

Aligning Civic Engagement and Volunteerism with City Priorities:

SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA Projects 2011

2011 SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA Team

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## **Executive Summary**

### Introduction

Eleven young people aged 18-25 enrolled in the Americorps VISTA program to join the 2011 SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA Team. They worked on eight different projects with various partner organizations spanning the city between June and August 2011. Each project called on VISTAs to help build organizational capacity by utilizing community volunteers and resources.

### Project Overviews

*PhillyGoes2College Community Outreach:* Partner with schools and community organizations to publicize college-related resources. Engage local youth as student blog interns to talk about their experiences preparing for and applying to college and to serve as role models for other youth.

*Graduation Coach Campaign Data Collection:* Engage network of 1,500 Philadelphians who have been trained as Graduation Coaches from fall 2010 to spring 2011 to provide feedback on their coaching practices and their ideas for improving the Campaign in year two.

*Hunting Park Maintenance Program:* Collaborate with community members and Parks and Recreation Staff on clean-ups, events, and job training to create a safer neighborhood through renovation, maintenance, and encouraged positive use of the park.

*Home-Delivered Meals Programs Needs-Assessment:* Conduct a needs assessment of home delivered meals programs in order to inform action steps that will align volunteer engagement strategies with program needs.

*Francisville Cleaning and Greening:* Organize community clean-up efforts and develop database to assist volunteers and Francisville Neighborhood Development Corporation (FNDC) in their long-term tree tending strategy.

*Fairhill Park Neighborhood Development:* Build on the momentum and relationships developed in the flagship PhillyRising Neighborhood to develop a network of committed community leaders to plan positive community events and create a town watch in the Fairhill section of Eastern North Philadelphia.

*Freedom Rings Partnership Curriculum Development:* Develop a menu of on-line resources and curriculum for Public Computing Center (PCC) staff and volunteers to draw on in helping PCC users develop their digital literacy skills.

*Recreation Center Environmental Stewardship Program:* Develop programming in Recreation Centers that engages consistent volunteers and educates youth on environmental stewardship and sustainability.

### Conclusion

The SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA team joined up with eight on-going projects at the beginning of June 2011. Over ten weeks, the SERVE Philadelphia VISTAs built capacity within their projects by developing surveys, assessing program needs, creating outreach materials, establishing databases, building curriculum, recruiting volunteers, and training community members. Their work involved numerous neighborhoods, at least 250 children and youth, approximately 300 adults, and provided over 4,500 hours of service to the city of Philadelphia. All eight projects will be sustained either by volunteers utilizing the program structures created by a SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA or by a full-time SERVE Philadelphia VISTA who will continue for a one-year term.

## **Introduction**

It is *possible* for 11 young people to step into a number of Philadelphia neighborhoods in need and provide support, leadership, and programming for community members, but that was not the goal of the work set out for the Summer VISTA Team in the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service. Rather, the goal was to engage and support community members in their efforts to improve and enrich their own neighborhoods. The goal was to provide an extra push, a jump start, within existing community projects and build or reinforce structures that could continue the momentum of those projects. The goal was to step up energetically and then step back purposefully because ultimately it will be the community involvement that will power neighborhood transformation, not temporary leadership and programming.

With this philosophy in mind, members of this AmeriCorps Summer VISTA team brought passion and action to their eight assigned projects. They encountered a number of serious challenges that face the city of Philadelphia. How do we increase the graduation rates at our city's high schools and inspire young people to attend college? How do we decrease violence and illicit activity in community parks? How do we beautify and revitalize a "food desert", connect homebound seniors to healthy meals, bridge the digital divide, and assist youth in becoming environmental stewards and learning the importance of sustainability? These were some of the questions the VISTAs asked themselves as they confronted the work set out for them. The most important question however, was how can we, in conjunction with various partner organizations, build organizational capacity for these projects and utilize community volunteers? In essence, how can individuals in a neighborhood come together to combat challenges their communities face, and how can city government partner with them?

What happens when dedicated, resourceful leaders spark community members into action is evidenced through the wide array of these projects' accomplishments. More than that however, it can be seen in the paths they have cleared, in some cases literally, for communities to continue to take on tasks that may have seemed too arduous before.

## **Project Overviews**

### PhillyGoes2College Community Outreach

The number of Philadelphians with college degrees is astonishingly low. Only 39% of Philadelphia public school students pursue college immediately after high school,<sup>1</sup> and many will face challenges that will not allow them to graduate, including academic and financial unpreparedness. There is a gross lack of information about how to obtain and pay for a college education. Our city contains a multitude of institutions of higher education and various resources to support postsecondary education for locals, but navigating these resources can be overwhelming.

