

## YOUTH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLP TECHNICAL NOTE



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TECHNICAL NOTE

# Staying Connected

Partnerships That Keep Youth Workforce Development Programs Market Driven

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## About The SEEP Network

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The SEEP Network ([www.seepnetwork.org](http://www.seepnetwork.org)), founded in 1985 and headquartered in Washington, DC, is an association of more than 70 international NGOs that support micro- and small enterprise development programs around the world. SEEP's mission is to connect microenterprise practitioners in a global learning community. As such, SEEP brings members and other practitioners together in a peer-learning environment to produce practical, innovative solutions to key challenges in the industry. SEEP then disseminates these solutions through training, publications, professional development, and technical assistance.

## About The PLP

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The Practitioner Learning Program (PLP) methodology was developed by SEEP as a way to engage microenterprise practitioners in a collaborative learning process to document and share findings and to identify effective and replicable practices and innovations to benefit the industry as a whole. Practitioner Learning Programs focus on learning at three levels: the individual organization, the PLP group, and the industry at large.

The PLP for “Youth Workforce Development: Using 100% Market-Driven Programs to Achieve 100% Employment,” funded by USAID through the AED FIELD-Support mechanism, aims to empower practitioners through peer learning to design and measure each element of their youth-serving workforce development programs. It intends to incorporate understanding of and response to market needs and opportunities, and develop the range of skills that youth need to achieve more success more quickly in the areas of employment or enterprise start-up and growth. The objective of this PLP is to identify, encourage, and disseminate replicable strategies for using market-driven program design to improve youth employment success and for measuring the effectiveness of these strategies.

The PLP learning products are written by and for practitioners in the field of youth workforce development. For our other learning products, please visit <http://seepnetwork.org/Pages/YouthandWorkforceDevelopment.aspx>

Other learning products in the Youth PLP include:

- “Guidelines and Experiences for Including Youth in Market Assessments for Stronger Youth Workforce Development Programs”
- “Monitoring and Evaluation for Youth Workforce Development Programs”
- “Scaling Up Youth Workforce Development Programs”
- Market-Driven Youth Programs and the Bottom Line: Using Income-Generating Activities to Make Programs 100% Market Driven

This document shares three brief case studies—Partners of the Americas in South America, IRC in West Africa, and EDC in Haiti—that show how youth workforce development programs can form partnerships to help them be more market driven. The publication includes individual stories and lessons for other practitioners.

## Introduction

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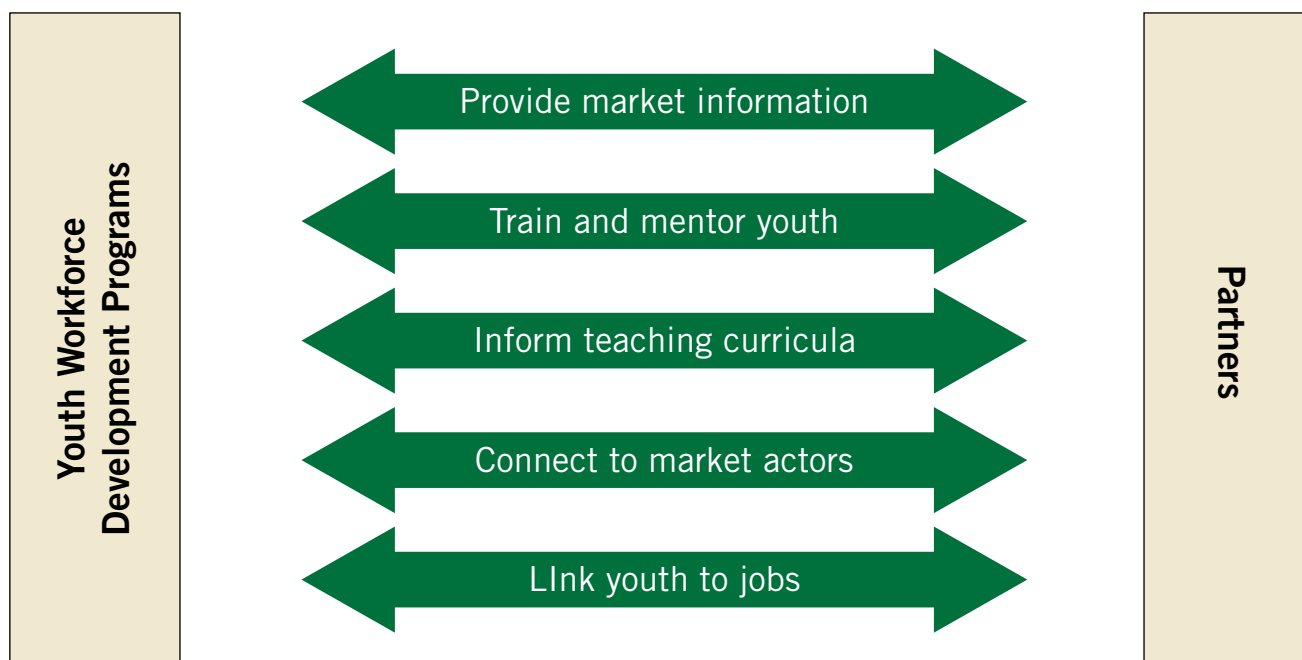
As youth seek to enter and sustain themselves in the workforce, they need technical knowledge and skills, as well as the knowledge and confidence to approach employers and navigate workplace relationships. Youth need networks that help them find market information, resources to start or grow their own businesses or obtain quality employment, and knowledge to make decisions about employment or entrepreneurship opportunities. Young people, as well as the organizations preparing them to enter the workforce, must have an intimate understanding of the market.

