

## Community Toolkit

- Business Support for Youth Programs
- **Creating an Education Program and Hiring Youth Outreach Staff**
  - Creating Youth Recognition Awards/Scholarships
  - Developing a Youth Training/Leadership Program
  - Involving Young People in the Election Process
    - Mentoring Students and Visiting Schools
    - Setting up Internship Programs
- Working with Youth to Address Specific Community Issues or Needs
  - Youth Philanthropy
- Youth on School, Municipal, and Advisory Boards / Councils

The Maine Department of Education's  
Citizenship Education Task Force

and

CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS



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While it is extremely important to encourage and educate our young people about the importance of civic engagement, it is equally important to give them the opportunity to put their knowledge to use. AmeriCorps, a national and community service program, is one such program specifically designed to allow U.S. Citizens 17 years and older to engage in intensive service for a year to meet community needs in areas such as education, the environment, and public safety. A 2004 study by AmeriCorps (“Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in AmeriCorps”) revealed that participation in AmeriCorps leads to strong civic engagement: connection to community, participation in community-based activities, and personal growth.

AmeriCorps is comprised of three major programs: AmeriCorps State and National; AmeriCorps VISTA; and AmeriCorps National Civilian. Roughly three-quarters of all AmeriCorps grant funding goes to the Governor-appointed Maine Commission for Community Service, which in turn awards grants to nonprofit groups to respond to local needs. Highlighted below are a few of the 20 AmeriCorps programs and their sponsors in Maine.<sup>1</sup>

#### Communities for Children and Youth: AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps\*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national program in which volunteers apply their skills in low-income communities, designing anti-poverty programs that will continue after they complete their service. To more effectively understand the needs of their constituents and anti-poverty work, VISTAs receive a monthly subsistence living allowance set slightly above poverty level. This allows VISTAs understand the daily struggles that persons in poverty face. VISTA’s serve for a minimum of one year and can reapply for a maximum service of three years.

In Maine VISTA, opportunities include working with the community projects of non-profit organizations. For example, Communities for Children and Youth Project Work Plan identifies six significant activities, in which VISTAs engage, to increase the development of children and youth at increased risk of poverty. These activities include:

- Recruit, screen, train, and manage volunteers;
- Outreach to youth populations;
- Raise resources through grant writing and fund raising activities;
- Create and/or strengthen strategic collaborative partnerships;
- Conduct public relation's campaigns; and
- Develop and assess programs

#### Island Institute Fellows Program

The Island Fellows Program is designed for recent college or master’s graduates’ who want to make a difference along the coast of Maine. Since 1999 the Island Institute has matched nearly 50 talented Island Fellows for one- to two-year assignments in communities requesting their help. They've tackled projects that have included developing school curriculum, creating arts

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<sup>1</sup> For a listing of the AmeriCorps programs and sponsor organizations in Maine, go to [http://www.nationalservice.gov/state\\_profiles/pdf/ME\\_AC.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/state_profiles/pdf/ME_AC.pdf)

programs, mapping community resources using GIS technology, leveraging assistance for island small businesses, conducting research projects or surveys, cataloging historical society and library collections, monitoring marine or other natural resources, finding the funding to build a new community center, and much more.

Nathan Michaud, former Island Fellow from Turner, Maine, spent two years as a sternman on the lobsterboat, the Zachary Nathaniel, on Frenchboro. Nathan was placed on Vinalhaven to do sea sampling with the fishermen there at their request and collected oral histories from the islanders for the Vinalhaven Historical Society. As a result of his success in working with a variety of islanders, the town manager of Vinalhaven requested that Nathan continue to assist them with the review and revision of their comprehensive plan. This required conducting surveys, doing some research, organizing meetings and drafting reports. Nate is now with Maine Rural Partners working to advance the rural development of Maine (see Community Toolkit topic “Youth on School, Municipal, and Advisory Boards / Councils”).

### Maine Conservation Corps

The Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) places members all over the state to serve on environmental and conservation projects. Positions range from three month to ten month commitments. Some members serve individually at agencies and nonprofits to address resource issues and educate Maine citizens, and others serve on Field Teams constructing and rehabilitating trails and trail structures.

The MCC is part of the Maine Department of Labor. Programs focus on conservation, environmental education, and meaningful opportunities for members to learn new skills and gain experience in environmental careers. The MCC manages three programs: the Field Team program, the SERVE/Maine Environmental Educator/Volunteer Leader (SMEEVL) program, and the Wildfire Safety program.

- Field Teams build trails, improve campgrounds, enhance wildlife habitat, and have developed a reputation as some of Maine's most effective trail builders.
- Environmental Educators and Volunteer Leaders recruit, train and manage volunteers, teach school children and adults about environmental issues, and work with watershed organizations to monitor water quality conditions.
- Members in the Wildfire Safety program serve with the Maine Forest Service to map areas that are at increased risk of wildfire and to educate citizens about disaster preparedness and reducing wildfire risk in Maine communities.

The MCC receives AmeriCorps funding through the Maine Commission for Community Service. During their terms of service our members receive weekly stipends, health insurance, and are able to earn AmeriCorps Education Awards to pay for college or student loans.

## Ideas and Suggestions for Implementation

Traditionally, youth and adult interactions have been thought in terms of the parent / child relationship or the teacher / student relationship. More and more adults have to redefine their relationship with young adults as they become accepting to the idea of working with youth as partners.

*"While the strategies for working with teens may differ from those you would use with adults, there are fundamental principles that should be followed when working with both. The bottom line is that teens want to be respected for their ideas, their perspectives and their time. They don't want to be treated as kids and they don't want to feel as if they have been used."*

- Ellen Feighery, Stanford Health Promotion Resource Center

### What are the benefits of youth-adult partnerships?

A survey conducted by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (a division of the National 4-H Council) showed that involving young people in decision-making helps them to build problem-solving skills, social competencies like communication, gives a sense of identity and autonomy, and builds an overall sense of purpose.