One of Mayor Nutter's central goals around education is to double the number of Philadelphia residents with a college degree by 2018, bringing that number to 36%. The PhillyGoes2College Office (PG2C) was opened in early 2010 to support progress towards that goal. PG2C is a free resource center for Philadelphians of any age, linking constituents to services that help them prepare, apply, and pay for postsecondary education. PG2C regularly reaches out to community organizations that serve youth and schools in order to partner with and empower these organizations to spread information about postsecondary education. For the 2011-2012 school year, the PG2C office is seeking to engage one to two high school students as intern bloggers for the website, in order to provide local youth voices that speak to the challenges of preparing for and applying to college and provide models for how postsecondary education can be made a reality using the many resources available in the city.

Through workshops and presentations alone, PG2C has reached more than 10,000 Philadelphians. Akilah Abdul-Rahman worked with PG2C to develop materials and strategies to increase outreach to Philadelphians. Akilah created and wrote PG2C's monthly newsletters and developed a financial aid how-to presentation for P2GC. Akilah

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<sup>1</sup> Mezzacappa, Dale. "Building on dreams of college." *The Philadelphia Public School Notebook* 18:6.

also coordinated the student blogger internship and increased PG2C's presence in the community by attending events and giving presentations throughout the city.

The outreach materials that Akilah developed will continue to be used by PG2C office staff and interns throughout the school year.

### Graduation Coach Campaign Data Collection

Many of the youth in the city are not getting the proper support to encourage them to continue to go to school, further their education, and take the necessary steps to become successful.

Mayor Michael Nutter is committed to increasing the city's high school graduation rate to 80% by the year 2015. He is also working to increase the rate of Philadelphians who earn a Bachelor's degree from 18% to 36% by the year 2018. The Graduation Coach Campaign is a mayoral initiative that specifically addresses the issue of low graduation rates in the city of Philadelphia. The mission of the Graduation Coach Campaign is to equip and empower Philadelphia's adults to help youth earn a high school diploma and succeed in college and careers. The campaign does this by hosting trainings that provide important information and resources to our coaches so that they have the ability to keep a young person on the right track. The long term goal is to train every adult in Philadelphia to become a coach so that all of our young people graduate high school and move on to higher education. The campaign is focused around five Key Conversations that coaches should have with their young person to establish healthy communication around education. Each conversation is tailored to a particular age group, starting from sixth grade and extending through college.

This summer, Denariel Benn worked on developing a summer survey to reach out to the campaign's present coaches and examine what activities and conversations coaches have had with their youth since attending training. The survey has enabled the campaign to assess its services to coaches and determine that most parts of the campaign need focus and restructuring. Denariel started this process by conducting focus groups and asking coaches what they thought about certain topics, including the structure of the campaign

and its interaction with coaches. With their feedback, Denariel constructed a detailed final report on the campaign's first year that includes recommendations for the future.

The Graduation Coach Campaign will continue to reach the people of Philadelphia and help the youth in the city. With new partnerships and leadership, the campaign can reach even more communities in the city of Philadelphia and train more coaches. With the coaches' recommendations and feedback from the summer survey, the planning team will focus on tactics to implement in the upcoming year. As long as there are adults that are willing to help and support a young person on their road to success, the Graduation Coach Campaign will continue to be a resource to the city of Philadelphia.

### Hunting Park Maintenance Program

At the geographic heart of Philadelphia lies an emerald; a multi-faceted 87-acre green space known as Hunting Park. From the center, beneath one of the park's many trees, Hunting Park can feel like the perfect escape while modest brick houses facing three of the park's four sides can create an intimate feel in the outer pockets of the park. Yet, this is not the preeminent story of Hunting Park. Between a rock known as Roosevelt Boulevard and a hard place known as the Badlands, Hunting Park is known as a hub for violence, prostitution, and drugs in the neighborhood.

The Mayor has been very explicit in his plan to lower crime rates and prioritize green space in Philadelphia. For both the neighborhood and the park, these issues go hand in hand. That is, if Hunting Park is a hub of crime, then prioritizing its maintenance and putting value in its existence will decrease criminal activity.

On top of this, Hunting Park United (HPU), a grassroots community organization, addresses the Mayor's goals for education and the economy by engaging youth in the process. HPU employs neighborhood youth in the summer months to maintain the park and facilitate its revitalization. Through partnerships with Fairmount Park, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, and the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society, youth are trained in

landscaping, tree trimming, and tree tending. Thus, Hunting Park United has created jobs and aided in the educational journey of young Philadelphians.

Noel Deaza and Julia Hillengas supervised and coached seven high school students during the summer of 2011. The youth spent 20 hours a week revitalizing the park. To combat negative perceptions, the youth picked up litter, separated trash from recycling, and created a clean environment. They also edged the walkways in the park to make them more usable and improve the image of Hunting Park. To address safety in the park, they elevated tree limbs which created better sightlines throughout the park and eliminated concealment areas at night. Lastly, they engaged park users and neighbors to join them as volunteers in community clean-up days and change habits and behaviors connected to the park.

