
**HEALTHY
FUTURES
OF TEXAS**
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RECIPE BOOK

**for Building a Near-Peer
Leadership Position**



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INTRODUCTION

Hiring a near-peer to work on your youth program staff can bring major benefits to the youth you serve and your agency! Near-peer connections, like recent alumni of your program and college students, can serve as a bridge between the youth and the adults who work with them. They can help translate cultural barriers, and they can serve as a representative for youth voice in staff spaces.



In 2020, Healthy Futures of Texas was supported by the Texas Youth Action Network and Methodist Healthcare Ministries to pilot two near-peer positions, called Team Leads, for their Youth Advocacy Council. We've compiled our lessons learned for this document to share with other organizations who are interested in boosting youth voice in their work.

Hiring a young person to your staff requires different structures than hiring older people. This toolkit in the form of a recipe book will help you make your own near-peer position!

STARTER COURSE

Preparing for your new position

Ingredients

- *2 oz. of HR personnel*
- *1.5 cups of staff policies*
- *A tablespoon of welcome giftspacked cups of onboarding schedule*

Prep Time

3 months (varies based on your HR's previous experience with this kind of hiring)

Instructions

Step 1: Meet with your HR personnel to determine all the steps needed to hire staff at your agency

- Discuss hiring, background check, drug screening, and reference check procedures
- Determine if your agency already has part-time employees, and how they differ from full-time employees
- Explain the importance of the new position to your HR personnel so they have more context for why they're doing new work
- Ask the HR personnel how they could make their process more teen-friendly
- This can include more specific directions, simplifying the screening process, and building new onboarding procedures around part-time work

Step 2: Examine your agency policies to make sure they're teen friendly

- Look through your staff handbook and highlight any places where you may need to explain more or change policy
 - For many part-time near-peers, this may be their first time in an office environment
- Be prepared to discuss the dress code, timeliness, and other important information related to professional success
 - Are there any pieces that need changing?
 - For example, how will your organization approach holidays for part-time staff?

Step 3: Make Welcome Gift for your near-peer

- A welcome gift is critical for making sure they feel like they're a part of your team
 - Include all the items relevant to their role, like laptops, tape, scissors and staplers
 - Include agency information, like one-pagers, postcards, and curriculum
 - Include swag from your agency - t-shirts, buttons, water bottles, everything!

Step 4: Build your onboarding schedule

- Plan to include the following items in the schedule
 - Daily meetings with their supervisor for the first couple of shifts
 - This helps to keep the near-peer centered and on tasks
 - SMART goals or other goals shaping activities
 - Introductions to the rest of the staff where they can learn more about the rest of the agency and meet their coworkers
 - Invitations to ongoing staff, department or other meetings
 - Weekly supervision times

MAIN COURSE

Supervising your new position

Ingredients

- *Dash of communication*
- *1 Cup of professional development*
- *A tablespoon of supervision*
- *Splash of task management*

Cook Time

- *Step 1-2: 2 weeks*
- *Steps 3-5: Ongoing*

Instructions

Step 1: Consider all the things you'll need to communicate to your near-peer

- Communicate the difference between part-time and full-time staff expectations
- Communicate specific tasks and schedules for their work
 - Highlight major deadlines and deliverables
- Communicate appropriate communication with young people and adults
 - They'll likely not have had experience with working with high schoolers in a professional setting - make sure they understand relevant boundaries

Step 2: Develop SMART goals

- Check in on these halfway through the year, and at the end of year
- Use them to cover long-term goals both for the projects they work on and for their professional development

Step 3: Weekly supervision

- Do a check-in
 - It's easy! Just ask "How are you doing?"
- Utilize this time for task management
 - Building a regular schedule builds reliability and lessens the need for putting out fires that arise due to lack of attention
- Ask about their career and life goals and help them meet them
- Solicit feedback for yourself

Step 4: Targeted professional development

- Consider: What does your TL need to be successful? Where are they in their professional trajectory?
- Find tools they can use to meet those goals
 - Books
 - Conferences
 - Webinars
 - Networking
- Discuss parts of the nonprofit world they're interested in
 - Grants
 - Finances
 - Management
 - Advocacy
 - Whatever else!

Step 5: Be flexible

- Semesters change, life changes, work changes
 - Be prepared to shift hours, workloads, and expectations
 - Yes, our deliverables are important - remember that your staff is the most important resource you have, though!



