



Best Practice Guide: Engaging Opportunity Youth in Service Years



SCHULTZ
FAMILY
FOUNDATION

Letter to the Audience

Dear Leader,

Across the nation, there is crisis of young people between the ages of 16-24 years of age that are disconnected from work and school, commonly known as “opportunity youth”. There are an estimated 4.6 million opportunity youth in America today. While this number has significantly declined since 2011, there are still far too many young people without pathways to a successful future. These opportunity youth are not a homogenous group, but a group of individuals with diverse backgrounds and multiple reasons for disconnection. Despite their challenges, opportunity youth remain optimistic about their future but require the support from organizations, programs, and individuals like you to help them increase their social capital and agency in order to achieve success.

At Service Year Alliance, we envision a future where a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – is a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. We believe service years are uniquely designed to provide the infrastructure that opportunity youth need to define clear goals, receive reliable supports that help them connect to their purpose, identify solutions to their current reality, and ultimately change the trajectory of their lives.

Opportunity youth could benefit substantially from well-constructed service year programs that offer an array of opportunities to help them develop personally and professionally.

Given the many benefits of a service year experience, it is surprising that more leaders are not using service years as a strategy to reconnect opportunity youth. Until now, service year programs have been challenged with identifying best practices to develop thoughtful, comprehensive programming to support opportunity youth.

With the support of the Schultz Family Foundation, Service Year Alliance worked with leaders in the service year field to create the Best Practice Guide: Engaging Opportunity Youth in Service Years. This guide offers the best strategies and approaches for engaging opportunity youth in service year programs, making it easy for you to better understand opportunity youth and their assets and challenges in order to determine effective program elements and needed supports. We hope this guide helps you determine your readiness to engage opportunity youth, develop effective models, and ultimately expand opportunities for young people to help solve issues, build skills, and strengthen the fabric that binds us together in service.

We invite you to join us in expanding opportunity through service years to better assist and support one of America’s most vulnerable populations – opportunity youth – in a service year.

Yours in service,



Shirley Sagawa



Table of Contents

Introduction	7
About Service Year Alliance	8
Vision and Mission of Service Year Alliance	8
Why Now?	8
Current State of Play of Opportunity Youth	9
Why Engage Opportunity Youth in Service Years?	11
A Closer Look at Opportunity Youth	12
Understanding Opportunity Youth	15
Points of Disconnection of Opportunity Youth	16
Assets and Needs of Opportunity Youth.....	17
Best Practices for Engaging Opportunity Youth in Service Years.....	19
Essential Program Elements for Opportunity Youth.....	20
Academic Training.....	21
Career Exploration, Navigation, and Placement.....	22
Leadership Development	24
Supportive Services	25

Creating a Program Culture for Opportunity Youth.....	28
Framing Program Culture for Opportunity Youth	29
Establishing a Culture for Authentic Experiences and Opportunities for Opportunity Youth	29
Staff Training	33
Member Development & Training	33
Collective Effort Strategies: Establishing Partnerships for Opportunity Youth	34
Strategic Partnerships	35
Outreach & Recruitment	35
During Service	35
Post-Service	36
Partner Organizations	37

Acknowledgements

Service Year Alliance would like to acknowledge the support of the following organizations and individuals that contributed to developing this guide by sharing their expertise, experience, and best practices working with opportunity youth. We appreciate your passion to create, improve, and expand opportunities for opportunity youth:

Germain Castellanos (Shine Educational Leadership & Pharmacy Technician Programs and Opportunity Youth United), Thaddeus Ferber (Forum for Youth Investment), Anthony Hubbard (YouthBuild Preparatory Academy), Julie Jent (National Council of Young Leaders and Opportunity Youth United), Nakeisha Neal Jones (Public Allies National and Public Allies, Washington DC), Sindri Manzanares (Green City Force), Sara Matthew (Forum for Youth Investment), Heather Sears (AmeriCorps Turnaround Schools), Mary Ellen Sprenkel (The Corps Network), and Monica Zeno-Martin (Youthbuild USA).

Many thanks to the members of the *National Council of Young Leaders and Opportunity Youth United* for sharing their personal experience and insight, and working diligently to provide the best opportunities to future leaders like themselves. Through their personal stories and experiences, we have learned the best strategies and approaches to engage young people.

We express our gratitude to *Dorothy Stoneman* for providing her leadership and guidance on engaging opportunity youth. We appreciate her sharing her insight and facilitating the convening of service year programs. Her long-standing commitment and dedication to uncovering the best opportunities for young people is noteworthy and inspiring.

We acknowledge our Chicago Director, Monique Ellington, for writing and developing this guide. We appreciate the time she spent learning from opportunity youth and service year programs, and researching the best practices for engaging opportunity youth.

Special thanks to the service year programs, youth organizations and programs, and individuals that invest in opportunity youth. We value your bold vision, thoughtfulness, and relentless, unwavering commitment to enhance the lives of all young Americans.

This work would not be possible without the guidance and financial support of the *Schultz Family Foundation*. We greatly appreciate your partnership!

Introduction

This guide highlights best practices and strategies that service year programs employ and should use to engage and support youth ages 16-24 years of age who are neither in school nor employed prior to a service year. These youth are commonly referred to as “opportunity youth” or “disconnected youth.”¹ The practices discussed in this guide are designed to highlight the diverse talents and needs of opportunity youth and share the best strategies for supporting opportunity youth in service year programs.

Service Year Alliance developed this best practice guide to support service year programs in engaging with opportunity youth:

For service year programs engaging opportunity youth. This guide can be utilized to examine their existing model and determine whether additional practices can or should be leveraged to better engage opportunity youth.

For service year programs not engaging opportunity youth. This guide can be utilized to share best practices and strategies to encourage inclusion of opportunity youth in their programs.

In an effort to expand opportunities for opportunity youth in service year programs, we encourage existing service year programs to examine the requirements necessary to serve with your programs and the experience/expertise needed to perform service while in programs. It is our belief that opportunity youth can perform and carry out a diverse set of responsibilities in any service year program depending on their assets and opportunities to develop needed skills. In most cases, service year programs should be able to make minimal changes to their existing models to serve opportunity youth. Later in the guide, we will discuss the diversity of opportunity youth and appropriate ways to identify opportunity youth for service year models.

¹In this guide, we will use the terms “opportunity youth” and “disconnected youth” interchangeably due to the awkwardness of the term “disconnected youth” in sentence structures.

About Service Year Alliance

Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. A service year before, during, and after college – or as a way to find your path – gives young people the chance to develop their skills, make an impact on the lives of others, and become the active citizens and leaders our nation needs. Service years offer a transformational experience for youth of all backgrounds, especially opportunity youth – young adults 16-24 years of age who are disconnected from school and work.

Our Vision

Every year, one million young Americans will be engaged in a service year, solving important problems while transforming their own lives.

Why Service Years?

Service years have the power to:

- Unleash the idealism and talent of young Americans to help tackle our greatest community challenges in education, health, poverty, and more
- Increase higher education access and completion
- Provide a pathway to a career by developing 21st century skills, including for disadvantaged young people
- Build bridges and understanding across different races, economic divides, and religions
- Develop the next generation of leaders
- Build the habits of citizenship and civic leadership

Why Now?

