
Youth Skills Training Program Guide

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This Youth Skills Training (YST) Program Guide provides information and resources to create a YST program or enhance an existing program. Learn more about YST at www.dli.mn.gov/YST.

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YST program overview

Purpose

The Youth Skills Training (YST) Program encourages, promotes and supports the development of local partnerships between schools, employers and community organizations. These local partnerships provide students with related classroom instruction, safety training, industry-recognized credentials and paid work experience in high-growth and high-demand occupations in the industries of advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology. Successful YST partnerships demonstrate the ability to achieve these objectives through various means including outreach, education, training and supportive services for students.

YST programs provide students with a meaningful alternative to enrolling directly into a high-cost, debt-incurring, four-year degree program without a plan. Employers throughout the state report an increasing number of unfilled positions in high-paying jobs that require a certification or two-year degree. Employers also indicate significant challenges in finding qualified and trainable employees to fill these skilled positions.

YST programs address workforce challenges by connecting industry with education to provide students with opportunities to learn about and gain hands-on experience in key industries.

Employers are connected with students interested in the industry, who have learned basic work skills and technical skills for the industry, and who would like to participate in a meaningful paid work experience. These individuals are great candidates to help fill the skills gap for employers struggling to find and retain qualified employees. YST programs serve employers, school districts, students, families, communities, post-secondary institutions, employer associations and nonprofit groups.

Equity

The Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) promotes public-service-centered work, teamwork, collaboration and building an inclusive environment with equitable systems. We are committed to building a diverse and inclusive workplace to better serve Minnesotans. All students attending a YST partnering school are eligible to participate. This may include public, private, home and charter schools. YST programs do not discriminate based on race, ethnicity or any other characteristic. Student demographics of these programs should be proportionate to the student demographics of the schools that develop and implement YST programs.

Components of YST

The four main components of the YST program are outreach, consultation, program approval and grant administration.

Outreach

YST program staff meet with individuals and groups throughout the state to present information and answer questions. YST provides technical assistance to local partnerships interested in learning more or creating and implementing a YST program in their community.

Forms of outreach have included conference calls, virtual and in-person presentations, virtual and in-person meetings and webinars to inform, educate and support the development and implementation of YST programs throughout the state.

Consultation

The YST program provides the following resources and assistance to support the creation and development of YST programs:

- technical assistance;
- partnership development;
- industry support;
- related instruction review;
- safety training and certification identification;
- paid work experience development;
- models and examples;
- child labor law information and resources;
- employer approval to host student learners for paid work experiences; and
- YST grant application support and feedback.

Program approval

The YST program was created to support high-growth, high-demand, living-wage industries where it has traditionally been difficult to place 16-17-year-old student learners in a paid work experience.

By meeting YST requirements and receiving approval from DLI, student learners are allowed to work in industries otherwise prohibited by child-labor laws.

DLI works with local partnerships to complete the necessary paperwork and requirements for YST program approval. This process was tested with six local partnerships throughout the state prior to implementation and has been updated several times based on feedback from local partnerships, the commissioner of DLI and current COVID-19 recommendations and restrictions.

Forms and additional information about YST program approval are at www.dli.mn.gov/YST.

Industries

YST operates in the following industries:

- advanced manufacturing;
- agriculture;
- automotive;
- health care; and
- information technology.

Occupations

YST program occupations are based on the following considerations and labor market information provided by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED):

- current demand for the occupation;
- long-term growth and demand for the occupation;
- statewide median wage for the occupation;
- industry-recognized credentials for the occupation; and
- dual training and hands-on learning opportunities for the occupation.

Any occupations that are prohibited for minors under the age of 18 are automatically excluded from the program.

Examples of occupations by industry

Advanced manufacturing

- assembler
- CAD specialist
- engineering technician
- machine programmer
- machinist/tool and die maker
- machinist/CNC operator
- maintenance and repair worker
- mechatronics technician
- quality technician
- welder

Agriculture

- agriculture equipment mechanic
- agronomist
- quality assurance/food safety

- greenhouse manager
- plant scientist
- urban farm manager

Automotive

- auto body technician
- auto mechanic
- diesel mechanic
- service technician

Health care

- certified nursing assistant
- health support specialist
- lab technician
- licensed practical nurse
- medical assistant
- registered nurse

Information technology

- coder
- cyber security
- IT programmer
- network administrator
- software development
- technician
- web developer

Grant administration

Minnesota statutes allocate \$1 million in annual grant funding for local YST partnerships. A maximum of \$100,000 is awarded to selected YST partnerships to spend over a two-year grant period.

