

Engaging At-Risk Youth in Youth Community Service Learning Councils

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Workshop Description

Engaging At-Risk Youth in Youth Community Service Learning Councils is an example of a highly successful program that is being showcased throughout the country. This workshop focuses on partnerships with your local Workforce Investment Board, Youth Council, One-Stop Career Centers, Community Colleges and Youth Serving Organizations. The program assists at-risk youth in becoming active citizens in their community. This interactive workshop outlines how to engage at-risk youth in the philanthropic process and civic engagement while forming positive adult relationships in the community. Partnerships with schools, agencies and government entities will be addressed. Workshop participants will learn the details of how to set up their own youth service learning council and how to partner with others in the process while empowering at-risk youth. This is an interactive workshop that engages the workshop participants in the process. Participants are provided an overview of the program, sample activities and the ability to interact with other participants.

Foundations for the session

The Youth Community Development Council is a youth in philanthropy project for at risk youth between the ages of 14 and 21. This leadership project uses community service learning to integrate community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. Youth who participate in this project are at risk of dropping out of school and have one or more of the following

characteristics: basic skills deficient, truant, pregnant or parenting teens, court involved, homeless, potential gang members, learning disabilities, come from single parent families, and victims of domestic violence. This Council facilitates the development of SCANS skills and competencies such as analytical thinking through an interesting and challenging activity; empowers at risk, often disenfranchised youth to serve the community; encourages youth to take responsibility for identifying and meeting unmet community needs; gives youth a voice and decision making authority on projects to be funded; and facilitates the development of trust and confidence in themselves and others. Youth participating in the Council 1) form a Board of Directors, 2) identify unmet community needs, 3) develop a *request for proposal* for funding to fill the identified unmet needs, 4) select the projects to be funded, 5) award mini grants, and 6) monitor the programs and ensure that the projects are implemented and completed. This process occurs through the use of an eighteen lesson step-by-step curriculum, in the form of a toolkit, which identifies:

- a concept, goals and objectives to be met;
- the SCANS skills that are being taught;
- needed materials, activities, and games; and
- reflection and feedback ideas for each lesson.

Youth participating in this Council benefit by: seeing how their participation in the Council benefits the entire community through the projects they fund; being engaged and empowered, which directly results in increased self-esteem; being part of the solution rather than part of the problem; experiencing increased trust in peers and adults; displaying increases in personal and social responsibility; improving their academic performance, graduating from high school and going on to employment or further education.

This program challenges the accepted norms for the types of individuals who usually participate in philanthropic organizations-either foundations, nonprofit agencies that grant funds for programs, or civic organizations such as the United Way, Rotary, Lions etc. The individuals who usually participate in these organizations represent the middle or upper class and are high level achievers in their career fields. The young people who are participating in this service learning council are youth who are at risk of dropping out of school and have many barriers to success. These barriers include poverty, homelessness, criminal history, substance abuse, broken families and other issues that make them at-risk. As a result of participation on this council, we have seen that these youth are able to turn their lives around, develop self-esteem, graduate high school, enter employment, or go on to college. They learn true leadership skills and develop civic responsibility as a result of participation on the council.

Goals of the Session

The session will explore the following misnomers regarding at-risk youth which include but are not limited to:

- At-risk youth can be fully empowered with adult responsibilities.
- At-risk youth can become decision makers.
- At-risk youth do want to learn about their community and become positive change agents.

The session will benefit the participants in the following ways which include but are not limited to:

- Participants will learn how to engage at-risk youth in community service learning.
- Participants will leave with ideas and suggestions for starting a youth service learning council that includes at-risk youth.
- Participants will learn how to engage community partners in an innovative program that provides the learning of active citizenship on the part of at-risk youth.

Project Status

At-risk youth are part of our future in this country today. There is a need to educate these young people about their community in order to encourage future civic engagement. This activity gives them the confidence to become part of their communities and not part of the problems that exist. The Cape and Islands Youth Community Development Council, now in its 6th year, is a Youth Service Learning Council whose members are at-risk youth. It has been funded previously by the Massachusetts Service Alliance with Learn and Serve America funds and is currently funded with private money. The council is a program of Career Opportunities, the one-stop career center for Cape Cod and the Islands, and administered by the Job Training and Employment Corporation. The council partners with public schools, the local Workforce Investment Board, and its Youth Council. These partnerships provide the youth with the opportunity to learn about the needs in the community and allow the council to leverage private, CNS and DOL funds.

We are currently in the process of replicating this program in other parts of the country.