With the youth workers, Julia Hillengas and Noel Deaza were able to elevate over 50 trees in just over two weeks. Concentrating on the southwest and southeast quadrants of the park, they covered over 40 acres of land and increased sightlines around the pavilion, Logan House, and 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Once the area was cleaned, the litter indicative of illicit activity (used condoms, condom wrappers, dime bags, blunt wrappers) was greatly reduced.

In an additional two weeks, Julia, Noel and their team of youth were also able to expand and edge the walkways from 9<sup>th</sup> Street to the Recreation Center and from Old York Road past the Farmer's Market, Logan House, and the pavilion to the center circle. Within this work, they cleared three storm drains and relocated extraneous soil to areas in the park in need (the soon-to-be renovated athletic field, bare patches). Once a week, they cleared areas of litter, found patterns, mapped hot spots, and determined ideal locations for trash and recycling bins.

Their biggest impact, and the hardest to quantify, was their presence. While they worked, people took notice. Questionable activity during the day relocated out of the park. Park users and neighbors walking through stopped to ask questions and give encouragement. The most common question was: How can I do what you do?

During the school year Hunting Park United will utilize high school youth as volunteers to continue the maintenance of the park and cement a positive presence in Hunting Park.

### Home-Delivered Meals Programs Needs-Assessment

Of the ten largest cities in America, Philadelphia has the highest number of citizens staying in their homes as they age. Many seniors who are frail or sick face increasingly limited mobility as they get older, thus decreasing their opportunity to cook for themselves, shop for groceries, or both. Senior hunger and nutrition needs in the city also overlap with the city's broader landscape of challenges associated with healthy food access. While accessing food is difficult for any senior with limited mobility, in so-called "food-deserts" or in areas with low availability of public transportation, it is even harder. Many homebound seniors also suffer from the disparaging health effects of having little daily support and interaction with others.

In March, Mayor Nutter participated in the national campaign "Mayors for Meals" to raise awareness about senior hunger in Philadelphia and to recognize the hard work of local Meals on Wheels organizations that, with the essential support of volunteers, meet thousands of seniors' daily nutritional needs across the city or supplement that need.

Margaret Ernst's VISTA project was to prepare a needs-assessment report on Philadelphia's volunteer-supported home-delivered meals programs in order to help the Mayor's Commission on Aging discern ways to support the capacity of those programs and continue to serve senior hunger needs in the city. She surveyed the city's largest home-delivered programs and built relationships with their directors and volunteer coordinators in order to understand their program needs in several areas, including volunteering capacity and training, funding, facilities improvement, and office support. By having a clearer picture of the needs and service capacity of home-delivered meals programs in Philadelphia, the Commission on Aging will be able to advocate for the infrastructure needs of those programs in policy circles and support city-wide efforts to recruit, maintain, and train volunteers for them.

As a part of a continued service term as a VISTA in the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service, Margaret will present her report to the Commission on Aging in September and to the directors of the programs surveyed and other aging professionals following that. Based on the findings of the report and listening sessions with program staff, she will then help the Commission on Aging develop action steps to strategically mobilize and coordinate volunteer efforts to help increase capacity to serve senior hunger in Philadelphia.

### Francisville Cleaning and Greening

Francisville is a neighborhood overwhelmed by vacant lots, abandoned properties and a lack of access to healthy food. Aligning with the Mayor's goal of greening Philadelphia, and increasing public safety, Keisha Smith and Patrice Murphy worked with the Francisville Neighborhood Development Corporation (FNDC) in beautifying the neighborhood.

The strategy for addressing this issue is cleaning the street every day. Every day members of the FNDC and volunteers cleaned different streets in the neighborhood, picking up trash and landscaping. About once a week, they maintained the trees by watering, weeding, pruning, and taking out the dead trees. They also weeded and watered the community gardens and gave some of the fruits and vegetables to community members.

A major part of their work comprised data collection of all the trees, noting missing trees and areas without trees. This data was used to fill out Tree Vitalize applications which were mailed to the owners of the properties in need of trees so that new ones could be planted. This data collection will be integral to the Plant One Million initiative of the Horticultural Society.

This work contributed to improving the community and maintaining a clean and safe environment. Throughout their work day Keisha and Patrice noted that many community members came and talked to them and thanked them for their work. This

project will be sustained after this summer in a variety of ways. Volunteers will continue to take care of the street cleaning. The maps and data of the trees will also allow the FNDC to more efficiently take care of the trees that are in the neighborhood. FNDC will continue to maintain the empty lots and parks in Francisville.

### Fairhill Park Neighborhood Development

Within the past several years, the neighborhood surrounding Fairhill Park has fallen victim to several factors that characterize an unhealthy community, including widespread alcohol and drug use and tensions between residents. The question facing both the city and community members in Fairhill is how to revitalize the neighborhood in positive, sustainable ways. What does this mean on the ground level, and what can be accomplished in one summer?