DESSERT COURSE

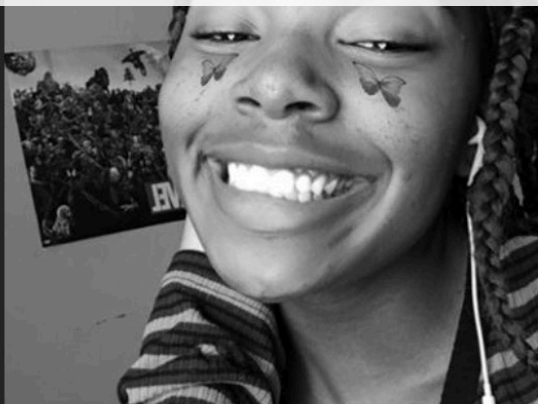
Preparing near-peer leader for future employment

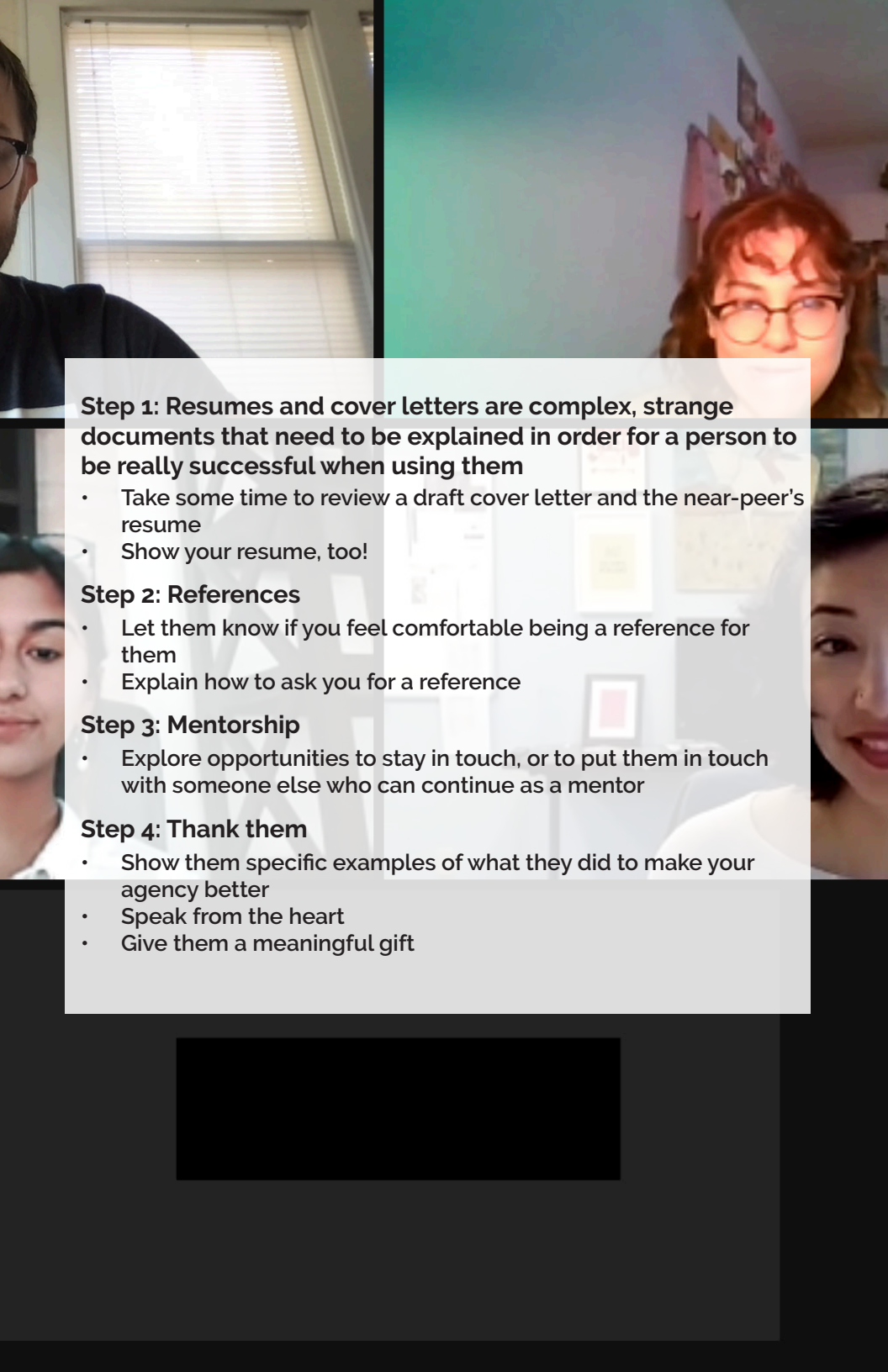
Ingredients

- *1 pint of resumes*
- *A spoonful of cover letters*
- *1 teaspoon of references*
- *A pinch of mentorship*

Cook Time

Start 1 month before position ends





Step 1: Resumes and cover letters are complex, strange documents that need to be explained in order for a person to be really successful when using them

- Take some time to review a draft cover letter and the near-peer's resume
- Show your resume, too!


Step 2: References

- Let them know if you feel comfortable being a reference for them
- Explain how to ask you for a reference

Step 3: Mentorship

- Explore opportunities to stay in touch, or to put them in touch with someone else who can continue as a mentor

Step 4: Thank them

- Show them specific examples of what they did to make your agency better
 - Speak from the heart
 - Give them a meaningful gift
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CONTACT

Anthony Betori
Health Education Program
Director, Healthy Futures of Texas
abetori@hf-tx.org

Elizabeth Tang
YAC Team Lead, Healthy Futures
of Texas
etang@hf-tx.org

Emily Naiser
Project Director, Texas Youth
Action Network
tyan@ppri.tamu.edu

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