



WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE A TALENT PIPELINE TO MEET ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

COMPANY OVERVIEW

The Housing Partnership Network (HPN) is a Boston-based, national nonprofit organization whose mission is to build affordable homes, better futures, and vibrant communities for low- and moderate-income people through partnerships with member organizations, the business sector, government, and philanthropic institutions. By fostering private sector partnerships and enterprises that achieve bold social missions, HPN and its member organizations work together to scale innovation and impact, helping millions of people gain access to affordable homes and thriving communities that offer economic opportunity and an enhanced quality of life. As HPN has grown over the past several years, the need for increased capacity on the Information Systems (IS) team has emerged. Facing a scarcity of talent with the relevant IS expertise, HPN leaders launched an innovative partnership with Year Up, to provide HPN access to a previously untapped source of skilled, driven, and diverse young people to meet its talent needs.

AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP TO ADDRESS A GROWING TALENT NEED

As the business model of HPN has evolved, so have its talent needs. When the organization was founded in 1992, leaders from 37 organizations gathered to share their experiences and see what they could learn through collaboration. Today, the organization has nearly 100 top-performing housing and community development social enterprises in its domestic network and works together with 75 members in the International Housing Partnership. Due to the success of HPN's social enterprise incubation model and the growth of its member organizations, demand has increased for the platform of support services that HPN provides. Organizational growth has increased staff headcount substantially – from 28 employees in 2012 to over 50 in 2016.

Among the areas where HPN needed to increase capacity was on the Information Systems (IS) team, requiring a diverse set of technological support skills for the member organizations in the network. Historically, the IS needs of HPN were minimal; however, the creation of new social enterprises, some with specific technological infrastructure and services, required greater capacity to deliver services in a consistent manner. HR explored several different ways to meet this evolving IS talent need. First, they hired an external consultant to work at HPN on a weekly basis. Subsequently, they brought in a temporary contract worker from a staffing agency to support the IS team. Both options were expensive and neither provided the long-term solution to the organization's growing capacity needs.

“We were very impressed by the soft skills of the Year Up graduates, who were more professional and composed than the candidates brought in by our paid staffing service! The common perception of Information Technology and Systems jobs is that they can be done in isolation, but the reality is quite different. It is critical to interact with the people in your organization to effectively understand how technology can support their business needs. Professional and personal skills are absolutely essential to this work and we found our Year Up graduate to be well prepared to meet these requirements.”

— Prabin Kanel
Vice President of
Information Systems

Eager to find talent that provided a solution to its IS challenges, as well as pursue diverse (in race, gender, and age) candidates, HPN set a goal to access new candidate pools. In January 2015, HPN initiated a partnership with Year Up, a nonprofit organization that works to prepare low-income young adults for the workplace through a one-year intensive training program that combines hands-on technical and professional skill development with an internship in the corporate setting. Year Up provided HPN with a pool of technically trained, professional, and diverse program graduates, who were interviewed for an entry-level role on the IS team. From this pool of candidates, IS team leaders selected Year Up graduate German Ayala and offered him a part-time position.



Prabin Kanel, the Vice President of Information Systems and German’s manager, was immediately impressed by German’s professionalism, technical skills, and passion for learning. Within a month of his initial date of hire, German performed exceptionally and his work schedule was increased by 25%. German continued to perform at a high level while taking on increasingly complex IS projects, and in November 2015, the HPN team was delighted to offer him a full-time position, with salary and benefits commensurate with the market.

STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

German’s presence at HPN has done more than simply add capacity to the IS team. Prabin speaks enthusiastically about how he himself has become more engaged in his work since German joined the organization. In particular, Prabin says he has grown more intentional about how he manages and supports the professional development of the staff members that report to him. The IS team has a weekly peer exchange session to discuss the technical challenges that they are dealing with and share best practices for addressing them. Prabin works to provide German with a variety of projects so that he will continue to learn and grow his skills at work. He is also coaching German to support him in improving his project management and customer service skills, as such competencies are becoming increasingly more important in the IS field.

Prabin believes that other staff members in the organization have also been energized by interacting with German, who brings a unique background and experience to the workplace. Research across a number of employers has indicated that increased employee engagement is a common benefit of programs that offer young adults a pathway into the workforce.

PARTNERSHIP WITH YEAR UP INSPIRES FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ABOUT TALENT MANAGEMENT

The successful partnership with Year Up has led to further discussions within HPN’s HR team and senior management about their approach to attracting and managing talent. Leaders at the organization are in the process of exploring several other programs that would allow them to outperform their current hiring practices in bringing in young and diverse talent. Recruitment from programs like Year Up that train and support low-income young adults aligns neatly with the organization’s mission of strengthening communities and making brighter futures possible for low- and moderate-income people in the United States. By seriously considering young

“In looking to fill our Information Systems positions, our traditional hiring process proved to be costly and time intensive. For a fraction of that cost, our relationship with Year Up has given us access to a pool of driven candidates with the necessary technical skills. Forward-thinking organizations should aim to partner with organizations like Year Up for organizations to meet their demand for IS expertise and prepare for the workforce of the future, which is younger, more diverse, and trained for success outside of the traditional educational path.”

— Sherry Burton, Senior Associate, Human Resources and Office Management

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- 1 **Access to a pool of trained talent** with the necessary technical and professional skills
- 2 **Higher retention** of staff
- 3 Increase in employee **diversity**
- 4 Boost in employee **engagement**
- 5 Alignment with the **organization’s mission**

people with atypical educational credentials as a source of entry-level talent and bringing them into the organization, HPN is able to enrich its understanding of the communities it aims to serve, as its staff better reflects the diversity of these communities.

Although it is a relatively small employer, HPN may not have hiring needs large enough to justify the creation of its own internal training program for youth, but it can help expand opportunities for young people in another way – by being a champion of innovative hiring practices in the affordable housing sector. HPN plans to share the story of its experience with Year Up with its members, informing them of this solution to increase young and diverse talent, which is scarce in the sector. This knowledge sharing has the potential to influence the practices of the many organizations that look to HPN for solutions to the industry challenges they face.



MEET A YEAR UP ALUMNUS BUILDING A CAREER AT HPN

German Ayala, Desktop Support Technician

After graduating from East Boston High School, German enrolled at Roxbury Community College. For a time, he worked multiple jobs to support his education, but ultimately decided to take time off from school because of financial difficulties. German heard about Year Up from high school friends who were pleased with the outcomes they had achieved through the program. Hungry for an experience to kick-start his professional career, German applied to the program and enrolled in January 2014.

German reflects positively on his time at Year Up, saying that through Year Up's training, he developed the technical and professional skills needed for success in the modern day workplace. He interned for six months at athenahealth, a healthcare technology company based in Watertown, MA. German says that this was a great opportunity to put his newly gained tech skills to work and to get real-life experience in the corporate world.

Two months after graduating from Year Up in January 2015, German joined the Information Systems Team at HPN. Working at a small organization has given him the chance to get involved in a wide variety of projects and develop a diverse array of IS skills. He also appreciates working for a mission-driven organization and building close relationships with his coworkers.

German is currently working toward an Associate's degree in Information Technology at Bunker Hill Community College. After graduating, he plans to transfer to a four-year institution to continue to develop his skills, and would like to pursue a career in website development or programming.



Year Up is a one-year, intensive training program that provides low-income young adults ages 18-24, with a combination of hands-on skill development, college credits, corporate internships, and support. Year Up operates in Arizona, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Greater Atlanta, Greater Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, the National Capital Region, New York, Providence, Puget Sound, the San Francisco Bay Area, and South Florida. For more information about Year Up, visit www.yearup.org.

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