This summer, Tiffany Perez worked with the Lighthouse and organizations with a stake in Fairhill Square Park to organize multiple community meetings in which both citizens and organizations discussed a variety of topics, including the steps necessary to form a town watch, a park clean-up schedule, and to organize family-friendly events in Fairhill Square Park.

Tiffany additionally worked with the Youth Leadership Group at the Lighthouse to directly implement two family fun nights that included activities for children, like face painting and break dancing. Community organizations from throughout the city tabled at the events to share information about services and opportunities. As neighbors of the park came out for the events and connected with each other in positive ways, Fairhill Park's atmosphere transformed from an insecure bed of illegal activity to a bustling center for families to enjoy. Following the success of the events, the Lighthouse has partnered with a range of local and citywide organizations to coordinate additional events for the fall.

Going forward, Tiffany will continue to volunteer with the Lighthouse throughout the school year and community members will continue to hold meetings and participate in the town watch.

## Freedom Rings Partnership Curriculum Development

In today's society, computer literacy is an invaluable skill. Even without a home computer, every individual in the city should be able to utilize the wide range of resources available via the Internet. In order to address this issue, the City of Philadelphia, represented by Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, the Urban Affairs Coalition and Drexel University have formed the Freedom Rings Partnership. This initiative works to bring free Internet access and computer training to individuals in a variety of locations throughout the city. These locations are known as Public Computing Centers (PCCs) and each organization has been charged with establishing and operating a number of sites.

As part of the Department of Parks and Recreation team, Sarah Schulman and Raturaj Rana began to address Philadelphia's digital divide by creating a resource website and two curriculums to assist PCC instructors in providing community members with the plethora of knowledge available to them through the Internet. Sarah and Raturaj's wordpress site ( <http://phillyfreedomrings.wordpress.com/>) is designed to organize free resources and online tutorials on various software programs, based on information they acquired from a needs-based assessment of the community at Rivera Recreation Center. Sarah and Raturaj also developed curriculum for an Internet Safety and Security course and two lessons on Microsoft Publisher 2010, the latter based on community members' expressed interest in creating desktop publications, whether in the form of newsletters or resumes.

Sarah and Raturaj engaged citizens not only through their use of the computing centers, but also through their participation in the needs-based survey and focus group. Listening to the teens and adults speak up about what types of activities they would like to use the computers for has been integral in informing the categories of resources they've organized, from job search websites to GED preparation and online homework tutors. This resource list will greatly impact the PCCs, allowing Computer Instructors (CIs) to inform users about accurate, reliable websites to serve them in a number of important areas.

Sarah and Raturaj developed lessons for Computer Instructors in order to assess the effectiveness and comprehensibility of their curriculum as well as to improve instructors' knowledge of the program. This way, CIs will be able to lead a class of PCC users in a Publisher workshop at their respective sites. They have received great feedback from the Freedom Rings Partner organizations on their wordpress and have witnessed the launch of a number of PCC sites by Parks and Recreation throughout the summer.

Their project will be sustained through the online resources list they have compiled and the curriculum they hope to incorporate onto the website. It is their hope that PCC staff and users will continue to find new resources and curriculum of interest and update the website, providing ongoing feedback on what is or is not working and ideas for new, exciting programs.

#### Recreation Center Environmental Stewardship Program

Since December 2010, the Mayor's Office for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service and the Department of Parks and Recreation have worked together to develop programming within Recreation Centers that engages volunteers consistently, engages youth both in out of school time/afterschool hours, and has a focus related to environmental stewardship and sustainability. In April 2011, Jonathan Tehrani, a SERVE Philadelphia Program Coordinator, began developing the curriculum for Growing Gardeners with the goal of introducing youth at summer day camps to the fundamentals of gardening and tree care, ultimately making them more conscious stewards of the green space at the recreation center. SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA Jamie Smolen joined the effort in June 2011 adding essential contributions in both program development and execution. Through leveraging resources, creating cross-departmental partnerships, working with other SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTAs, and actively engaging volunteers, Growing Gardeners served over 200 youth at 7 recreation centers in North Philadelphia during the six week summer camp season.

Both the Department of Parks and Recreation and the City of Philadelphia consider improving Philadelphian's access and familiarity with green space an important tenet for the future. As part of Greenworks Philadelphia, Mayor Michael Nutter has set the long-

term goal of adding “500 new acres of green public spaces in the city” and planting 300,000 new trees by 2015. Teaching Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards will help to ensure that these green investments last. Furthermore, with the merger of the Fairmount Parks Commission and Department of Recreation in 2010, the recently created Department of Parks and Recreation will focus on providing environmental education through recreation centers, rather than parks as it has done in the past.