**Market-driven programs** in youth workforce development identify, read, and respond to signals from the broad economic market. This includes not only signals on product supply and demand but also on the job skills demanded by employers.

**Market-driven partnerships** are those that provide market information to programs, help programs respond to market signals, connect youth with opportunities, provide programs with in-demand technical knowledge, or otherwise help programs become or stay market driven.

How can youth-serving organizations that are not directly connected to the labor market ensure that their youth programs have adequate information about the demands of the labor market? Often the most efficient solution is by partnering with another organization that has a more intimate understanding about market needs and/or partnering with labor market actors themselves.

### How Do Partners Make Programs More Market-Driven?



To that end, the following case studies showcase three different partnerships that help implementing organizations maintain and deepen a market orientation. Three practitioner agencies here share their experiences and recommendations in forming partnerships to improve market focus.

### The Three Projects at a Glance

**Partners of the Americas' A Ganar/Vencer:** This youth employability program uses sports to target at-risk youth, ages 16 to 24, in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay, with the goal of enabling them to compete successfully for competitive, market-driven jobs. See [www.partners.net](http://www.partners.net) and [www.aganar.org](http://www.aganar.org).

**Education Development Center's (EDC) Haitian Out-of-School Youth Livelihood Initiative (IDEJEN):** This project provides basic education, life skills, employability, vocational training, and entrepreneurship training to out-of-school youth, ages 15 to 24, in Haiti. The project also supports youth as they transition to employment, self-employment, or further education. See [idejen.edc.org](http://idejen.edc.org).

**International Rescue Committee (IRC)'s LEGACY Initiative:** This project works in partnership with schools and national actors to improve the quality and relevance of local educational opportunities and bolster national education policies in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. See [www.theirc.org](http://www.theirc.org).

# 1. Partnering to Create an In-Demand Curriculum and Meet Labor Demand

## Partners of the Americas and the Universidad de Especialidades Turísticas

Partners of the Americas (POA) runs the *A Ganar/Vencer* employment program in South America for low-income youth. POA specializes in using sports to teach employability skills, such as teamwork, communication, discipline, and a focus on results—all skills that are key to being a successful employee. POA wanted to prepare youth who have little or no points of entry to the formal employment market with the market-driven skills needed to be successful. To accomplish this, POA sought partnerships with organizations in Ecuador with strong ties to job market, which knew where the jobs existed and which could help implement training that was needed by sectors seeking employees. They planned to work with those organizations to combine the sport-based training with vocational technical training to develop an integrated and comprehensive market-driven program.

