a lot more synergy in the organization if there were a position to pull everything together. [Moving Cross into the COO-role] would strengthen our internal management and free me up to do some more external [work]. I still have a lot to do internally, but the organization is much better off because Tim is joining me in taking responsibility for the whole organization." Stoneman's time is now evenly divided between internal management, fundraising, advocacy, and constituency building.

Looking forward, Stoneman sees the need to add more development experience to go after individual funding, and to help protect the organization from the vagaries of government funding. Currently, Stoneman serves as the director of development. She has hired a number of junior staff who support fund development activities: "We have a number of department heads who are very good at relating to funders and writing proposals. There is a delegation of fundraising roles, even though I'm the person in charge." In 2003, YouthBuild USA only spent 2 percent of its revenue on fundraising.

The board of YouthBuild USA meets twice a year, and the board chairman, Leroy Looper, has been in that position since the organization began. Looper talks with Stoneman frequently, whenever she calls, which might be every day in a challenging period when complex decisions are being made, or every few weeks when things are going well.

"The nature of the board hasn't changed at all," Stoneman says. "The board has been a uniquely grassroots board. It is not a fundraising board. It's a board which is a policy, accountability, and guidance board. Five YouthBuild graduates sit on the board, to insure that we stay close to our purpose. It is a very wise board, and when I am confused, I go to the board. It's important to have someone you trust more than yourself when you're confused. There is one board member I call for legal issues, another one I call for advocacy issues, another one for research issues, another for financial issues, and so forth."

## Key Insights

- **Balancing site control and freedom.** YouthBuild grew by creating a movement. YouthBuild chose this method to spark entrepreneurship and creativity at the local level. But with the influx of HUD money to other organizations, affiliates asked for more central control to maintain the brand's integrity early on.
- **Navigating a unique institutional design.** YouthBuild has an unusual institutional design in which many sites share its brand but over which it has incomplete control – a legacy of the bargain it struck with the federal government. YouthBuild has built a community of peers, levels of voluntary affiliation, and a number of incentives – including services, sharing of best practices, and funding – to encourage sites to put in place the practices that YouthBuild's national office and their peers have deemed the most effective. The affiliates' voice in determining policy helps to hold it all together.
- **Involving youth in leadership roles.** YouthBuild USA has worked hard to give young people an equal voice with adults in national YouthBuild policy-making. Young people serve on the board; YouthBuild USA sustains two national youth policy councils; and young people have equal votes with directors on the AffNet policy councils. The involvement of young people at the center keeps the organization tuned in to its constituents and its long-range mission of changing the conditions that face low-income young people.
- **Advocating tirelessly.** YouthBuild USA has fostered strong government relationships for years, benefiting from committed legislative, federal agency, and AmeriCorps champions. The organization has built and fortified these relationships by creating opportunities for YouthBuild students to talk to legislators and administrators, inspiring them with hope, optimism, and a desire to help.