America is facing a variety of challenges that service years can address, including:

- Significant social challenges that require human capital
- Racial, economic, religious, and political divisions, with trust in one another at historic lows
- 4.6 million youth and young adults who are not in school or are unemployed
- Civic participation that is atrophying
- A 21st century skills gap that is leaving millions of Americans behind

Current State of Play: Disconnected Youth

There is a national epidemic of disconnected youth ages 16-24 who are not in school or employed. There are an estimated 4.6 million disconnected youth in the United States today. The disconnection rate of youth directly affects progress in America. According to Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council's website, "one fundamental indicator of societal progress and well-being is how young people are faring in their transition to adulthood."

Disconnected youth cost \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services. The higher proportion of youth not in school or working is a direct correlation to a region's inability to expand its opportunities locally. According to the Opportunity Index, disconnected youth are the single most powerful indicator in measuring opportunity and economic and social mobility in areas across the country.

The Opportunity Index, and the indicators that comprise it, aims to measure what opportunity looks like in the United States. The index is multidimensional; it paints a broad picture of opportunity that goes beyond economics alone and includes twenty indicators within four dimensions: economy, education, health, and community. It offers a snapshot of conditions that can be used to identify and improve access to opportunity – in comprehensive terms – for residents and their communities.²

When youth are not calculated in the solution to improve communities in America, we eliminate the opportunity to successfully address societal issues and challenge social norms that can improve and advance our nation. Our investment in youth is not just essential to our country's economic stability, but more importantly, it enables us to develop thoughtful, well-informed, civically engaged leaders to address the social problems of today.

Service Year Alliance believes that if we invest in comprehensive service year models that provide skill development, career navigation and immersion, and social service supports, we can provide all Americans with the opportunity to achieve personal and economic success and contribute exponentially to our nation and its communities.

² *Opportunity Index: How Opportunity Measures up in Your Community*, Opportunity Nation and Child Trends, 1 May 2017, opportunityindex.org.

Opportunity Youth in Numbers

According to a recent report released by Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council's March 2018 report *More Than a Million Reasons for Hope: Youth Disconnection in America Today*:

In 2016, 11.7 percent of young Americans were disconnected, an improvement from the 2015 rate of 12.3 percent, and a 20 percent decrease from the 2010 peak rate of 14.7 percent. Yet, 4.6 million young people remain out of work and out of school.

Race and ethnicity. There is a chasm of nearly 20 percentage points in disconnection rates separating racial and ethnic groups. Asian youth have the lowest rate of disconnection (6.6 percent), followed by white (9.2 percent), Latino (13.7 percent), black (17.2 percent), and lastly, Native American (25.8 percent) youth. Youth disconnection has decreased over time for all major racial and ethnic groups; however, the gap between the groups with the highest and lowest rates has not narrowed appreciably.

Gender. Overall, young women are less likely to be disconnected, with a rate of 11.2 percent compared to the male rate of 12.1 percent. However, the rate of female disconnection varies widely by race and ethnicity, from 6.6 percent among Asian young women and 9.4 percent among white women; to 14.2 and 14.8 percent among black and Latina women, respectively; and 23.4 percent among Native American women.

Educational background. Disconnected youth are nine times as likely to have left high school without a diploma as connected young people. Opportunity youth over the age of 18 are twice as likely as their connected counterparts to have graduated high school but have gone no further. Few opportunity youth have bachelor's degrees.

Institutionalization. A vanishingly small percentage of connected youth live in institutional quarters; just 0.3 percent. The rate for disconnected youth is twenty-two times higher – and higher still for some groups, as discussed below. Institutionalization is a particularly grave problem for black young people.

Living with parents. Disconnected children ages 16 and 17 are 3.2 times as likely to be living without either of their parents as connected young people that age. Connected young people are one-and-a-half times as likely to be living with both their parents as disconnected young people. These statistics put the family situations of disconnected and connected youth in sharp contrast. A majority of connected young people (60 percent) live with two parents, benefitting from the emotional, social, and financial support of two adults, and only 8.3 percent live with neither parent. One in four disconnected young people, on the other hand, live apart from not just one but both parents; this reality indicates a profound family disruption at some earlier point.

Why Engage Opportunity Youth in Service Years?

Service years are uniquely designed to support opportunity youth and help change the trajectory of their lives because most service year programs are reflective of the communities they serve. In this case, opportunity youth will find purpose in service while making meaningful contributions to their community and developing personal and professional skills. Service years allow opportunity youth the chance to be change agents by highlighting their personal strengths, leveraging their power and voice, and contributing effective solutions.

Well-constructed service year programs can provide a range of supports that opportunity youth need to change their circumstances. Service year programs can build the 21st century skills necessary for success in the workplace and, often, specialized skills training relevant to future careers. These elements can be found in many job training programs as well. What differentiates service year programs from workforce development programs is their ability to help youth redefine themselves in relation to society, to discover their purpose,

and to address their social and emotional development in a supportive environment for at least six to twelve months with post-service engagement.

The act of serving others - a hallmark of service year programs - is often a pivotal experience for many opportunity youth. For Xavier Jennings, who participated in YouthBuild's Mile High Youth Corps, the incident of cleaning up the yard of an older white female resident's home was life changing. "I'd like to believe that at that moment, two lives were changed for the better", said Xavier, as he described his feelings when the woman served Xavier cookies in her backyard with tears of gratitude. Just hours before, as Xavier knocked on her door, the older woman stood in the window paralyzed and afraid to open her door. Only when the crew team leader, a white male, knocked on the door and explained the program did Xavier and his fellow corps member, a Hispanic male, get access to her yard.

Service years provide an infrastructure that enables opportunity youth to define clear goals and offers a reliable support system that helps them feel confident about their future. Service

years offer opportunity youth a connection to their purpose and help them identify solutions to their current reality.

In order to develop a path from where we are today to our vision of increased service year positions for opportunity youth, we will discuss in this guide best practices for engaging opportunity youth in service year programs.

A Closer Look at Opportunity Youth

It is a common misconception that opportunity youth are disconnected from work and school because they do not desire to be successful. However, in reality most opportunity youth live in economically disadvantaged communities largely impacted by concentrated poverty, systems of oppression, and inequality of resources and opportunity. Due to these circumstances, opportunity youth often become products of delimited and destructive communities that provide little to no opportunities to make positive, productive choices for their lives. Patrick Sharley asserts in his article, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality*, “the same families have experienced the consequences of life in the most disadvantaged environments over multiple

generations.” In these cases, opportunity youth lack the social capital and agency to change their circumstances without the support of institutions, organizations, programs, and individuals to help eliminate these systems of oppression.

Despite coming from challenging circumstances, most opportunity youth are optimistic about their futures and are interested in opportunities to achieve personal and economic success.

Opportunity youth possess a willingness to work, a desire to be successful, and a drive to develop both personally and professionally. The majority of opportunity youth, if given the chance to address their personal and development challenges, would jump at the opportunity. A service year can provide opportunity youth the opportunity they have been waiting for. Milbrey W. McLaughlin states in his book, *You Can’t Be What You Can’t See*, “Developmental psychologists agree that young people need continuous exposure to new things, places, ideas, and options to develop potential and make positive life choices.”