The YST program manages the grant application process, state contracts, monitoring, invoicing and reporting for all grants associated with the program.

YST program approval is not required to apply for grant funding, and grant funding is not required for YST program approval.

Although not a requirement for YST program approval, YST grants are an important component to provide local partnerships with initial funding to create and implement a YST program. A sustainability plan is required as part of the application process since funding is meant to cover initial costs to start a program.

Grant application process

1. Complete an online letter of intent to apply for YST grant funding.
2. DLI provides approval of the letter of intent.
3. Complete formal grant application.
4. Grant committee reviews and determines grant recipients and award amounts.

Grant recipients are required to provide quarterly invoices and quarterly reporting to monitor progress and track outcomes. The grant recipients are convened to share ideas, information, resources and challenges, ask questions and receive technical support.

Requirements

Funding can be used to coordinate and implement YST programs. Specifically, local YST partnerships have used grant money for:

- marketing and advertising programs;
- recruiting schools, employers and students;
- employer training;
- student transportation;
- staff members to coordinate and monitor program outcomes; and
- student credentials or certifications.

Funds cannot be used to pay student wages.

Additional YST grant application information and instructions are at www.dli.mn.gov/YST.

Requirements of a YST program

- Local partnership (education and employer).
- Industry-related classroom instruction for high school credit.
- Safe and meaningful paid work experiences for students 16 years of age or older.
- Qualified supervision and safety training.
- At least 60 percent of students receive an industry credential.
- At least 80 percent of eligible students graduate.

Age and hours

By state law, 16- and 17-year-olds may not work after 11 p.m. on evenings before school days or before 5 a.m. on school days.

Regulations

- Employers must comply with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and state child labor laws.
- Employers must comply with Minnesota OSHA (MNOSHA) requirements and key safety components to include the following workplace aspects:
 - physical plant and environment (accessible to students, noise, lighting, aisles open, ventilation, cleanliness, protective safety gear);
 - equipment and machines (machine guarding, hazardous occupation orders prohibiting use of specific equipment and machines, safe operating conditions); and
 - training (identifying who provides orientation safety training, safety training for operation of specific equipment, identify who is responsible for day-to-day supervision while operating equipment).
- Employers must provide documentation for workers' compensation insurance.
- Student learner rate of pay and scheduling of work hours must be clearly established. Student learners must be paid at least minimum wage for all hours worked.

Minnesota program exemption

Minnesota's child labor laws prohibit the use of certain potentially hazardous equipment by employees younger than 18. A 16- or 17-year-old may use certain potentially hazardous equipment if they are a student learner in a school-work training program. Learn more at www.dli.mn.gov/YST.

If a student learner's work involves using hazardous equipment it must be:

- incidental to the student learner's training;
- intermittent and only for short periods of time (up to 20% of a shift and no more than one hour per day); and
- with direct and close supervision.

Steps to create and implement a YST program

Creating and implementing a YST program does not need to be overwhelming. Take small steps to begin. It only takes one teacher, one industry partner, one class and one student to get started.

1. Select an approved YST industry based on community needs and availability.
2. Form a local partnership between selected industry employers, schools and community organizations. Additional details about this step can be found in the frequently asked questions section.
3. Identify high school classes or technical college courses for student learners to receive industry-related classroom instruction for high school credit.
4. Ensure all stakeholders involved in the YST program understand child labor laws for the chosen industry. Determine how and when safety instruction will be provided in the school and at the worksite.
5. Create a schedule and work process for the YST program – key considerations are:
 - supervision;
 - hours;
 - transportation;
 - training;
 - goals;
 - requirements; and
 - wages – students must be paid at least minimum wage for all paid work experience hours.
6. Plan to track YST program outcomes. Based on statute, at least 80% of student learners must graduate and at least 60% of student learners must earn an industry-recognized credential upon program completion.

Considerations

When creating a YST program consider the following questions:

- Who is the main contact or lead partner?
- What skills and knowledge will students have when entering a paid work experience?
- What are the child labor laws that apply to 16- and 17-year-old student learners?
- What type of equipment will be used and what safety training needs to be in place?
- What are insurance considerations for employing 16- and 17-year-old student learners?
- How many students can be placed at each employer site?
- What type of schedule and hours meet the needs of all parties involved?
- What options are available to transport students to and from the work site?
- What will the starting wage be for student employees?