With research indicating there were job opportunities in the tourist sector, POA established a relationship with the Universidad de Especialidades Turísticas (UCT) tourism university in Ecuador. UCT is Ecuador’s leading tourism-sector educational organization; the majority of its students come from high-quality private schools in Ecuador. Through this partnership, POA embedded its employability curriculum within a technical skills course on tourism at the university to ensure that what is taught is responsive to the demand by employers seeking qualified graduates to hire.

Each partner brings a distinct set of complementary skills to the relationship, as outlined in the table below.

<b>POA and <i>A Ganar</i></b>	<b>Universidad de Especialidades Turísticas (UCT)</b>
Access to, and an understanding of, an under-served market of economically disadvantaged youth from Quito’s poorer neighborhoods	Experienced technical skills training in tourism
Expertise in developing employability skills among at-risk youth and training organizations to implement the sport-based curriculum	Connections to the country’s hotel and restaurant industry, plus a pipeline of managers in the tourism industry who can mentor the youth
Funding to support the majority of training costs	Physical facilities for conducting the training accreditation valued by the labor market

Together, the partners are able to serve a segment of young people with market-oriented skills that would have been difficult for either to have done independently. Partners of the Americas gained a high-quality, market-linked training provider in tourism, an industry they had not previously targeted, to help ensure that its graduates’ tourism skills would translate into actual jobs in the industry. UCT gained a partner that had access to (and the knowledge of how to serve) lower-income youth than they typically reached.

## Partners of the Americas' Recommendations

- **Deepen relationships with partners by asking partners to help find mentors and other people as resources.** Often one partner will know market actors better and can provide technical knowledge and real-life experience to youth participants. As an added benefit, this greater involvement can lead to better understanding of, and thus better support for, both programs. For instance, POA worked with UCT to identify hotel and restaurant managers as mentors for youth who were preparing to enter the tourism industry.

- **Establish regular check-ins for reflection and evaluation.** It is important to set aside regularly scheduled time to evaluate the performance of partners. Developing a system and timeline for evaluations should be established at the beginning of the partnership and continue periodically throughout the partnership to ensure proper feedback. This should be a two-way evaluation, so that all partners are able to learn about their performance. POA learned that partnership does not mean handing over responsibility; instead, it is a close collaboration to achieve a shared vision of success. Every week, POA's staff visited implementation partners to monitor training quality and provide technical assistance to facilitators who were using *A Ganar's* methodology. At first, the partners felt the visits were intrusive, but this changed as the relationship developed.

Over time, POA has been able to demonstrate that they are there to support, not criticize, the facilitators. This is critically important to success, particularly with partners who are new to serving a target population. As the partners begin to see the improvements this brings to youth and their organizations, they will value the technical assistance and partnership.

## 2. Partnering to Identify Growing Labor Markets and Find Youth Employment

### Education Development Center and Regional Chambers Of Commerce

Education Development Center (EDC) runs the Haitian Out-of-School Youth Livelihood Initiative (IDEJEN) program in Haiti, which provides out-of-school youth with non-formal basic education, life skills, and vocational and entrepreneurship training. The Haitian economy is highly informal, and only 15 percent of the workforce is in the formal sector. Most youth have no access to the formal sector. Even though EDC anticipated that its youth graduates would most likely find work in the informal sector, short-term work in the formal sector offered the opportunity to gain valuable experience that could bolster the youth's reputation as responsible workers. Thus, EDC wanted to ensure that youth were exposed to formal, private-sector employment opportunities and sought partnerships with the regional chambers of commerce, as well as small and medium business entrepreneurs.

The regional chambers of commerce play several vital roles:

- They work with IDEJEN to identify the most marketable vocational trades in which to train new youth cohorts.
- They connect IDEJEN with their member businesses, so IDEJEN can collect information about local labor markets.
- They offer youth valuable work experience through internships.
- They provide the space to host Youth Career Centers, where IDEJEN provides job placement services and small business training.
- They help IDEJEN develop a database of private entrepreneurs.
- They recognize private-sector "champions," which are firms who have taken IDEJEN youth in internships or jobs for more than three months, and encourage other private companies to accept additional youth in internships.