In the face of existing hardships and adversity, service year programs that are engaging opportunity youth assert that opportunity youth are resilient and have an ability to overcome adversity. We see the impact of a service year in the story of Germain Castellanos, a young leader

of Opportunity Youth United. Germain grew up in an economically disadvantaged, working-class community with gang violence all around him. His service year with Youth Conservation Corps opened up his eyes and helped him realize his potential. Today, he is the Program Director for the SHINE Educational Leadership Program at Waukegan High School, the very same high school from which he had been expelled in his first year of high school. Every day, he helps young people understand their life goals and what career path they should pursue.

"I did my service year at Youth Conservation Corps. The diverse experiences I had during my service year gave me the opportunity and built the capacity in me that I did not know I had. I figured if I could go from doing presentations in elementary school to organizing food drives - I could do anything."

Like Germain, opportunity youth represent a group of diverse individuals with distinct needs and supports established by their personal experiences. We must understand opportunity youth are not a homogenous group, but rather a group of individuals with various backgrounds and personal stories. In the 2012 report released by Civic Enterprises, John Bridgeland and Tess Mason-Elder assert, "Opportunity youth represent a demographically diverse population.

While they are equally divided between males and females, disconnection is much more common for low-income and minority youth, with black and Hispanic youth being disproportionately represented compared to their share of overall youth population. Rates of disconnection vary across the age spectrum of 16 to 24, but older youth in this age group are more likely to be opportunity youth than their younger peers. Overall, opportunity youth are more likely to live apart from their parents, be from low-income families, and lack health insurance. Despite the diversity within the opportunity youth population, they do share certain risk factors that increase the likelihood of becoming disconnected. Specifically, these youth have often left high school without a diploma, and the most vulnerable among them have been young people involved in the juvenile justice system, are current and former foster youth, or teenage parents."

Due to the uniqueness of opportunity youth, it is imperative that service years offer a range of supports to address their barriers and ways to highlight and cultivate opportunity youth's individual assets in their programming. In understanding this, we must examine the totality of each young person using an equity lens and asset framing to uncover the best approaches to support opportunity youth. Using this approach, service year programs will examine an individual's diverse set of assets, barriers, and supports.

Asset Framing of Opportunity Youth

Asset framing is defining individuals by their aspirations, contributions, and the value they bring to society rather than their barriers and cost on society. Asset framing is particularly important when engaging disconnected youth and working in their communities. When defining someone by something that stigmatizes them, we cause further injury, reinforce mistrust, and create a lack of understanding.

"To build more caring and prosperous communities where everyone is afforded equitable opportunities to grow their health, wealth, know-how and networks; we must first define people by their aspirations and contributions." - Trabian Shorter, Founder of BMe.

BMe connects authentic black male leaders with key influencers across industries and sectors who share their belief in valuing all members of the human family.

It is important to recognize opportunity youth on a continuum of needs, barriers, and supports. We understand all service year programs are not conducive for all opportunity youth due largely to staff capacity, needed expertise and experience for service activities, and availability and knowledge of resources to address barriers. However, we believe there are more service year programs that can engage opportunity youth. In most cases, service year programs will need to make minimal changes to their existing program model. We will discuss essential program elements later in the guide.

For the purpose of this guide, we have classified opportunity youth into three categories to assist service year programs in determining which

opportunity youth are best suited for their program:

Engaged Youth. Youth with a college degree or vocational attainment but have been unable to gain long-term or permanent success.

Underserved Youth. Youth with some education and employment experience but have not maintained long-term or permanent success.

Difficult to Engage Youth. Youth with little or no educational attainment who have been disconnected for an extended period, often not engaged beyond the age of 16.

These classifications are important to service year programs because it assists them in

determining their program's capacity to engage opportunity youth and leveraging needed resources and key partnerships.

Understanding Opportunity Youth

Service Year Alliance has identified the following common assets, barriers, and challenges faced by opportunity youth. This is useful for service year programs in order to identify appropriate practices to develop in their models. In many cases, service year programs will encounter opportunity youth across the continuum regardless of the three categories described earlier. In understanding the distinct assets, barriers, and obstacles of opportunity youth, we can design and modify programs that explore the best strategies and support opportunity youth on a pathway to success. While there are systems and cultures that continue to debilitate the process of opportunity youth, we understand the importance and power to change lives through opportunities, particularly service years.

Assets

- Ability to multitask
- Ability to overcome adversity
- Ability to lead peers
- Desire for skill development
- Desire to be successful
- Desire to change current circumstances
- Desire to end poverty and injustices in their community
- Resilience
- Willingness to work

Common Barriers

- Chemical dependency/substance abuse
- Disconnected from school/employment
- Dysfunctional family member with intense needs
- Homelessness/unstable home
- Involvement in systems (foster care, criminal justice, child support)
- Limited job skills/work experiences
- Managing parenthood
- Mental and physical challenges
- Self-defeating habits (lack of hope, lack of effort, etc)

Implications of Poverty

- Developmental challenges
- Educational performance
- Health challenges
- Hunger
- Lack of digital access
- Low social mobility
- Transportation
- Trauma/Crime impacted communities

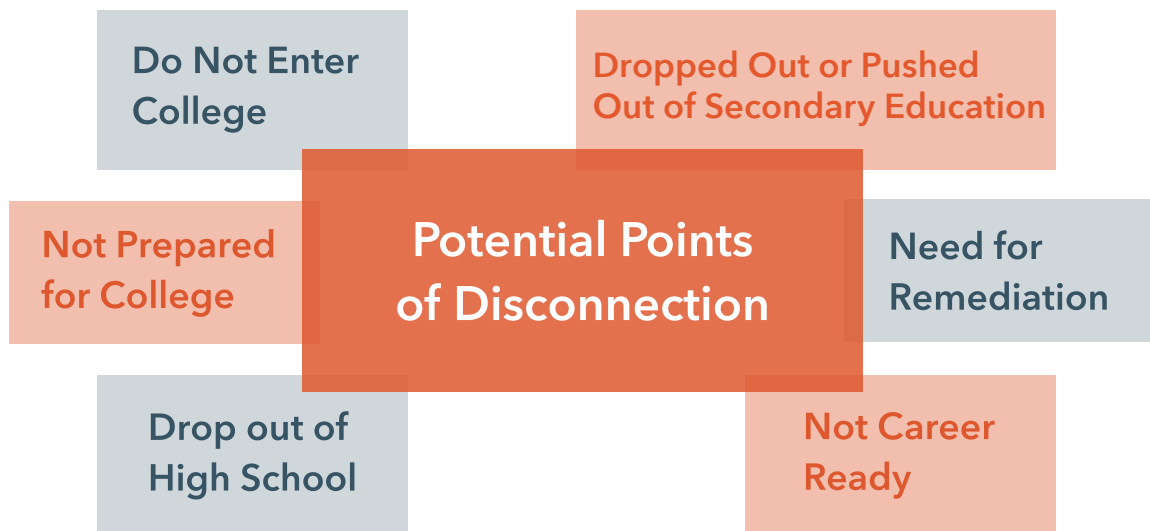
Implications of Poverty on Opportunity Youth

Poverty is a compounding factor that affects opportunity youth in America. Approximately 41 percent of disconnected youth live in households and communities facing various barriers to economic stability and prosperity. Individuals, families, and communities affected by poverty lack resources and opportunities to change their economic status. In these conditions, we have found that poverty compounds the barriers of opportunity youth. The lack of reliable access to basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and educational resources for extended periods of time correlates to youth lacking the knowledge to identify effective strategies to finish school, identify career pathways, and overcome challenges. Opportunity youth living in impoverished circumstances often face developmental and health challenges, poor educational performance, low social mobility, and increased exposure to crime and violence. Poverty damages and can prohibit success for opportunity youth.

