

# CARIBBEAN **YOUTH** EMPOWERMENT

A **YOUTH:WORK** PROJECT



## **CONSORTIUM BUILDING**

A Caribbean Case Study



# CONSORTIUM BUILDING: A CARIBBEAN CASE STUDY

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

To learn more, visit [www.iyfnfnet.org](http://www.iyfnfnet.org).

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## Introduction

Of the 100 million young people aged 15–24 who live in Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly half are considered “at risk” and live in under-served communities. One in four of these young people are jobless, many more have dropped out of school, and a growing number face rising violence in their communities.<sup>1</sup> No single organization can tackle these problems alone, particularly in a resource-constrained environment. The urgency of the situation for today’s youth necessitates innovative solutions, and above all for businesses, civil society organizations, governments, and international institutions to work together in addressing these challenges. By joining forces, youth-serving organizations can ensure that their impact is much greater than if they were working alone.

One model for this type of cooperation has been pioneered by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) in Saint Lucia and subsequently Antigua and Barbuda under the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP). In each country, IYF brought together a consortium of local youth-serving organizations to implement and manage a project for youth at risk. The consortium not only contributed to the success and impact of CYEP, but also paved the way for the formalization of long-term collaboration between these institutions.

This case study provides an overview of the consortium model as implemented under CYEP, the model’s strengths and benefits, and best practices. It offers insights on how to build collaborative relationships in order to more effectively support the implementation of projects and ensure the successful delivery of services targeting youth at risk.

## The Consortium Model under CYEP

*“While we have worked together with other groups across the sectors to focus on a shared or common goal before, CYEP was the first time we had institutionalized the consortium model in Saint Lucia.”*

— Dr. Jacqueline Bird, Founding Director, RISE (Saint Lucia) Inc.

At the outset of the CYEP program, IYF faced the challenge of selecting local partners in Saint Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda from among several organizations, each specialized in certain activities targeting specific youth populations. For example, some organizations provided training services to youth, but did not target vulnerable groups. Other institutions targeted youth at risk, but focused more on advocacy and did not have the capacity for direct service implementation. It became evident that any grantee would strongly benefit from the close collaboration with other key actors. Rather than asking a single organization to take on the implementation of the whole program covering key components including vocational training, entrepreneurship and life skills for

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<sup>1</sup> International Youth Foundation, *Building Alliances for Youth: Lessons from Obra*, November 2011.

<http://library.iyfn.org/sites/default/files/library/ObraGlobalReportENG.pdf>

youth at risk, collaboration between multiple organizations with complementary experiences and skills would be necessary for successful program execution.

Moreover, by sharing resources and expanding their networks, the member institutions could engage other key stakeholders such as community-based organizations, government ministries, the private sector (businesses and financial institutions), and the media to promote the project, recruit participants, connect with potential trainers and facilitators, identify job opportunities, and garner additional financial support for the project. The collaboration that would be brought about by the consortium had the potential to add enormous value to the project.

As a result, the consortium model was created in parallel with the launch of CYEP in Saint Lucia, so that member organizations could work together to overcome their capacity constraints and more effectively carry out program activities. The successful model was subsequently expanded to include Antigua and Barbuda as well.

Although the need for partnership and its potential benefits were clear, this was a new and innovative model in the Caribbean. A key first step was to bring the partner organizations together to discuss the planned collaboration and clearly define roles and responsibilities within the overall project objectives. After an initial meeting of the potential consortium members, it became apparent that the selected organizations knew each other well and had worked together on previous occasions. More importantly, the organizations' capacities were complementary rather than overlapping; each organization brought something unique to the table, while still sharing a common interest in the challenges being addressed by CYEP.

The consortium model was formalized through the project strategy, in which IYF designated one of the institutions as the grantee to sign the contract, and indicated that the project would be implemented in collaboration with a consortium of partners that provided critical services. To ensure overall coordination of the consortium, the lead organization created a management structure bringing together representatives of all members and established a shared work plan for the project. Each organization took the lead in at least one programmatic area where they had particular expertise.