During two one-hour sessions each week of camp, youth ranging in ages from 5 to 13 became stewards of 27 container gardens of sunflowers and string beans, gained basic knowledge of how to care for trees, and learned to recognize tree damage. During the first three weeks, students were exposed to the fundamental steps of planting a garden; students designed their wooden produce crates that resembled raised beds, got their hands dirty mixing the soil and compost, hand delivered it to their gardens in a relay race, planted the seeds, and earnestly watered their new harvest. The second half of the program encouraged students to apply their enthusiasm for maintaining their gardens to becoming stewards of the trees in their respective recreation centers and playgrounds. Using “secret guides,” students became tree detectives who learned to recognize signs of damage and sickness on the roots, trunks, and leaves of trees in their recreation center. In addition, students learned to recognize species of trees in the process of being planted in their recreation center or playground as part of the Philadelphia Horticultural Society’s Plant One Million campaign.

In successfully running Growing Gardeners, Jon and Jamie built a strong cross-departmental partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation, a dedicated team of volunteers, and SERVE Philadelphia VISTAs. In the early planning stages of the program, Debbie Carr, Director of Environmental Education at Parks and Recreation, provided Jon with Project Learning Tree, a comprehensive resource that contributed fun activities about tree physiology and the components of soil to the program curriculum. Eileen Sheridan, Parks and Recreation District 6 Manager, granted Growing Gardeners permission to run the program at 7 recreation centers and playgrounds in North Philadelphia. In addition, Recreation leaders set aside space in their centers for container sunflower and string bean gardens that directly showed youth the importance of regular maintenance and care of

plant life. Finally, Camp directors allocated a regular one-hour time slot for the program two times a week.

To provide program support, the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service recruited 12 volunteers through its SERVE Philadelphia website. Prior to beginning the program, each volunteer attended an orientation where they grew more comfortable with the curriculum and program goals. At each program session, a SERVE Philadelphia VISTA led the general lesson while 1-2 volunteers provided more individualized attention during small group activities. Without creating these partnerships, Growing Gardeners would not have been possible.

Beyond building capacity among a network of volunteers and Park and Recreation staff, a number of partners generously donated supplies and contributed curriculum development. Iovine's Produce donated produce crates that served as "raised beds," Home Depot generously donated gift certificates that allowed us to purchase gardening supplies, La Colombe Torrefaction donated coffee sacks that lined the interior of our "raised beds," Primex Gardening Center donated seeds and gardening expertise, ShopRite and SuperFresh donated materials for a dirt dessert that taught students about the layers of soil, and Hussain Abdul-Haqq contributed some much needed advice about gardening specifics.

By continuing to develop relationships with commercial partners, Department of Parks and Recreation staff, and a base of volunteers, the program has showed the possibility for replicating itself in future summers. Furthermore, Jon and Jamie are currently assembling a comprehensive resource outlining the best practices for implementing the summer program for Recreation leaders who may be interested in replicating the program in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA team joined up with eight on-going projects at the beginning of June 2011. Over ten weeks, the SERVE Philadelphia VISTAs built capacity within their projects by developing surveys, assessing program needs, creating outreach materials, establishing databases, building curriculum, recruiting volunteers, and training community members. Their work involved numerous neighborhoods, at least 250 children and youth, approximately 300 adults, and provided over 4,500 hours of service to the city of Philadelphia. All eight projects will be sustained either by volunteers utilizing the program structures created by a SERVE Philadelphia Summer VISTA or by a full-time SERVE Philadelphia VISTA who will continue for a one-year term.

But the impact of our work does not stop there. It cannot be sufficiently contained within the numbers. Our primary goal was community engagement, to build or boost civilian mechanisms that will power neighborhood transformation. The PhillyGoes2College office will be able to reach more Philadelphia students because of the materials and framework that Akilah Abdul-Rahman created. The Graduation Coach Campaign will be able to redesign its workshops and recruitment to become a more effective resource for adults mentoring young people thanks to the survey that Denariel Benn developed, implemented and analyzed. Hunting Park United can leverage more community support and resources by showcasing the youth work accomplished in Hunting Park under the facilitation of Noel Deaza and Julia Hillengas. The Mayor's Commission on Aging can connect more seniors with meals and develop programs to fill gaps due to the assessment report that Margaret Ernst completed. The Francisville Neighborhood Development Corporation can begin replacing dead or missing trees and applying for additional funding because of the mapping database developed by Patrice Murphy and Keisha Smith. The Lighthouse will host monthly family events run by the Lighthouse Youth Leadership Group because of the guidance of Tiffany Perez. Up to 19 Public Computing Centers can provide training and resources to community members via lessons and a website that Raturaj Rana and Sarah Schulman created. Any recreation center can

access the curriculum and resources to run a 5-week environmental education program that Jamie Smolen and Jon Tehrani designed and implemented.