For service year programs working in communities ravaged by high rates of unemployment and lacking access to meaningful employment, they must understand the challenges of the community and create strategies to address both the opportunity youth they serve and the community as a whole. Service year programs must create comprehensive service year models that can directly address systemic barriers or develop strategic partnerships with local social service, education, and training partners that can address both service year corps members' needs and community needs.

Points of Disconnection of Opportunity Youth

Opportunity youth can become disconnected from education and career opportunities at various ages and stages due to a variety of reasons. When we understand these points of disconnection, we can create strategies to address and prevent disconnection for youth in the future.



In examining the 'points of disconnection' for opportunity youth, you can learn more about their personal story, support system, systems that may have failed them, areas of strengths, and areas of development in order to better support them. For example, Adrean Vargas, a youth manager at Central States SER, a youth workforce development and education organization that works with opportunity youth to achieve success, stated, "When I work with young people, I always try to make sure I understand how they landed where they are. To me, it tells a unique story about how I should manage the relationship – what key supports can I offer? And what supports should I not offer?" By understanding the history of youth, we can better support them.

Many opportunity youth may have faced personal and developmental challenges that

have led them to leave school, be pushed out of school, or not pursue career pathways. This may include lack of knowledge and exposure to career opportunities, lack of role models or adequate positive social and emotional support systems, and/or having family responsibilities. Opportunity youth lack meaningful work experience that could provide both professional experience and income, and most importantly may inform and connect them to necessary career options.

Assets and Needs of Opportunity Youth

Understanding the diverse assets and needs of opportunity youth is pivotal to their advancement. Your staff may be able to gather some information related to assets and needs during the recruitment process (i.e. during

an interview or from referring agencies).

Unfortunately, in most cases, we have learned that youth may not share the totality or enormity of their circumstances for fear of being excluded from the candidate pool. As a best practice in successful programs engaging opportunity youth, an initial life skills assessment and plan is conducted.

The life skills assessment and plan is a self-reporting instrument that gives both the service year program and youth the opportunity to assess strengths and challenges. It also promotes the youth's active engagement in planning their learning goals and making decisions about their future. Below are sample questions to pose to youth in your service year program. These questions can assist a service year program in learning more about its service year corps members and making changes to their models.

Strengths Assessment. Determine youth's current assets, strengths, and what he/she intends to enhance during a service year.

- *What are your current goals?*
- *What do you hope to accomplish during your year of service?*
- *What existing strengths/assets do you bring your service year experience?*
- *What strengths do you wish to develop*

further during your service year? In what ways can staff assist you in developing these strengths?

Existing and Potential Barriers. Determine youth's challenges or barriers that will prevent him/her from completing a service year and/or pursuing post-service pathways.

- *What are your existing barriers that would prevent you from completing a year of service?*
- *What are your current responsibilities in school, work, family, and community?*
- *What has prevented you from achieving success in the past? What has changed and how did you address these barriers?*
- *What do you need to be successful? How can our staff assist you in addressing barriers?*

Network of Supports. Identify individuals and/or organizations that can assist him/her in achieving success in a service year and beyond.

- *What entities, organizations, or individuals are supporting you currently? How are they supporting you?*
- *How have you identified supports in the past?*
- *Specifically, what additional supports do you need?*
- *What is the best way to build your social capital and support system?*

- *How do you leverage support? What are your apprehensions about asking for support?*

Goal Setting Strategies. Assist youth in identifying personal and professional goals to accomplish during a service year, immediately following a service year, and one to five years after a service year.

- *What are your personal goals and aspirations?*
- *What is your “why” behind these goals?*
- *What are short-term and long-term goals and how do you create agency? How can our staff help you to create agency?*
- *How do you define success for yourself based on your goals?*

Educational Attainment. Determine with youth the goals for educational attainment including completion of high school and interest in pursuing higher education.

- *What are your educational goals?*
- *Do you have plan to pursue your education? If so, when and how?*
- *What would prevent you from finishing or applying to school?*
- *If applicable, how do you plan to use your education award after your service year?*

Specialized Training/Credential Attainment.

Determine youth’s interest in obtaining credentials for his/her intended career pathway.

- *What is your current career interest?*
- *What credentials or training do you need to pursue your career goals?*
- *How do you plan to use offered training and credentials during and after your service year?*

While understanding the assets and needs of opportunity youth is pivotal their success, it is important to develop and structure programs to ensure opportunity youth have the best opportunity to address barriers and enhance their assets. In the next section, we will discuss best practices and essential elements service year programs should have in place before recruiting opportunity youth.

Best Practices for Engaging Opportunity Youth in Service Years

Opportunity youth benefit substantially from well-constructed service year programs when they offer an array of opportunities to enhance their development both personally and professionally. Service year programs provide opportunity youth the chance to address

personal barriers and develop appropriate skills are best practice. In the Heartland Alliance's report, *Providing True Opportunity for Opportunity Youth: Promising Practices and Principles for Helping Youth Facing Barriers to Employment* it states, "Those opportunity youth facing the most significant challenges, such as extreme poverty, homelessness, and justice system involvement, often need even more intensive assistance in entering and keeping employment, and are at risk of being left behind even by employment programs that are specifically designed to serve opportunity youth." Service year programs that consider the extreme conditions of opportunity youth when designing their program or evaluating their programs' effectiveness can ensure all opportunity youth are successful.

Supporting opportunity youth often requires helping and supporting youth in multiple aspects of their lives. Service Year Alliance has worked with a group of exceptional service year programs to define best practices, essential program elements, training, and support structures to best assist opportunity youth.

This section of the guide will highlight essential program elements that have been proven to be the most effective when engaging opportunity youth in service years.

Essential Program Elements for Opportunity Youth

Service Year Alliance proposes that service year programs develop models using the following four essential program elements:



1. Educational Attainment & Academic Training

Educational attainment and academic training during a service year program is crucial to the long-term success of opportunity youth. Service year programs working with opportunity youth should include academic training or a pathway to reconnect opportunity youth to education. According to the National Council of Young Leaders' *Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America*, access to higher education is a primary immediate recommendation. It states *"AmeriCorps education awards, scholarships, low-cost or free community and state colleges, loans that are not predatory or excessively burdensome, and Pell Grants for nontraditional students must be protected and expanded, barriers to obtaining them reduced, and pathways to college strengthened."* Service year programs provide academic training, offer opportunities for service year corps members to work toward their high school diploma, or it's equivalent, and/or provide training where service year corps members can earn skills and credentials needed to succeed in high-demand careers and higher education.

For example, YouthBuild USA is a national comprehensive service year program for disconnected youth ages 16-24 that breaks

the cycle of poverty with a commitment to work, education, family, and community.

YouthBuild USA is a full-time service year program where participants spend half of their time in supportive, individualized classrooms working toward their high school diploma or its equivalent, earning skills and certifications needed to succeed in high-demand careers, and preparing for postsecondary education in college or registered apprenticeships. The other half of their time is spent refurbishing low-income housing while developing skills in construction and land management training. YouthBuild members are afforded the opportunity to practice and enhance their personal and professional skills throughout their service year.