The consortium in Saint Lucia comprised the following five institutions:

- **National Skills and Development Centre (NSDC)**, which was the lead coordinating organization for the consortium and was responsible for the delivery of technical and vocational training
- **Centre for Adolescent Rehabilitation and Education (C.A.R.E.)**, which was responsible for life skills training and career counseling
- **RISE (Saint Lucia) Inc.**, which assisted with recruiting participants and mentoring
- **James Belgrave Micro Enterprise Development Fund Incorporated (BELFUND)**, which provided micro enterprise development services and technical assistance
- **St. Lucia Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture**, which assisted in reaching out to employers

The consortium in Antigua and Barbuda was developed in the same manner and included the following four institutions:

- **Gilbert Agricultural and Rural Development Centre (GARD Centre)**, which acted as the coordinating or lead institution for the consortium
- **The Directorate of Gender Affairs** (government agency), which was responsible for the life skills and job readiness courses using IYF's Passport to Success® Curriculum

- **The Antigua and Barbuda Hospitality Training Institute (ABHTI)**, which provided nine-month courses in basic cookery and beverage service
- **The Antigua and Barbuda Institute for Continuing Education (ABICE)**, which provided vocational training in the area of welding

The institutions signed a Memorandum of Understanding which captured the nature, purpose, and scope of the relationship. The MOU also included a statement of mutual benefit and interest, commitments and responsibilities of the parties, financial terms and framework, and other details.

## Strength through Cooperation: Advantages of the Consortium Model

*“I think the consortium approach is commendable. It needs to be embraced. An approach of that nature in a small territory like Saint Lucia is critical. It can help better utilize resources. It is an approach we commend and want to see continue in the future.”*

— John Victorin, Centre Supervisor, NDSC

It is often said that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and this is certainly true in the case of youth-serving alliances such as the CYEP consortia. Each organization is stronger through its cooperation with others than it would be acting alone. Bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in a consortium has a number of advantages, including:

- **Improving project outcomes:** The consortium model leads to more effective project implementation by building greater management capacity. Working together through joint decision-making allows member organizations to increase the impact and benefit of training activities for the youth and improve the sustainability of project outcomes.
- **Sharing resources:** Individual organizations may have limited capacities in terms of time, staff, funds, and infrastructure. By working together on shared project goals, consortium members can pool resources and benefit from each other’s strengths.
- **Avoiding duplication of efforts:** Because consortium members work together on one large project, rather than many small projects that may involve repetition or even competition, resources and efforts are not wasted. In the case of CYEP, partner organizations referred participants to each other’s training courses, providing benefits for each other and ensuring that activities were not duplicated.
- **Offering complementary skills:** Bringing together a diverse set of organizations specializing in different areas can allow a program to provide a wide range of services to youth, including life skills, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. For example, in Antigua and Barbuda, the participation of the hospitality training institute (ABHTI) in the consortium allowed CYEP to offer industry-recognized hospitality training to vulnerable youth that other organizations would not have been able to provide.
- **Building capacity and innovation:** By learning from each other, consortium members can build their capacity to implement effective programs for youth. The consortium model also offers members opportunities to share innovative ideas and best practices among themselves and with the broader development community.

- **Increasing effective fundraising:** Organizations targeting the same sources of donor funding have more success by partnering rather than competing. Demonstrating cooperation can mobilize additional resources—both financial and in kind—that can be leveraged to support greater impact in the long term.
- **Strengthening advocacy:** In presenting a unified viewpoint, the consortium allows partner organizations to speak about youth issues with a stronger voice. It creates a more visible platform for consortium members to advocate together for greater investments in youth development.

All of these benefits were apparent in the experiences of the CYEP consortia members in Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Lucia. Each organization was able to achieve its own goals with the support of the other members. Through this form of partnering, the participating institutions saw the opportunity to expand their programs, share resources, and in the long run become more effective.