- What is the goal of the program from a student, parent, employer and school perspective?
- How will students be evaluated throughout this program?
- Who are the main contact people involved (employer, school, parents and guardians)?
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) is required for the student?
- What are the responsibilities of each person involved in the program?

Tips to create a successful YST program

Several essential components have emerged based on successful YST programs.

Administrative and executive team support

The school and employer must believe in the program, educate staff members, promote the program, connect with the community and support with time, money, scheduling, exposure opportunities, speakers, recruitment, etc.

Employer/school partnerships

Begin to create and establish local employer/school partnerships in your community. Establish an industry council to determine employer needs and to determine roles in creating a program.

Marketing and recruitment plan

Determine a plan to recruit students, provide industry exposure opportunities, target specific populations, provide feeder classes, use interest and ability assessment data, advertise to the community and create a retention plan.

Determine program goals

Create realistic, achievable, obtainable goals that are well-designed and clearly laid out. Partnerships should discuss meaningful credentials and determine how students will obtain them.

Parent and community participation

Market and advertise the program, creating awareness, providing opportunities and using statistics from the industry that include the amount of training, salary, demand, benefits to working in the industry, etc.

Funding and resources

Explore grants and other funding sources to create and

implement a YST program. How will money be used to create, promote and implement a program designed to offer students the opportunity to gain meaningful skills and obtain paid work experience?

Exposure opportunities

Provide quality, meaningful, hands-on, real world exposure opportunities to students of all ages, parents, teachers, counselors and administration through activities that include speakers, field trips, tours, open houses, etc.

Quality instruction

Provide quality, meaningful, hands-on, real world, industry-related classroom instruction to students. Consult industry partners about curriculum and provide them with opportunities to connect with teachers and school staff members. The teacher should be engaged, excited and willing to connect with industry and community members, and have a desire to update their own knowledge and skills. Take advantage of opportunities such as summer teacher externships.

Soft-skill development

Teach students the skills necessary to be successfully employed in the industry. Work with industry partners and schools to design and plan ways to practice skills in the classroom and in the work setting. Monitor and track specific skills to demonstrate needs and improvement of these skills.

Safe and meaningful work experience

Create a safe and meaningful paid work experience that provides students with technical skills and employment skills. Teach students about pathways to obtain a variety of positions within the industry.

Growth, recruitment and continuous improvement

Plan for the growth of the program: how to increase the number of students participating; increase paid work experience opportunities; add new employers and improve the curriculum.

YST operation

YST brings local employers, schools, students and other stakeholders together. These partnerships have short- and long-term benefits. Key program benefits include:

- industry exposure for all involved;
- discovery of pathways to high-growth and high-demand career opportunities;

- strong relationships among industry, education and community;
- energy and new ideas about training future talent;
- reaching younger students to help fill needs and skills gaps;
- partnering in shaping curriculum to address current trends;
- increasing student skills, knowledge and awareness of high-growth, high-demand, living-wage careers; and
- providing future employees to fill the needs identified by a local industry.

Student learners

A “student learner” is 16 or 17 years old, a student of an accredited school and a part-time employee. The student learner obtains academic credit and employment training under a bona fide, written, school-work training program agreement between the school and the employer. Students develop a solid understanding of the pathways that lead to specific careers within the selected industry.

Responsibilities

As YST program participants, student learners:

- comply with guidelines established by the school and the employer;
- commit to the education, safety training and work components of the program;
- assume the dual role of employee and student at the worksite;
- understand safety and child labor laws in the chosen industry; and
- maintain satisfactory performance in both the school and work environments.

Opportunities

Through a YST program, student learners:

- learn and develop essential workplace skills required to become successful employees;
- develop important knowledge and technical skills in an industry setting;
- earn income and gain work experience;
- develop trusted relationships with professionals within a desired industry;
- increase confidence and elevate career aspirations; and
- have the potential to gain college credits and industry-recognized credentials.

Parents or guardians

It is important for a student learner’s parents or guardians to support and monitor their child’s involvement in a YST program. Specifically they should:

- provide consent for the child to participate in a paid work experience through a training agreement;
- encourage the child to perform at a high level in both academic and work-related tasks; and
- get involved and learn about the YST program and pathways to meaningful careers.