In an interview we conducted with Xavier Jennings, graduate of YouthBuild USA's Mile High Youth Corps in Denver, Colorado, he shared his desire to be successful for himself and his family. He said, *"By 18, I was arrested a couple of times, not attending school, no job - I made a promise to myself and to my grandma that I would make something of myself."* After starting at the YouthBuild Mile High Youth Corps, Xavier began gaining the skills he needed to be successful. He worked to complete his high school credential while completing the program. Looking back on his experience at YouthBuild he

says, “My service year was a huge transformative experience for me. I didn’t think I’d ever be sitting here with my Associate’s Degree, able to teach at my program, be a father, a leader in my community, able to inspire others to walk in similar footsteps.”

In determining if your service year program can or should offer educational attainment or academic training during the service year, it is important to consider the following:

Type of Program. Determine if your service year corps members will serve part-time or full-time while completing their education goals.

Relevant Educational and Training

Opportunities. Identify educational training and credentialing that aligns with the service year experience at your organization. Determine if there are particular trainings or credentials that are in high demand for employers or universities.

Strategic Partners. Identify and establish key local partners such as local GED or high school programs, universities, and 2-year and 4-year colleges. Determine if your organization can leverage college credit for any skills developed during your service year.

Higher Education Attainment & Education

Awards. As a part of the initial assessment, determine if your service year corps members

plan to attend or finish college. Begin establishing regular meetings to discuss their educational plan. The plan should include a discussion of entrance exams, application deadlines, scholarship opportunities, and the AmeriCorps Education Award.

For AmeriCorps programs -

Identify surrounding colleges and universities that accept the AmeriCorps Education Award. Discuss the education award and ways to use the award with service year corps members.

For non-AmeriCorps programs -

Determine if your organization should apply for the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which is a post-service year benefit earned by individuals who complete an approved term of national service through AmeriCorps programs.

2. Career Exploration, Navigation, and Placement

We understand that youth struggle to connect to the labor market or a career pathway largely due to lack of knowledge, experience, skills, and social capital. This is especially challenging for opportunity youth facing additional barriers to success. Service year programs can provide ways for opportunity youth to explore career pathways while serving others. In these service year programs, opportunity youth gain essential technical skills that are building blocks to career

pathways. Opportunity youth are able to learn, practice, and improve the skills that will be essential to post-service career opportunities.

For example, Green City Force's Clean Energy Corps, an AmeriCorps program based in New York City, combines service and workforce development while providing opportunity youth with training and leadership opportunities to create a sustainable, green economy.

Service year corps members receive training through Green City Academy that includes solid eco-literacy, job readiness, and technical training focused on preparing for certification as weatherization technicians and eco-entrepreneurship. Service year corps members are exposed to a diversity of career paths related to greening the economy through unique employment partnerships.

Toward the end of a service year at Green City Force, its service year corps members work with their staff to identify post-service career opportunities for green jobs in New York City. Green City Force leads a team as part of the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project, convened by JobsFirstNYC, with employers in energy efficiency and affordable housing. These relationships enable Green City Force

to keep trainings relevant for in-demand skills and certifications. Green City Force added over 50 job placements through energy companies Willdan, Franklin, Ameresco, BlocPower, and their own social enterprise activities.

Green City Force's 2018 graduate, Anthony Williams says, *"Where I grew up, no one I knew really cared about developing professionalism or building work skills. They were either concerned with getting to where the money was, playing sports or both. I was lucky because I realized at an early age that there was more to life and only I could bring about a significant change in my life, but I just didn't know where to turn. When I heard about Green City Force, I quickly realized that the training, mentorship, support, and effort they put into helping youth, made it the right place for me."*

Here, we learn from Anthony that introducing opportunity youth to career-focused skills while they serve helps them to identify and refine skills necessary for their long-term success.

Service year programs that wish to create experiences where opportunity youth explore careers and learn appropriate strategies to navigate career sectors and placement opportunities should explore the following:

Relevant Training Opportunities & Partners.

Identify and establish relationships with local training partners that offer relevant training in in-demand sectors. Determine if training partners can offer training during service hours or at local facilities during non-service hours.

Employment Partners. Identify and establish partnerships with local employers. Commonly, service year programs leverage employment partners toward the end of their program when service year corps members are actively pursuing post-service opportunities. However, employers can play a vital role throughout the program to ensure the success of your service year corps members after completing their service year.

- We observed this in CivicWorks, an AmeriCorps program based in Baltimore, Maryland that engages opportunity youth in a service year to strengthen the City of Baltimore's community through education, skill development, and community service. As a best practice, CivicWorks' employment partners not only provide placement after service years, but also help identify candidates for their AmeriCorps program and advise on the curriculum offered during the service year. This model ensures

their service year corps members are considering their next steps and understand the importance of achieving necessary credentials in order to advance in the program and on their chosen career path.

3. Leadership Development

Service year programs understand the importance of developing leaders to help opportunity youth meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve their full potential. Youth development activities and experiences that help build social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies are essential for opportunity youth. Leadership development focused programming helps opportunity youth develop the ability to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, set personal and career goals, and develop self-esteem. Additionally, service year programs that foster leadership development enable opportunity youth to become role models that direct and guide others and influence behaviors.

Public Allies is a service year program that is committed to advancing social justice and equity by engaging and activating the leadership capacities of young adults. Public Allies places its Allies with nonprofit organizations where they

help address critical community needs such as youth development, education, workforce development, environmental issues, arts programming, and community health. Public Allies' learning process weaves together four key elements that constitute an experiential journey of self-discovery and professional development:

- Practical, on-the-job learning through a paid, full-time nonprofit apprenticeship
- Rigorous leadership training
- Building community through a cohort model, and
- Mentoring, coaching, and continual self-reflection

Another best practice model for developing leadership skills is when these opportunities are built into the program. In Greencorps Chicago, a green-industry job training corps model program, participants are able to advance to high level positions including becoming a driver, a member of their advanced crew, and crew supervisor after completing essential trainings during their first year. In the Greencorps Chicago model, participants are evaluated through their evaluation program to determine readiness for advancement. The evaluation program is outlined and shared with their participants at the beginning of the program. This allows

their participants to set clear goals to apply for these opportunities. With each promotion, participants are able to learn and develop new skills related to their new responsibilities.

This model will require service year programs to evaluate their program budget and pay structure to ensure pay increases are given with new responsibilities. Additionally, we have learned that such opportunities can prepare opportunity youth to begin post-service year career opportunities beyond entry level.

4. Supportive Services & Case Management Support

As mentioned before, opportunity youth face varying challenges that impede their success. Supportive services and case management are crucial to the advancement of opportunity youth. Social support includes information, advice, and practical assistance from others. Young people vary widely in the amount and types of support they want or need, therefore it is important to discuss during their initial assessment. Formal and informal support can include several elements such as:

Emotional Support. Offering or providing empathy, validation, and encouragement during difficult times.