While youth learn valuable life skills, adults benefit by seeing them as valid contributors to the community. Some of other ways adults profit are by understanding the needs & concerns of youth, gaining new ideas and different perspectives, sharing knowledge, and increasing their creativity. Advocates of youth / adults partnerships assert that some programs are more sustainable and effective when youth are involved. Consider the following benefits youth have on organizations: (1) youth can help bring clarity & focus to an organization's mission; (2) the organization is more connected to youth in the community; (3) greater value is placed on youth inclusion and representation; and (4) the organization builds the reputation of being truly committed to youth.

### What is a youth-adult partnership?

Youth-adult partnerships are founded on the belief that young people have the right to participate in programs and help shape policies that will serve them. Adults see youth as partners who enrich the experience and who helps to enrich the experiences of youths. A true partnership is mutually respectful and is one that allows both sides to make suggestions and decisions that are recognized and valued.

For adults to share the decision-making power with youth means adults must have confidence in young people's judgment, respect their input, and recognize youth as assets. For a partnership to work, adults may need to embrace change, be willing to provide additional support and training, and modify their notion of what works and doesn't work. Youth will need to adapt as well in order to understand the limitations and realities of a program or organization's development, operation, and evaluation.

### What are the ways in which youth can be involved in a program or organization?

There are a many ways to engage youth in leadership and in decision-making. No one model is *the* model. Different models work in different programs. The following outlines a few types of models that have been used in service-learning programs. Further reading for each model provides the following: a brief description, advantages of that approach, implementation steps, and examples (see “Youth Voice: A Guide for Engaging Young People in Leadership and Decision-Making in Service-Learning Programs”). A few models include:

- Youth as Planners
- Youth as Trainers
- Youth as Evaluators
- Youth as Policy Makers

### What are the elements of effective youth-adult partnerships?

#### Organizational Capacity

- Establish clear goals, expectations, and responsibilities for youth and adults.
- Ensure commitment to youth-adult partnerships from all levels of organization.
- Provide support for youth through mentorship and skills-building opportunities.
- Ensure that mentors have time, energy, and resources to supervise youth adequately.
- Ensure flexible meeting times for youth and provide free food or transportation if necessary.
- Monitor needs of youth and adults regularly.

#### Attitude Shift

- Address misconceptions and biases that youth and adults have about each other.
- Be open to changing attitudes and building skills in working with youth and adults.
- Be aware of different styles of communication.
- Value the skills and experiences of both youth and adults.
- Use training to diminish stereotypes and facilitate collaboration.

#### Level of Participation

- Assess the current level of youth participation in the organization.
- Determine ways that youth can be involved meaningfully and integrally.
- Ensure that youth are involved in all stages and levels of an organization.
- Avoid tokenism.
- Ensure that youth have ownership and influence in decision-making.

### What are some of the logistical and organizational barriers?

Many adults see the need for meaningful youth engagement in organizational policymaking, and young people want more significant involvement. Still the process of creating and sustaining a youth / adult partnership can be difficult. A big challenge is the newness of the partnership concept. The implementation process can be hindered if both parties are hesitant and fear failure from the other. Logistical issues that may need to be resolved include (see Advocates for Youth for more detail on the following items):

- Hours for Meetings and Work
- Transportation
- Food
- Equipment and Support
- Procedures and Policies
- Training

What are some quick tips for a youth /adult partnership?

For Youth

- Do speak up!
- Do invite adults to share their skills, experiences, and resources.
- Do commit time and energy to do the work.
- Do take responsibility seriously.
- Do seek to involve other youth.
- Don't stereotype adults.
- Don't assume all adults will treat you like "you're just a kid."

For Adults

- Do involve youth in the decisionmaking that affects their lives.
- Do listen—really listen to youth and be willing to learn from them.
- Do provide youth with information and training they need to succeed.
- Do be thoughtful about the special consideration and support that is necessary when involving young people. They may need rides to meetings, or may need meetings scheduled to accommodate school hours.
- Do plan meetings so that everyone feels welcome.
- Don't stereotype youth.
- Don't blame all youth for the actions of one individual youth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This section compiled from publications with the following organizations: National Service-Learning Partnership; Education Commission of the States; YouthNet; Advocates for Youth; and Youth Activism.

## Case Study Resources

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## Additional Resources

### Blunt Youth Radio Program

On the air since 1994, nationally award-winning Blunt Youth Radio is a youth-produced public affairs talk show. The show is a mix of live call-in talk and pre-produced radio features. You can listen to our show live every Monday night at 7:30pm on Portland's [WMPG](http://www.wmpg.com) at 90.9 and 104.1 FM. <http://bluntradio.org/>

### Chewonki

The Chewonki Foundation is a non-profit educational institution organized in 1962. The diverse programs of the Foundation are drawn from our educational mission and include a summer camp, a semester of academic and personal challenges for high school juniors, a variety of educational group programs, and wilderness excursions for adults, families and individuals. Outreach opportunities include math or Spanish teacher, camp counselor, trip leader, and others. <http://www.chewonki.org/Home/>

### Maine Audubon

Maine Audubon offers a range of rewarding employment opportunities at beautiful Audubon centers and sanctuaries around the state. Seasonal employment opportunities include camp educators, pre-K assistant educator, and other managing positions. <http://www.maineaudubon.org/>

### Maine Youth Camping Association

Many summer camps offer educational outreach programs where young adults are hired as counselors and/or educators. <http://www.maineamps.org/>