Schools

Schools are the link between YST student learners and employers. As part of YST, schools:

- create meaningful opportunities for students to learn about the industry;
- provide industry-related instruction and safety training;
- increase opportunities for students to succeed in high-growth, high-demand careers;
- educate students about pathways to skilled careers; and
- receive industry feedback about curriculum, technical skills and employment skills required for success.

Responsibilities

As YST program leaders, schools must:

- identify a person to serve as program lead;
- establish connections with industry partners;
- involve parents and community members;
- identify industry-related high school or area technical college classes;
- work with industry partners to create paid work experiences for student learners;
- assist with coordination of paid work experiences and the selection of students to participate;
- enter a school-work training agreement with the employer, school, student and parent or guardian;
- provide students with safety training and educate them about child labor laws;
- evaluate the program and track outcomes;
- work with industry partners to submit paperwork to become an approved program through DLI; and
- coordinate with DLI and other appropriate agencies.

Employers

YST employers provide safe, healthy and meaningful paid work experiences that have a lasting impact.

Responsibilities

As YST program participants, employers must:

- understand and comply with all child labor laws;
- contact their insurance provider to obtain approval for 16- and 17-year-old student learners to participate in paid work experiences;
- determine the safety training and supervision required for students;
- work with the school to create a student work plan;
- collaborate with school partners to provide input about industry-related curriculum;
- work with the school to determine meaningful industry credentials and certifications;
- provide student learners with the opportunity to experience and learn about the industry;
- teach students about pathways to careers within the industry;
- provide training for the employees who will work with student learners;
- successfully complete YST employer approval process with guidance from DLI; and
- pay students at least minimum wage for all hours worked.

Opportunities

Through a YST program, employers:

- create meaningful partnerships with school districts;
- provide input about curriculum and important employment skills necessary for industry;
- build a pipeline of diverse talent to meet current and future workforce needs;
- develop direct relationships with students interested in the industry;
- create opportunities for employees to develop mentoring and leadership roles; and
- increase productivity and team morale.

Engagement

Strong marketing and engagement are critical to create YST industry and education partnerships and recruit students. There are various ways that all stakeholders can participate to improve YST programs.

Students

- Tour local companies.
- Interact with industry professionals.
- Participate in career events at school and in the community.
- Attend events featuring industry speakers.
- Connect with a mentor from industry.
- Participate in job-shadow experiences.
- Attend tours of post-secondary programs.
- Request informational interviews with industry professionals.
- Earn industry-related credentials and college credits whenever possible.
- Participate in industry-related summer programs or camps to gain experience.

Parents and guardians

- Attend industry tours with students or on your own.
- Attend classroom speakers.
- Participate in job-shadow experiences.
- Attend career fairs and open houses.
- Serve as a classroom speaker for your industry.
- Participate as a member of an advisory council.

Schools

- Create a brochure about your program.
- Attend your local chamber of commerce meetings. Many local employers are members and you will be able to make contacts as well as distribute your brochure and business card.
- Contact your local economic development board, which has close contact with employers in the area and can explain which industries are in high demand.
- Check your area for a career center. The employment counselor there can connect you to employers, as well as education and scholarship programs.
- Check your school for a co-op program or a school-to-work program. The director will have important contacts they may be willing to share with you.
- Connect with your local area technology center.
- Contact the human resources personnel at local businesses and arrange working lunches to explain your program and how it can benefit them.
- Contact the local newspaper for a focus story about your program and how it can help local businesses.

- Set up a booth during local festivals and events. Community leaders are often present.
- Start a Facebook, Twitter or Instagram account aimed at attracting employers.
- Host a luncheon for local business leaders to explain your program.
- Invite industry members into school to see what is being taught.
- Donate consumable materials, equipment, time and expertise.
- Provide input about curriculum.
- Offer to help train teachers about current trends in your industry.
- Create summer externships for teachers interested in gaining industry experience.
- Donate funds for students to obtain credentials and certifications.
- Mentor students interested in your industry.
- Agree to informational interviews with students.
- Provide paid work experiences for students.
- Provide scholarships for students.
- Introduce yourself to school guidance counselors and inquire about any business contacts they may have.

Employers

- Provide tours of your company.
- Volunteer as classroom speakers for industry-related classes.
- Represent your company at career fairs and open house events.
- Provide a job-shadow experience for students and parents.