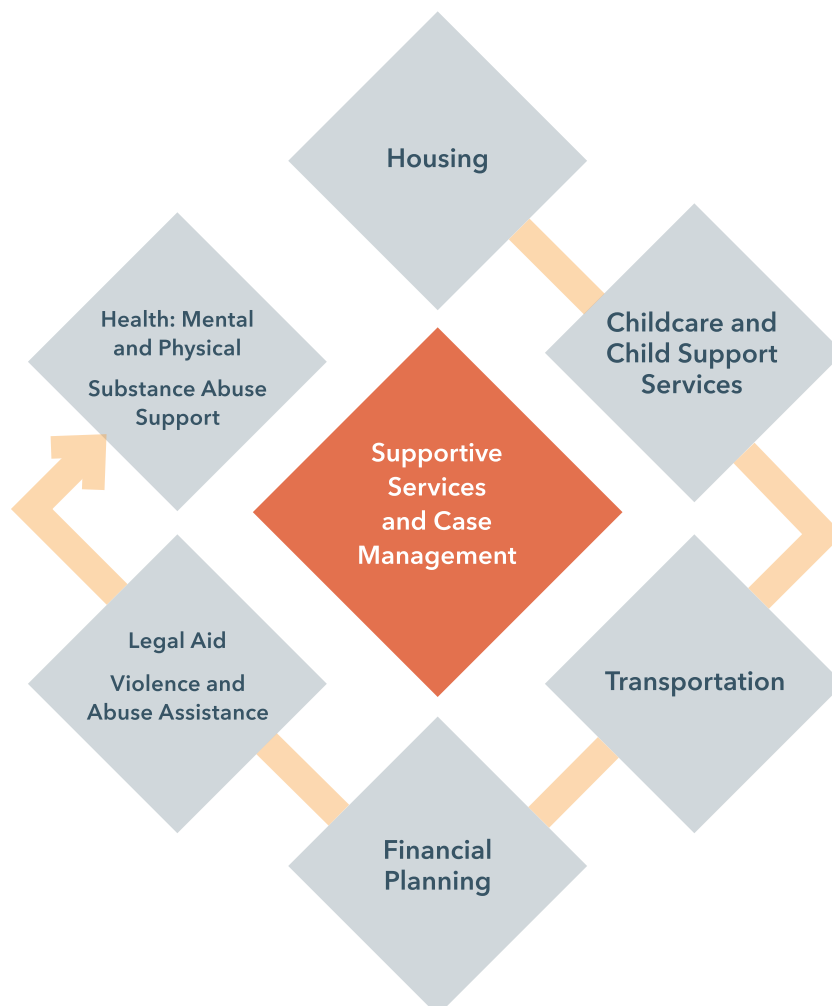
Problem Solving. Helping to address present barriers that prevent or hinder success. For example, assisting youth with transportation needs by exploring bus routes, identifying transportation passes, and/or exploring transportation costs.

Needed resources. Helping youth identify community resources such as educational and career opportunities and activity groups to meet other youth with common interests.

Immediate Needs. Identifying resources to meet immediate needs such as food pantries, interview attire, homeless shelters, apartments, and ways to earn money.

Practical Needs. Assisting with the development of necessary skills, such as job readiness training, accompanying a youth to court hearing or a meeting, and teaching new skills for managing a budget.

While opportunity youth's challenges vary widely, there are key services that all service year programs should offer either internally or through strategic local partnerships. These services fall under the umbrella of case management services and include support for the following:



Service year programs that incorporate case management services enable their service year corps members to address barriers while completing a service year. Case management services provide opportunity youth support in developing a life plan that helps them identify personal challenges and create a roadmap to address them.

In an interview we conducted with Kenvin Lacayo, a former opportunity youth who is currently serving as a Leading Men Fellow with The Literacy Lab in Washington, DC, he told us, *“Doing a service year has made me extremely confident in my abilities in myself, in my future. I feel like the doors were kicked down and I have so many people who will support me. Who, I feel like, if I don’t believe in myself, they’ll definitely believe in me and they’ll make me believe in myself. It’s just been amazing.”* Service year programs that offer comprehensive supports enable opportunity youth to build confidence and develop the social agency to address barriers, both presently and in the future.

When service year programs do not have capacity or are unable to address diverse barriers, it is important to establish partnerships

with local social service agencies to address barriers for service year corps members. These agencies can work directly with opportunity youth from their areas, share comprehensive support models, or identify supportive partners to address such barriers. Service year programs should develop social service partners in the following areas:

Childcare and Child Support. Identify local childcare facilities and hours of operation, supports for financing childcare, and ways to leverage child support.

Financial Planning. Identify local agencies that teach financial literacy and debt relief.

Health. Identify hospitals and clinics that can support the diverse health needs of service year corps members.

Housing. Identify local homeless shelters, safe houses, and programs that assist youth with obtaining their first apartment.

Legal Aid. Identify local lawyers and agencies that assist people from low-income communities.

Substance Abuse. Identify local agencies that provide counseling, support, and treatment for substance abuse.

Transportation. Identify local programs for reduced fares and organizations that assist with transportation costs.

Violence and Abuse. Identify agencies that offer courses in abuse counseling such as trauma training, restorative justice, anger management, and domestic abuse.

In developing these partnerships, service year programs have an understanding of their process for engaging their clients. This will ensure your service year corps members understand what they can expect and how to follow through with the process. We have learned from service year programs engaging opportunity youth that when referring them to outside agencies, it is a best practice to provide a warm introduction by making an appointment for them, connecting them to one person at the organization, and discussing the organization's process to assist them. Without following these steps, youth tend to become lost in a daunting process, disengaged because follow-through is challenging, and are reluctant to address barriers due to previous bad experiences.

In addition to supportive service and case management support, we learned from service

year programs that engage opportunity youth that by caring about young person's success and helping them to navigate their barriers, a relationship is established. In many cases, these youth begin to identify staff as mentors. While many service year programs do not provide formal mentoring in their programs, they do provide ongoing support, recognition, and accountability for service year corps members. We understand that opportunity youth need individual mentors to give confidence, respect, and support in planning and working toward a productive future. It is important to note opportunity youth can benefit from mentors from a similar background who have overcome common barriers and mentors from different backgrounds who can open new doors and horizons.

Creating A Program Culture For Opportunity Youth

Culture has the power to transform lives, strengthen communities, and forge a sense of identity and belonging. Service year program culture plays an integral role in promoting sustainable social and economic development, especially for opportunity youth. Program culture is equally as important as program

elements. Program culture is the determining factor in whether or not youth complete programs and/or thrive in programs.

An effective service year has the potential for substantial impact on three fronts – the host organization’s capacity for achieving its mission, the community in which service is performed, and the individual who completes the service year. Program culture, staff development, and service year corps member development are important components to consider in order to ensure the success of opportunity youth completing service years.

Framing Program Culture for Opportunity Youth

Youth can play a vital role in bridging cultures and serving as key agents in promoting harmony and understanding in service year programs. In order to create such environments, service year programs must foster a culture that not only motivates and inspires opportunity youth, but also provides more inclusive and equitable opportunities. This process begins from program design and planning – outreach and recruitment – during a service year.

Many opportunity youth have been affected by failed systems and structures that have not supported or have marginalized them, which creates mistrust. Establishing trust is one of the first steps to creating a positive program culture.

Creating a culture that nurtures and supports opportunity youth helps to re-establish trust. This can be fostered by establishing a culture that is inclusive of opportunity youth regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, and personal assets and barriers.