And yet, all of these sustainable accomplishments cannot become certain realities without community members and volunteers. How can we ensure that these individuals are equally as passionate about the future of these projects as the VISTAs? The answer lies in the interest community members expressed in these projects throughout the summer and their involvement in them. The SERVE Philadelphia VISTAs produced not only tangible legacies in the form of curriculums, surveys, reports, resource binders, blogs, and cleaner, safer public spaces, but left in their wake a presence and a contagious passion for engagement and volunteerism. While they worked, passersby stopped and inquired. Young people asked to be involved. Volunteers returned. People took notice. The drive to meet neighborhood needs and raise the standards of learning and living has been strengthened in the population with the most power to incite real change: community members themselves.

Challenge	City Strategy to Address this Challenge	Citizen Engagement Strategy Developed by Summer VISTAs	Impact	Sustainability
Increasing the number of Philadelphians who graduate from high school and go to college	Philly Goes2College	Partner with schools and community organizations to publicize college-related resources while engaging local youth as student blog interns to talk about their experiences preparing for and applying to college and to serve as role models for other youth.	<b>Akilah Abdul-Rahman</b> (1) Developed outreach strategies to provide college-related resources to Philadelphians, (2) Met with local youth to talk about their education goals and pointed them to resources that will help them meet those goals.	In 2011-2012 AmeriCorps VISTAs who serve in the PhillyGoes2College office will continue to implement strategies developed in Summer 2011.
Engaging adults to coach and support young people on their path to and through higher education	Graduation Coach Campaign (GCC)	Engage network of 1,500 Philadelphians who've been trained as Graduation Coaches in the past year to provide feedback on their coaching practices and their ideas for improving the Campaign in year two.	<b>Denariel Benn</b> (1) Designed and implemented a survey of current graduation coaches, (2) Coordinated 2 focus groups of Graduation Coaches, and (3) Published report of Key Findings and Recommendations to inform the growth of the GCC in year two.	The incoming Graduation Coach Campaign Coordinator will work closely with the GCC leadership team to implement recommendations outlined in the GCC Research Report.
Increasing digital literacy and access to technology for all Philadelphians	Through the City's involvement in the <b>Freedom Rings Partnership</b> , 77 Public Computing Centers (PCCs) are opening throughout the city, including 19 in Recreation Centers.	Develop a menu of on-line resources and curriculum for PCC staff and volunteers to draw on in helping PCC users develop their digital literacy skills.	<b>Sarah Schulman &amp; Ruturaj Rana</b> (1) Created a <b>wordpress</b> website to showcase on-line resources and curriculum that will serve as the homepage at PCCs in Parks and Recreation Centers, (2) Developed specific Microsoft Office curriculum to be implemented by PCC staff and volunteers.	In 2011-2012 an AmeriCorps VISTA will use the resources developed to inform a process for centrally recruiting, training and placing volunteers in Parks and Recreations' PCCs.
Increasing access to and appreciation of public green space	<b>Greenworks</b> calls for "500 new acres of green public space in the city" and teaching Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards to ensure sustainability of these green investments.	Develop programming in Recreation Centers that engages consistent volunteers and educates youth on environmental stewardship and sustainability.	<b>Jamie Smolen &amp; Jon Tehrani</b> (1) Developed a six-week environmental education program for 150 youth spread across 7 Recreation Center day camps in North Philadelphia, (2) Cultivated a team of Parks and Recreation staff, VISTA facilitators, WorkReady counselors and college student volunteers to carry out weekly program sessions. More than 150 youth participants became stewards of 27 container gardens, gained basic knowledge of how to care for	A comprehensive resource binder - including weekly lesson plans, summary of required resources and volunteer recruitment strategy - was developed to assist Parks and Recreation staff in replicating the program in the future.