## IDEJEN's Recommendations

- **Find strong private-sector partners.** In economic environments with small and weak formal sectors, finding partners that are well-connected to the private sector and can help youth connect to the formal sector is essential. This is particularly true for socially marginalized youth with few skills.
- **Find the individual champions within partner organizations.** IDEJEN's best successes have come from Youth Career Centers when the president of the local chamber of commerce is actively engaged. In these situations, higher numbers of youth have been placed in internships or short-term jobs.
- **Widen the type of partnerships.** While this example focuses on ways to strengthen partnerships with the formal private sector, the IDEJEN team learned to widen the array of partnerships to ensure that its youth workforce development project meets the demands of the market and offers greater economic opportunities to marginalized and poorly educated youth. This includes partnerships with different branches of the national government, such as the ministries of environment and agriculture; local government agencies; microfinance institutions; and local community-based organizations, as well as partnerships with other donor-funded projects that focus on strengthening local targeted value chains.

## 3. Partnering to Access Apprenticeships

### Partners of the Americas, Ecos Do Futuro, and TeleSoluções

POA's A Ganar program in Brazil, *Vencer*, partners with Ecos do Futuro, a certified apprenticeship provider and non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Rio de Janeiro, to help implement *Vencer*. Securing an apprenticeship is an important step towards employment for *Vencer* youth, and a prime way that POA ensures that its training is responding to demands in the labor market.

To help achieve this, POA and Ecos do Futuro target Brazilian companies that, by law and based on their number of employees, must provide formal apprenticeship opportunities to youth. This allows youth to earn apprentice wages and benefit from their involvement in the formal labor market, which brings them other social and economic benefits.

Many *Vencer* graduates are highly sought after in high-growth industries, such as customer service and promotion centers similar to the call center company TeleSoluções in Rio de Janeiro. In this partnership, POA and its NGO partner Ecos do Futuro provide the training to youth before and during their apprenticeships. Ecos do Futuro designs the vocational and technical aspects of training in conjunction with TeleSoluções staff and monitors youth closely during their apprenticeship period. TeleSoluções pays apprentice wages, provides meals and transportation, and contributes to technical training. The partnership is beneficial for TeleSoluções because it receives well-screened and highly-trained youth as job applicants. Added benefits are that the program helps it comply with the apprenticeship law and its investment in the program is less than the cost of paying fines to the Brazilian government for non-compliance.

## POA's Recommendations

- **Partners that work and grow together become stronger.** POA and *Vencer* needed to link youth to apprenticeships. Ecos do Futuro wanted POA support to implement training for youth in their community. Ecos do Futuro also had contacts with private companies willing and needing to hire youth. Ecos do Futuro had the knowledge about the Brazilian apprenticeship law, the ability to implement programs through it, and the contacts with Brazilian companies to make this happen. POA brought know-how and resources needed by Ecos do Futuro. TeleSoluções brought support, technical know-how, and opportunities for work.
- **Partnerships take time to develop.** The benefits of the partnership between POA, Ecos do Futuro, and TeleSoluções was not immediately clear to all members. It took time to build trust and demonstrate that at-risk youth can be effectively trained and can perform well on the job. It took time to determine the best ways for each organization to work together. As the first *Vencer* youth became successful, all partners grew more convinced of the value and potential of working together. The partnership continues to grow and change based on market conditions and available resources.

## 4. Partnering to Help Others Become More Market Driven

### IRC and the National Working Group on TVET

Strong programs may want to engage with others to generate interest in and improve policies on market-driven youth workforce development. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Liberia recognized that it could have far greater reach for its workforce programs if it brought the need for market-driven solutions for youth to the national level and engaged both the private and public sectors. It facilitated the establishment of the National Working Group for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), a body consisting of key government ministries—labor, education, youth and sports, and planning—plus other local and international stakeholders.

#### IRC's Recommendation

**Leverage partnerships with the government to engage the private sector in youth workforce advocacy and policy development.** Involving the private sector in youth workforce development programs can sometimes be challenging without incentives for participation. Governments are often better positioned to engage the private sector than NGOs. IRC has been able to include the private sector in the National Working Group on TVET by using its relationship with the Liberian government to connect with private sector representatives that might otherwise be difficult to access.