While there is no perfect science to establishing trust and building rapport with youth, some successful service year programs begin this work by carrying out their mission in communities they serve. Service year programs can engage with community members, understand the needs of a community, and work with communities to address their challenges. This may include participating in service projects in communities, offering training or support to community members, or simply by being visible in communities promoting positive change. A service year program’s reputation in the community can assist with establishing trust among service year corps members and communities. Reputation can be an important factor when engaging opportunity youth, especially those who are not familiar with service years.

Establishing a Culture for Authentic Experiences and Opportunities for Opportunity Youth

One of the most important elements of a service year program is culture to ensure the program

is youth-centered and focused by creating opportunities for youth to advance, build leadership skills, and enhance their personal social agency.

The book *You Can't Be What You Can't See* by Milbrey W. McLaughlin dissects the program CYCLE, a youth program that worked with hundreds of young people in one of America's most challenging communities – Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing complex – to help them achieve success. In the book, McLaughlin explores the reasons for their long-term success with some of the most disadvantaged youth stating, "Arguably, the CYCLE strategy most important to the positive outcomes participants achieved was its relationship-based, constantly adapting, youth-centered approach. CYCLE was not about implementing all-purpose, by-the-book programs created elsewhere. Nor did it carry out what some have called 'herd programming,' where groups of kids move from activity to activity on a strict schedule no matter what. CYCLE staffers were dedicated to providing resources and opportunities that built on each individual's strengths and potential; they focused on achieving hoped-for outcomes, rather than avoiding feared consequences; and they attended closely to each young person's needs." McLaughlin further writes that their youth-centered philosophy was predicated on

understanding that youth that came through their doors wanting to achieve, but they also had diverse preferences, talents, and skills to offer the program and society.

As service year programs seek to provide authentic opportunities that enrich the lives of opportunity youth, it is important to create a culture where opportunity youth can contribute in diverse ways. Some of the best practices for creating authentic experiences and opportunities include:

Creating a Caring Environment. In service year programs, opportunity youth should feel welcomed and cared for by staff and their peers. Service year programs should offer opportunities to share their personal stories, struggles, and progress. As a best practice, programs like YouthBuild USA, Public Allies, and Green City Force have scheduled times for open sharing. This provides their service year corps members with the opportunity to build their social agency and capital by uplifting their voice, learning from staff, and most importantly, it gives them an opportunity to feel empowered to overcome challenges.

Raising Opportunity Youth's Voices. In service year programs, opportunity youth should be given the chance to increase their responsibilities and leverage their voices in

decision-making processes. For some programs, opportunity youth sit on their board or provide continuous feedback to staff members about their experience. In creating a model like this, service year programs must incorporate authentic leadership opportunities; ones where opportunity youth are not just simply heard, but where there are also ways to implement their feedback. In these cases, service year staff should determine the decision making power and effective ways to make changes (i.e changing the program mid-year or the following year, determining needed resources to make changes, etc.).

The National Council of Young Leaders, a diverse group of outstanding young leaders who have been nominated and selected by opportunity youth organizations, made recommendations for best practices in supporting opportunity youth. In the Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America publication, these young leaders proposed the following core elements of interventions:

Creating safety in places and communities

- Relief from struggle for survival that comes with homelessness, hunger, violence, drugs and alcohol, family breakup, and suicidal depression
- A safe, caring community where everyone is committed to each other's success

Caring, understanding individuals that support opportunity youth

- Caring individual mentors who give opportunity youth confidence that they will have value and help them identify and achieve goals
- People who see the good in opportunity youth
- A positive peer group

Inspiration

- Connection to various sources of faith and spirituality
- Opportunities to serve others, to give back,

to find the joy and satisfaction of making a positive difference

- The space to redefine and believe in themselves, to realize "this negative life is not for me," to embrace the backgrounds from which they come, to recognize their strengths, and to plan for a meaningful and satisfying future

Learning

- Access to quality education and job-skills training to become employable
- Opportunities to experience new horizons
- A chance for creativity and for recreational opportunities
- Assurance that college is within reach if they choose that path
- Opportunities to learn leadership skills and play leadership roles, realizing their larger value to society

Earnings

- Stipends, wages, or living allowances during training and/or service, to enable participation from young people who must earn money

Follow-up support

- Actual placements in college, advanced training, and/or jobs, and follow-up support to overcome obstacles or setbacks

Staff Development

Choosing caring and empathetic staff members is integral to the success of opportunity youth.

Service year programs with staff members who understand the assets and needs of opportunity youth have the best service year corps member retention and completion rates. Service year programs with staff members who share similar backgrounds and/or understand societal and structural barriers tend to have a better understanding of opportunity youth and can more easily serve as an example of the possibilities they can achieve.

Staff members – whether directly or indirectly working with service year corps members – should take part in essential trainings like cultural competency and trauma-informed training in order to be prepared to work with opportunity youth. This will help foster an environment that does not limit potential and fosters collaboration between staff and opportunity youth to address challenges. Staff members must be invested in and willing to commit to assisting opportunity youth on a continual basis.

Developing a staff and program model that assists opportunity youth best is a continuous process. This process requires reviewing and assessing current policies and procedures each year to ensure programs are structured

appropriately and are able to offer an array of opportunities for their service year corps members.

Member Development and Training

A carefully planned and robust training schedule is crucial to the success of opportunity youth. Member development and training will ensure opportunity youth are able to strengthen their assets and overcome challenges during a service year. Best practices for developing opportunity youth begin with the orientation period, which can last from one week to a month, depending on the amount of material to cover. In most cases, the orientation period provides opportunity youth the chance to be acclimated in their role as corps members and identify areas of development and a plan to address them.

It is important to build a schedule of trainings throughout the service year in order for opportunity youth to develop their technical and interpersonal skills and practice using them. During the orientation period, program staff should assist opportunity youth in writing an individual development plan or life plan. Writing an individual development plan with service year corps members involves a robust conversation to identify short-term and long-term goals and aspirations, identify networks of supports (individuals that will be assisting the service

year corps member while serving), and identify markers of positive and negative relationships. This process will allow staff and service year corps members to build rapport, set clear expectations, and identify areas that may cause service year corps members to get off track. This process is ongoing with several checkpoints throughout the service year.

During the service year, staff members should incorporate both classroom training and activities that help service year corps members develop workforce development and personal development skills. Some suggested courses include:

Job Readiness Training. A training that a service year corps member receives to prepare them to seek or obtain employment after a service year. Some suggested training components include cover letter and resume preparation, job searching, completing a job application, understanding employment rights, conflict resolution, and ways to discuss the service year experience.

Life Skills Training. A training about a variety of life skills subjects that are not directly related to looking for a job. Some suggested training components include work/life balance, financial planning and management, family strengthening skills, time management, and leadership training.

Harm Reduction Training. A training to introduce set of practical strategies that reduce the negative consequences of addictive behaviors.

Cultural Competency Training. A training that helps service year corps members develop the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and helps to ensure the needs of all community members are addressed.

Trauma Informed Training. A training framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.

These essential training elements will ensure opportunity youth are prepared to address common personal and professional challenges.