Challenge	City Strategy to Address this Challenge	Citizen Engagement Strategy Developed by Summer VISTAs	Impact	Sustainability
<b>Improving quality of life and neighborhood development in the Francisville section of North Philadelphia</b>	<b>Greenworks</b> calls for “500 new acres of green public space in the city” and teaching Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards to ensure sustainability of these green investments.	Organize community clean-up efforts and develop database to assist volunteers and Francisville Neighborhood Development Corporation (FNDC) in their long-term tree tending strategy.	<b>Patrice Murphy and Keisha Smith</b> (1) Increased visibility of environmental stewardship in the community through continual maintenance of trees, Francisville Orchard and Senior Garden, and (2) Improved resource infrastructure for FNDC.	The president of FNDC will use the database compiled in Summer 2011 to more efficiently and effectively drive volunteer recruitment and deployment in the coming year.
<b>Supporting community members in stopping illegal activity and promoting public safety in Fairhill Park</b>	<b>The PhillyRising Collaborative</b> connects City leaders with community leaders to identify and solve problems.	Build on the momentum and relationships developed in the flagship PhillyRising Neighborhood to develop a network of committed community leaders to plan positive community events and create a town watch in the Fairhill section of Eastern North Philadelphia.	<b>Tiffany Perez</b> Coordinated community organizations, neighborhood residents and youth leaders to design and carry out positive, family friendly activities in Fairhill Park.	Individuals and organizations involved in summer activity planning have committed to continue collaborating into the future. A series of fall activities have already been scheduled.
<b>Creating a “Green Zone” in North Philadelphia by addressing neighborhood violence and decreased use and maintenance of Hunting Park</b>	<b>Greenworks</b> calls for Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards to ensure the development and use of green spaces.	Collaborate with community members and Parks and Recreation Staff on clean-ups, events, and job training to create a safer neighborhood through renovation, maintenance, and encouraged positive use of the park.	<b>Noel Deaza and Julia Hillengas</b> (1) Conducted community outreach to increase volunteer activity in Hunting Park, (2) Provided seven local youth with job skills and work experience through litter clean-ups and landscaping. Youth increased sightline elevation in Hunting Park to decrease illicit activities during the day.	A seasonal maintenance training program through Parks and Recreation will continue park maintenance. Youth volunteers will assist Parks and Recreation and PHS staff during the school year. Hunting Park United will employ and train youth next summer.
<b>Developing a stronger, sustainable infrastructure to meet hunger needs among Philadelphia’s aging population</b>	The <b>Mayor’s Commission on Aging</b> (MCOA) is charged to convene partners to support the creation of an “Age Friendly Philadelphia.”	Conduct a needs assessment of home delivered meals programs in order to inform action steps that will align volunteer engagement strategies with program needs.	<b>Margaret Ernst</b> (1) Surveyed the city’s largest home delivered meals programs about needs in several areas, including: facilities, volunteer engagement practices, funding and client capacity.	In Fall 2011, an Americorps VISTA, working closely with the MCOA, will develop volunteer engagement strategies in order to increase the city’s capacity to meet senior hunger need.



## SERVE Philadelphia 2011 Summer VISTA Biographies

**Akilah Abdul-Rahman** is a senior at Bryn Mawr College seeking a B.A. in English with a minor in Education. Akilah is an alum of the Mayor's Internship Program 2010, and has returned to the Mayor's Office of Education & PhillyGoes2College Office for a second summer. After graduation, Akilah's career goals include working in education and college access-related non-profits. A native of Philadelphia, Akilah's goal is to work and live in Philadelphia.

**Denariel Benn** is currently working as the AmeriCorps Summer VISTA for the Graduation Coach Campaign in the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service. She is working to collect data and information from the trained coaches and measure the impact that the campaign has achieved since its launch in September of 2010. Ms. Benn is currently a sophomore at Drexel University studying Biomedical Engineering with a minor in Criminal Justice. She sits as the Executive Secretary of two organizations at Drexel, the Biomedical Engineering Society and *weServe*, a local and international service organization.

**Margaret Ernst** is a VISTA in the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service, where she has been collaborating with the Mayor's Commission on Aging to research the city's capacity to address senior hunger. Margaret is a recent graduate of Bryn Mawr College, where she majored in Religion at neighboring Haverford College and minored in Creative Writing at Bryn Mawr. Margaret previously worked as a staff writer intern at The Philadelphia Public School Notebook. Margaret is excited to be staying on as a VISTA until August 2012 to continue her work with the Commission on Aging and to work with the Parks and Recreation department to develop a volunteer engagement model for public computing centers through the Freedom Rings Partnership. In the future, Margaret hopes to complete a joint masters in divinity and social work in order to pursue interests in faith-based civic engagement and education advocacy in Philadelphia.

**Tiffany Perez** considers one of her greatest accomplishments to have received the honor of graduating from the well-known Central High School. This did not come easily as she had the difficult task of maintaining her grades while juggling two jobs. After enduring four vigorous years, Tiffany received her diploma on June 15, 2011. This came with the exciting news that she had been accepted to Penn State University, Schuylkill Campus. However, after weighing all of her possible options, Tiffany decided to begin her college career at Community College of Philadelphia with plans to participate in Penn State's Dual Admissions program. Currently, while Tiffany has not declared a major, she knows that whatever field she chooses will have to allow her the opportunity to provide services for others.

**Ruturaj S. Rana** is a rising junior at Temple University with a double major in International Business and Management Information Systems. He actively participates in the Temple University community along with the community of Philadelphia by performing more than twenty community service hours every semester since his freshman year. To further his reach into the community he is a member and now Vice President of a social and service interest group on Temple University's campus, Delta Epsilon Psi Fraternity Inc. Ruturaj is also the Vice President of Internal Marketing of the Association of Management Information Systems at Temple University which is a professional organization providing opportunities to promote the study and practice of management information systems. With dreams of traveling around the world and upholding his passion for service, Ruturaj plans to join the Peace Corps and later work for a Multi-national Corporation in a position dealing with external relations.