## Best Practices for Consortium Building

*“From my perspective, the consortium showed the full potential of using a holistic approach to addressing the needs of vulnerable youth.”*

— Dr. Karleen Mason, Executive Director, C.A.R.E.

Youth-serving organizations in all regions of the world can learn from the experiences of the consortia created under CYEP. Best practices established through this program include:

- **Establish shared goals:** A clear mission and vision should be articulated for the consortium upon its creation; these must be shared by all members and should be a natural fit with the mandate and goals of each member organization. By taking part in the consortium, members should benefit from being a part of a larger effort and see a clear contribution to the achievement of their own objectives. Ideally, a successful consortium will extend beyond the project at hand, grow to incorporate new members, and lead to longer-term collaboration.
- **Create management structures:** Within the consortium, a lead institution should be designated as responsible for coordination. This responsibility can be shared across multiple organizations if there are several distinct roles to be filled. For the organization(s) taking on coordination, staff time and other resources must be designated specifically for consortium management to ensure that adequate effort is devoted to these tasks.
- **Leverage external support:** Particularly if the consortium concept is new to all members, it may be worthwhile to have part-time or full-time external support for managing the consortium. This person should have the skills and experience necessary to support capacity building for member organizations and to promote institution building at the consortium level. S/he should also be capable of bridging the gap between organizational cultures and managing intra- and inter-institutional dynamics.
- **Clearly define responsibilities:** Compared to working alone, collaboration requires greater levels of consultation and involvement as well as shared decision-making. Once the consortium is established, members should sign a Memorandum of Understanding that formally sets out the roles and responsibilities of each organization, in order to ensure that there is accountability for all assigned tasks.
- **Involve members across the project cycle:** Core institutions engaged from the start of the consortium process should be engaged in all aspects of program development, from writing the funding proposal to designing activities. This creates ownership and buy-in, ensuring that the program responds to the needs and abilities of member organizations and the youth populations that they serve. As the project life cycles progresses, members should continue to be engaged in key decisions.

- **Adapt to changing conditions:** The continuing success of a consortium will depend on its ability to adapt to new circumstances and needs—for example, after the original project has ended and new sources of funding are sought. In some cases, new members may be invited to join the consortium in order to add new skills and competencies to the group, or to broaden the youth population reached.
- **Secure buy-in at all levels:** Although high-level executives tend to represent their organizations at consortium meetings, it is important that managers and staff at all levels understand the work of the consortium and the importance of their organization’s membership in it. All staff members should be regarded as stakeholders and made aware of the consortium process. In particular, staff members should know how this collaboration will impact their own work, and what resources may be available to them from other partners.
- **Maintain an open dialogue:** All member organizations should be treated equally and have their opinions heard with respect. A democratic and efficient decision-making process should be agreed upon at the outset in order to maintain transparency. Negotiation and building trust over time is key to successful cooperation.

## Conclusion

*“I enjoyed [working with the consortium]. The meetings were always interesting – even the interagency dynamics. We have grown into it, and we all received benefits. We could not have achieved what we did without the keen monitoring and evaluation eye of IYF.”*

— Dr. Stephen King, Director, RISE (Saint Lucia) Inc.

When the consortium model was proposed under CYEP, it was an innovative model in the region, and the advantages and benefits of working together were not fully clear to organizations that may typically have been used to viewing each other as competitors. However, as the consortia grew in strength over the course of the program, members began to support each other in various ways, rely on each other for complementary skills, and build off of each other’s programmatic strengths.

Perhaps most importantly, consortium activities have continued beyond CYEP in both scope and time, demonstrating the value of this structure to its members. The consortium in Antigua and Barbuda has expanded to take on new institutions as well as explore an advocacy role. In both Saint Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda, partner organizations have continued to work together, involving each other in new programs and cooperating to pursue new sources of funding.

From this experience, the consortium model has proved a valuable approach for bringing youth-serving organizations together to accomplish shared objectives. Participating institutions agreed that this collaborative structure allowed them to build their capacity and achieve more than they could have on their own—ultimately resulting in a greater impact for the youth that they serve.