Establishing Partnerships for Opportunity Youth: Collective Effort Strategies

Universally, service year programs working with opportunity youth have determined that collective effort strategies are the best approaches to working with opportunity youth. Collective effort strategies decrease significant fragmentation and lack of alignment between systems that support opportunity youth. In many cases, service year programs have operated in silos, which limits their outreach to existing structures that support opportunity youth. This

is largely due to how service year programs are funded and their lack of capacity to support youth beyond their own corps members. Service Year Alliance suggests that service year programs develop strategic partnerships locally to better support their service year corps members and establish a pipeline to service year opportunities for opportunity youth.

Collective impact occurs when organizations from different sectors agree to solve a specific social problem using a common agenda, aligning their efforts, and using common measures of success.

Establishing Strategic Partnerships

Some of the best service year models are those that work collaboratively with other organizations that are engaging opportunity youth. Collective impact strategies can assist opportunity youth in building a network of supports. Service year programs should work to establish local partnerships that can support their engagement of opportunity youth during all phases of a service year – outreach and recruitment, during service, and post-service.

Outreach & Recruitment

When planning and developing service year models for opportunity youth, it is best practice for service year programs to identify and develop relationships with all programs working with youth in their area. Local youth programs may be able to offer support in recruiting new service year corps members and helping support youth they refer to a service year program. Establishing trust is a crucial element for opportunity youth; therefore, it is important to establish a network of supports that follow up and support youth when challenges or obstacles arise.

During Service

Providing individualized support to opportunity youth during a service year is essential. Therefore, as a best practice, service year programs should develop relationships with outside agencies that engage their service year corps members. These agencies may include foster care, criminal justice, youth development organizations, and/or shelters. In these cases, it is imperative for service year programs to develop relationships with their staff. This will allow service year programs to become aware of requirements such as mandates, court dates,

and mandatory meetings in order to ensure minimal interruptions during a service year. Additionally, service year program staff can better understand the best approaches to supporting service year corps members while they serve.

Post-Service

As service year programs identify their service year corps members' goals and areas of development, a best practice is to establish relationships with universities and 2-year and 4-year colleges, training organizations, organizations offering extensive supportive services, and local employers. This will ensure opportunity youth are prepared for life after a service year. Service year programs that prepare their service year corps members for next steps have higher post-service placement rates and successful service year corps member outcomes long-term.

Partner Organizations



Mission. The mission of Green City Force is to break the cycle of poverty, preparing urban young adults to succeed in their chosen careers by engaging them in service, training, academics and work experiences related to the clean energy economy. In doing so, GCF encourages them to lead socially and environmentally responsible lives.

About. Green City Force's model engages unemployed young adults in NYC's public housing neighborhoods through full-time, stipended service in visible and innovative sustainability initiatives, providing them with experience and skills to obtain employment or access college. Our model exemplifies a holistic approach to working with young adults 18-24 who are unemployed or in dead-end jobs, living in public housing communities with concentrated poverty, violence and environmental and health disparities.

GCF's Energy Corps members (6-month track) lead ambitious projects in public housing communities, notably Love Where You Live, through which members serve as credible messengers educating fellow residents about energy conservation.

After recruiting city-wide in our first five years, over the past 18 months, GCF has concentrated recruitment and service projects for our Energy Corps in the 15 highest-crime neighborhoods in NYCHA, which account for 20% of violent crime, as identified by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice under the Mayor's Action Plan.

GCF Urban Farm Corps Members (10-month track) build and maintain urban farms in public housing communities. Corps Members increase access to local food through farms that produce tons of food for residents while creating an effective platform for service, training, and employment for young people residing in NYCHA.



Mission. The mission of YouthBuild USA and YouthBuild International is to unleash the intelligence and positive energy of low-income young people to rebuild their communities and their lives.

About. YouthBuild U.S.A seeks to join with others to help build a movement toward a more just society in which respect, love, responsibility, and cooperation are the dominant unifying values, and sufficient opportunities are available for all people in all communities to fulfill their own potential and contribute to the well-being of others.

There are at least 2.3 million low-income 16 - 24-year-olds in the United States who are neither in school nor employed. Globally, over 200 million youth are working poor and earning less than \$2.00 a day. All are in urgent need of pathways to jobs, education, entrepreneurship, and other opportunities leading to productive and contributing livelihoods. YouthBuild programs provide those pathways by unleashing the positive energy of low-income young people to rebuild their communities and their lives, breaking the cycle of poverty with a commitment to work, education, community, and family.

YouthBuild programs develop ethical young leaders to take responsibility for their families and communities and to change the conditions of poverty through civic engagement. YouthBuild USA and YouthBuild International work to build and sustain pathways into national and international leadership for outstanding young leaders.

YouthBuild students spend roughly half their time in supportive, individualized classrooms working toward their high school diploma or its equivalent, earning

skills and certifications they need to succeed in high-demand careers, and preparing for postsecondary education or registered apprenticeships. Outside the United States, the education component is adapted to the local circumstances.

To date, 165,000 YouthBuild students worldwide have built over 33,000 units of affordable housing and other community assets such as community centers and schools.



Mission. To create a just and equitable society and the diverse leadership to sustain it.

About. Public Allies is a national movement grounded in the conviction that everyone leads. We believe that everyone can make a difference and can work to inspire more citizens to believe in themselves, step up, and act. Throughout our nation's history, lasting social change has always resulted from the courageous acts of many, not just the inspiration of the few.

Public Allies employs integrated strategies to develop the next generation of leaders and re-define leadership for our times. The Public Allies signature AmeriCorps Ally Program identifies diverse young adults and prepares them for leadership through paid full-time nonprofit apprenticeships and rigorous leadership training.

Our Alumni Programs connect and engage the growing Public Allies network of diverse leaders and invests in those positioned to make the greatest impact.

Since 1992, over 6,000 Allies have completed the program with more than 75% continuing careers in nonprofit and public service.



Mission. The Forum for Youth Investment helps leaders get young people ready for life.

About. The Forum for Youth Investment is an action tank working with national, state and local leaders in more than 35 states. The Forum has more than 45 staff and 15 consultants associated with our two offices in Washington, D.C. and Ypsilanti, Michigan. The Forum is committed to thought leadership – and to bring academic, field and action research into play where policy and practice decisions are made. We do more than synthesize information. We challenge leaders to:

- improve youth readiness;
- increase family, school and community supports; and
- increase shared accountability for progress.

The Forum is equally committed to action. Each year, we expand our capacity to help leaders who share our passion for big picture change to move these ideas to impact. We create trainings, tools, learning communities, technical assistance and evaluation approaches that respond to their requests and connect them with their peers.

Helping all young people be ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life – is the vision that drives our work. It knits together the branded technical assistance centers, networks, and projects and initiatives we create to organize our staff and be better prepared to respond to the challenges and opportunities facing the national, state and local leaders with whom we work.



Mission. Opportunity Youth United is a national movement of young people and champions from all backgrounds committed to creating a society that invests adequately in the education and welfare of its children and youth, supports family and community life, ends mass incarceration and discrimination of all kinds and is structured to provide opportunity and responsibility for all.

About. Opportunity Youth United is a solutions-oriented movement of young adults who have experienced poverty and are dedicated to creating a society with opportunity and responsibility, love and respect, education and employment, justice and equality for all. We are Black, White, Native American, Latino, Asian, and Mixed Heritage. We are from all different religions, genders and sexual preferences, and geographical areas.

Our vision is a nation where all young people can reach their highest potential and noblest aspirations in the context of supportive, healthy, and inclusive communities.



A BETTER YOU.
A GREATER US.