

A black and white photograph of a group of diverse young people, mostly Black and Hispanic, smiling and laughing. They are wearing lanyards with "PLAYWORKS" written on them. An orange semi-transparent banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text in white.

Service Years as a Strategy for Engaging Opportunity Youth

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The Giving Tree

by
Shel
Silverstein



About Service Year Alliance

Our Mission

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, or after college gives young people the chance to transform their lives, make an impact in their community, and become the active citizens and leaders our nation needs. Expanding service years has the power to revitalize cities, uplift and educate children at risk, and empower communities struggling with poverty. It can unite the most diverse nation in history, binding people of different backgrounds through common cause.

Our Vision

Every year, one million young Americans engaged in a service year, solving important problems while transforming their own lives. How will we get there?



ServiceYear.org

Access to and presence on a state-of-the-art online marketplace and resource hub.



National Recruitment, Awareness, and Corps Member Support

Access to and participation in a national campaign to inspire a generation to serve, rewards for their service, and resources to support corps members during and after their service.



Grow Service Year Programs

Access to best practices, knowledge sharing and awards to grow and improve your existing programs and help create new ones.



Policy and Advocacy

Support from the Washington, DC policy operation, grassroots movement across the country, and an alliance of influential Americans.

Foreword

In communities across the nation, tens of thousands of service year corps members are working to address local needs – making an impact on important issues such as education, environmental conservation, health, and more. Service year corps members revitalize communities while also building valuable skills that help to advance their education and career. In the process, service year corps members meet people from different backgrounds and feel part of something bigger than themselves, strengthening the civic health of the communities where they serve.

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. A service year is a transformational experience for youth of all backgrounds, including opportunity youth –young adults ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school and work. 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. The act of serving others – a hallmark of all service year programs – is a pivotal experience for many opportunity youth.

The need to expand service year opportunities is clear. Our communities face significant challenges and deep societal divides that threaten the health and well-being of our country. An entire generation of young people are entering adulthood without clear direction and disconnected from their communities. We have an urgent need to recruit this generation to become community leaders and agents of change. Service years provide the critical human capital we need to make progress in all these areas.

In order to develop a path from where we are today to our vision of increased service year opportunities, we must create more opportunities for all young people including, opportunity youth. Our country needs organizations like yours to join us in this movement to create inspiring and empowering service year opportunities. 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.

How to Use This Guide

The *Service Years as a Strategy for Engaging Opportunity Youth* guide is designed to highlight ways that nonprofits can embrace service years as a strategy to address the needs of their communities, with a specific focus on engaging opportunity youth. It is our hope that this guide will serve as inspiration for ways in which service years can be utilized at your organization and in your community. 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. We want to ensure that a service year is an option for all youth by growing the number of service year opportunities. This handbook is designed for organizations with robust experience working with opportunity youth. It serves as an introduction to the service year field and as inspiration to get started in unleashing the power of service years.

This guide is meant to make it easy for you to learn about a few of the nation’s premier service year programs that engage opportunity youth and the issues these programs address. We hope this guide helps you find inspiration for how a service year program model could benefit your community, inspire you to create a service year program, and ultimately increase the number of service year opportunities.

Have questions? Contact resources@serviceyear.org.

What is a Service Year

A service year is a paid opportunity to develop real-world skills through hands-on service.. From fighting poverty to mentoring kids to responding to natural disasters – a service year is a meaningful and fulfilling way to tackle the most pressing challenges facing our nation through programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, YouthBuild, and hundreds of others.

A service year refers to service that 1) addresses important societal problems, 2) requires a substantial time commitment over the course of 9-12 months, and 3) is performed through organized programs that are designed to build ties among individuals from diverse backgrounds or increase life opportunities for those who serve. Because of the substantial time commitment involved, service year corps members are paid modest living allowances. They may also be rewarded with other benefits to support their living needs, such as housing, food vouchers, travel support.

Service year programs are remarkably flexible; there is no one typical service year program design. In some cases, organizations recruit dozens of service year corps members and organize them in teams to take on projects across several locations. In others, one or two individuals serve at an organization working under staff supervision. Regardless of size, host organizations enable service year corps members to understand their larger role in solving society's problems, while providing a meaningful and transformative experience.

Program Profiles



Mission. The mission of American YouthWorks is to provide young people with opportunities to build careers, strengthen communities, and improve the environment through education, on-the-job training, and service to others.

About. Founded in 1975, American YouthWorks (AYW) started as a GED and literacy program for incarcerated youth in Austin. Since then, AYW has grown to serve the entire Austin community and is now home to two primary programs: Texas Conservation Corps (TxCC) and YouthBuild Austin.