Frequently asked questions

How do I get the right people in the room?

The key to getting the right people in the room is finding the right person in each organization you are trying to connect with. In schools it may be a pathway coordinator, counselor, CTE teacher, principal or superintendent. In industry, connecting with human resources directors, owners and trainers is a good way to start. It may also be helpful to include a chamber of commerce, economic development organization or similar group to help coordinate. Call or visit to determine the right person and have a conversation about what you would like to create.

What is the best way to communicate what we will cover in the school?

To demonstrate what is being taught in industry-related classes, share class syllabi with industry partners and other partners. Ask for feedback and share what the student is expected to learn in the course, the skills and knowledge they will gain, and any safety instruction they will receive. Also, discuss meaningful industry-related certifications the industry recognizes and supports.

How do I communicate what the work experience will look like?

To explain the work experience, start with the basics. You want the partner to provide student learners with paid work experience in a high-growth, high-demand industry. The goal is to provide student learners with exposure to the industry, training and paid work experience that allows them to gain experience and discover pathways that lead to a variety of careers within the industry.

What are recommendations of ways to make a program sustainable?

To make a program sustainable, the partnership needs to think about creative ways to keep the momentum moving and the relationship strong over the long-term. There needs to be a lead person from each of the involved organizations (primarily from the school and the employer; other partners could lead the program's work as well). The work required to keep a YST program going needs to be included as a substantial component of someone's position. The work should not be added to a position that already has 100 percent of the time accounted for in a staff person's given role.

Is there a minimum number of hours of paid work experience required for a YST program?

No, there is no minimum or maximum number of hours of paid work experience required for YST programs.

Why are skilled trades/construction not one of the industries included for the YST grant and YST program approval?

Minnesota child labor law does not allow for minors under 18 years of age on construction and building sites. YST programs include 16- and 17-year-old students and requires paid work experience.

Teachers and school staff

How do I convince a reluctant employer to provide meaningful work experience? How do I talk about that?

To convince a reluctant employer, frame the discussion as a way to help provide the company and industry with their workforce of the future. Make sure the employer understands what is in it for them. Explain that the work experience is more about providing a student or group of students with exposure to the industry rather than hiring 16- and 17-year-old workers. This is part of the long-term solution to the shortage of skilled workers.

How often should we meet to provide updates about the program?

Plan to meet as often as necessary to get started and keep the momentum going. We recommend meeting on a monthly basis to share new ideas and ensure everyone understands the goals of the program and what their roles are in the development of the program. It is a good idea to create an industry council that includes schools, employers, students and parents.

What is the best way to introduce parents to this program?

Parents are integral to a program's success. There are many ways to introduce parents to this program, including curriculum nights, class registration events, tours of companies, career events, local newspaper stories and social media postings.

Employers

How much should I pay students?

Based on statute, student learners must be paid at least minimum wage for all work experience hours at the employer.

How do I find mentors for students for their on-the-job training?

Mentoring students is an opportunity for employees to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and to make a difference for student learners interested in pursuing a career in their industry. We recommend selecting employees who you believe would be good at communicating what they do to someone who is likely brand new to the work environment. If you do not have employees who come to mind right away, we recommend doing a call-out at a staff meeting. This could be a new way to recognize employees within your company as well.

What is the best way to supervise a student learner's use of certain equipment?

Students should receive safety instruction and training about any equipment they are going to use. We recommend standing right next to – and in many cases between – the student and the equipment you are demonstrating. In occupations declared hazardous, direct and close supervision of a qualified and experienced person is to be provided.

About grants

Does our partnership need to receive a grant before applying for YST program approval?

No, you do not need to be a YST grant recipient to apply for YST program approval. The YST grant process and YST program approval are two independent components of the program.

What are the expected program outcomes?

By statute, it is expected at least 80 percent of the student learners who participate in a YST grant-funded program should receive a high school diploma and at least 60 percent of the student learners who participate in a grant-funded YST program should receive a recognized credential upon completion of the YST program.

Can grant money be used to purchase equipment and supplies for classrooms?

Yes, grant money can be used for equipment and supplies as long as the employer partners agree the purchases are important to the program and are a good use of the grant funds. The YST grant funding is designed to create and implement YST programs and is not designed to become an educational funding source.

Questions and more information

Visit www.dli.mn.gov/YST.

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