IRC's experience with the National Working Group has shown how responsibility for market-driven youth workforce development may be embedded within national-level institutions, with sufficient technical and material support. In post-conflict contexts, government institutions often seek areas where they can re-establish their capacity and allow their institutional memory to re-emerge. This is no different in the field of youth workforce development. The National Working Group has focused its efforts on improving the TVET system to better tackle high youth unemployment, through such approaches as identifying and addressing barriers to female participation in TVET, fostering connections with newly-arrived “big” businesses in Liberia (e.g., Arcelor Mittal Steel and Taiwan LEE Rubber Company) to leverage employment and financing possibilities, and certifying curricula that is proven to be market driven. The benefits of this partnership approach are exceptional because they promote the potential for sustainability and scale—two qualities that are usually difficult to achieve in youth workforce development programs.

#### IRC's Recommendation

**Demonstrate mutual benefit.** Partnerships are effective when all parties benefit from participation. The National Working Group on TVET works because IRC needs the commitment and resources of relevant TVET stakeholders to ensure that workforce development programs are market driven, and because the Working Group needs IRC's support to develop its capacity to conduct market assessments and use these to develop market-driven curricula. Both groups continue to participate actively in the partnership because each makes a critical contribution to achieving mutually beneficial outcomes.

However, establishing and retaining a partnership such as this also comes with its challenges. Given the loss of institutional memory and capacity due to conflict, the process of developing the partnership and executing agreed-upon activities to address market-driven agendas can be slow. For instance, although members of the National Working Group knew how to establish partnerships with large companies, the actual process in post-conflict Liberia has so far been fraught with broken connections, defunct institutions, and outdated policies and procedures. The process of policy reform takes time in any context, but the pace is much diminished when each of the links in the policy chain needs to be updated or reinstated.

## IRC's Recommendation

**When there are challenges, refer back to the original agreement and re-evaluate partners' expectations and commitments.** IRC found that maintaining momentum on all the agreed priorities for the National Working Group was challenging and led to individual group members' losing their direction. This in turn diminished the motivation of group members. IRC was challenged to find a way to reinvigorate the group and turn it back to its established priorities. IRC held a review session with the National Working Group members, reviewing the original Memorandum of Understanding and priorities in a frank and open discussion about members' expectations and capacity (both in terms of technical expertise and time). This discussion led to a realignment of the priorities and a more targeted strategy of engagement for both IRC and the NWG members.

The facilitating NGO also needs to recognize the shift in skills and technical expertise required to manage and engage in this form of partnership. IRC field-staff members are familiar with undertaking market assessments and translating the resultant data into program design. However, they have had to learn how to support other actors to conduct these same processes and become more market driven themselves. This does not prevent the partnership from being successful at improving market orientation, but it is important to consider how effective program staff will be as they shift roles due to new relationships.

## 5. Conclusion

This learning product has described how partnerships can benefit both youth workforce development programs and the agencies they work with, and help them become more market driven. Whether they are community members, large corporations, or government ministries, the need for them to partner with youth workforce development programs is evident. However, the nature of the partnership may vary as much as the organization or entity with whom the partnership is forged. The following table draws on the experience of PLP partners to suggest potential partners depending on the type of market-oriented improvement sought.

<b>If You Need . . .</b>	<b>You Might Want To Partner With . . .</b>
Information about what labor markets are growing	→ Chambers of commerce, local or regional governments, macro-economic programs
Internship or apprenticeship placements for youth	→ Private businesses and consortia
Influence to change policies that affect your market orientation	→ Government ministries, other youth NGOs or coalitions
Subject matter expertise for training	→ Universities, professional associations

Youth workforce development programs have the challenging task of ensuring that the complex needs and assets of youth are addressed at the same time that they ensure that program interventions are market driven. Partnerships are an essential ingredient to achieving these aims.

## Useful Resources

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These resources address partnerships for youth workforce development programs.

International Youth Foundation. 2008. "Working with the Business Sector to Advance Employment." *FieldNotes*, vol. 3, no. 13. Baltimore, MD, USA: USAID.

USAID. 2006. *Job Creation in Post Conflict Societies*. Washington, DC: USAID.

Youth Employment Network. 2007. *Joining Forces with Young People: A Practical Guide to Collaboration for Youth Employment*. Geneva: YEN

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