TxCC, established in 1993, conserves natural landscapes across the Southwest and responds to natural disasters. Texas Conservation Corps is a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps accredited program that empowers young people through AmeriCorps service, conservation, education, and job training.

TxCC recruits people who have a passion for the environment and working outdoors, and an interest in gaining new skill sets and experiences – no experience is required to join the program. Participants engage in hands-on projects on public lands, coastal regions, and disaster areas throughout the natural landscapes of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

YouthBuild Austin, established in 1997, offers young adults, ages 16 to 24, the opportunity to complete their high school education or earn their GED and simultaneously receive career training.

YouthBuild Austin is a holistic youth service program that combines academics with career training, leadership development, and community service at no cost to the students. Students also receive paid career training and certification in computer technology, healthcare, or green construction.

In addition, YouthBuild Austin provides customized support services, including: counseling, basic needs assistance, graduate support, college readiness, and a re-entry track for young people exiting the criminal justice system.

Website: www.americanyouthworks.org



Mission. The mission of Green City Force (GCF) 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. The 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 which concentrate poverty, violence and environmental and health disparities.

GCF is working towards a "green city" built on principles of sustainability, social, economic, and environmental justice. Green City Force works towards this vision through the city-wide Clean

Energy Corps and Urban Farm Corps in New York City. These service year programs engage young people to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, inspires a passion for sustainability and service, stimulates the demand for green services, and creates ladders to careers in the green economy for young people living in poverty.

GCF's ambition is that national service directed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving the environment becomes an avenue to prosperity for a generation of urban youth in New York City, as well as a means to build a culture of sustainability that can drive the growth of the green economy.

GCF's Energy Corps members 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 their first five years, GCF now concentrates recruitment and service projects for the Energy Corps in the 15 highest-crime neighborhoods in New York City Housing Authority (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 build and maintain urban farms in public housing communities. Service year 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.

Website: www.greencityforce.org



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. Public Allies believes 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. Like never before, our country needs leaders who will recognize and activate all of a community's assets, connect people across cultures, and facilitate collaborative action.

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. Allies are placed with a nonprofit organization where they help address critical community needs such as youth development, education, workforce development, environmental issues, arts programming, and community health. The program is a dynamic pipeline for talented young people to emerge as leaders and to strengthen the capacity of community organizations.

Public Allies is intentional about recruiting young leaders whose promise and potential are too frequently overlooked, dismissed, or ignored, including young adults aging out of the foster care system; our brothers and sisters who must remake their lives following incarceration; and single mothers seeking a bridge from GED to college and career. They need – and deserve – opportunities like Public Allies to activate their full leadership potential.

Public Allies alumni programs connect and engage the growing Public Allies network of diverse leaders and invest 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.

Website: www.publicallies.org



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. 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 give low-income young people who have fallen off the edges of society the opportunity to transform their own lives, get back on track to adult responsibility, and give back to their communities. Each year about 8,000 low-income young people who have left high school without a diploma enroll full-time in YouthBuild Programs for about 10 months. 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.

A strong emphasis is placed on creating a safe and caring community of adults and peers committed to each other's success. YouthBuild programs develop ethical young leaders to take responsibility for their families and communities and to change the conditions of poverty through civic engagement. 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.

Website: www.youthbuild.org

Getting Started

Are you inspired and ready to create or replicate a service year program for your organization? Contact us and let us know you want to get started. You can reach us at growth@serviceyear.org. Our team at Service Year Alliance is eager to answer any questions you have and point you in the right direction. In fact, to get you started please review the following helpful links and resources.

Helpful Links and Resources

[Creating a Service Year Program handbook](#) provides a guideline for starting a service year program. It is built for organizations to design a high-quality year of service that will have lasting impact. It will also provide an introduction to ServiceYear.org, a state-of-the-art marketplace that matches young people interested in doing a service year with service year opportunities.

[Best Practice Guide: Engaging Opportunity Youth in Service Years](#) 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 necessary 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.

[Certification Criteria](#) - ServiceYear.org only includes positions that are deemed to have the characteristics of a service year position, based on the certification criteria. If your organization is not currently part of AmeriCorps, or if you want to create a new program not recognized by AmeriCorps, your positions will need to be certified. Take a look at the criteria as you consider developing your program.

[Funding Resources](#) - Currently, many service year programs are funded by public and private funds. Here is a list of some of the public funding sources: AmeriCorps, YouthBuild, and WIOA Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA).



A BETTER YOU.
A GREATER US.

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Find us on Facebook: [Facebook.com/ServiceYear](https://facebook.com/ServiceYear)