**Sarah Schulman** is a rising senior and Writing Seminars major at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Sarah's interest in community service and civic engagement began while attending Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia and has continued to grow throughout her time at Hopkins. She has tutored at numerous Baltimore City schools and volunteered through the organization *From Classroom to Community* to assist recently rehabilitated men in developing computer and resume-writing skills. She will be the organization's Program Coordinator in the up-coming school year. After college, Sarah hopes to attend graduate school for social work and participate in another AmeriCorps service program.

**Jamie Smolen** recently implemented a six week environmental education program for youth in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Recreation. His past community service experiences include leading college volunteers at a weekly after-school program for elementary-aged students in North Central Philadelphia and providing weekly English lessons to a Spanish-speaking custodian in Washington DC. Prior to beginning his term of service at the Mayor's Office, he interned with The Food Trust's Healthy Cornerstore Initiative where he helped create mini business plans with cornerstore owners interested in offering their customers healthy food options. He is currently finishing his undergraduate degrees in Spanish and Political Science at Temple University and plans to pursue a Master's Degree in Public Health following his graduation in May 2012.

**Keisha Smith** was born in Columbia, South Carolina and was raised in West Orange, New Jersey. She has her Bachelor of Social Work from Temple University and is currently enrolled in the Master's of Social Work Program at Temple University. Keisha has interned with the Department of Human Services, Community Based Prevention Services, Girl's Track Program.

**Patrice Murphy** is a VISTA working with the Francisville Community Development Corporation. This summer she learned that nature is a beautiful thing that must be cared for by the community. Patrice lives in Francisville and her example of hard work has inspired her fellow neighbors to get more involved in community activities. Patrice is a proud graduate of Benjamin Franklin High School where she was actively involved in community service. In the future, Patrice would like to go back to school to learn about caring for animals. She also hopes that other people will hear about and be inspired by the great things that AmeriCorps VISTAs do throughout the city.

**Julia Hillengas** is a Project Coordinator for the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service. She is a happy alumna of Central High School, Temple University, and Americorps. Formerly a high school teacher in Philadelphia, Ms. Hillengas is excited to return to broader community work and explore the alternative educational opportunities that arise. Ms. Hillengas has worked with youth for over 10 years as a teacher, coach, camp counselor, and employer through organizations such as YouthBuild Philadelphia, Fairmount Youth Soccer Association, the YMCA of Philadelphia, and Hunting Park United. Ms. Hillengas also has experience in community organizing, social science research, and GIS mapping.

**Noel Deaza** is a 21 years old student at the Community College of Philadelphia. Before attending college he served as a City Year Corps member where he worked on a team of eight individuals from very diverse backgrounds to coordinate large scale service days and events. This summer Noel worked with Hunting Park Youth United on a project at Hunting Park Recreation Center designed to increase civic engagement. He hopes his efforts will help encourage youth to take the right path in helping their community.



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Challenge	City Strategy to Address this Challenge	Citizen Engagement Strategy Developed by Summer VISTAs	Impact	Sustainability
Increasing the number of Philadelphians who graduate from high school and go to college	Philly Goes2College	Partner with schools and community organizations to publicize college-related resources while engaging local youth as student blog interns to talk about their experiences preparing for and applying to college and to serve as role models for other youth.	<b>Akilah Abdul-Rahman</b> (1) Developed outreach strategies to provide college-related resources to Philadelphians, (2) Met with local youth to talk about their education goals and pointed them to resources that will help them meet those goals.	In 2011-2012 AmeriCorps VISTAs who serve in the PhillyGoes2College office will continue to implement strategies developed in Summer 2011.
Engaging adults to coach and support young people on their path to and through higher education	Graduation Coach Campaign (GCC)	Engage network of 1,500 Philadelphians who've been trained as Graduation Coaches in the past year to provide feedback on their coaching practices and their ideas for improving the Campaign in year two.	<b>Denariel Benn</b> (1) Designed and implemented a survey of current graduation coaches, (2) Coordinated 2 focus groups of Graduation Coaches, and (3) Published report of Key Findings and Recommendations to inform the growth of the GCC in year two.	The incoming Graduation Coach Campaign Coordinator will work closely with the GCC leadership team to implement recommendations outlined in the GCC Research Report.
Increasing digital literacy and access to technology for all Philadelphians	Through the City's involvement in the <b>Freedom Rings Partnership</b> , 77 Public Computing Centers (PCCs) are opening throughout the city, including 19 in Recreation Centers.	Develop a menu of on-line resources and curriculum for PCC staff and volunteers to draw on in helping PCC users develop their digital literacy skills.	<b>Sarah Schulman &amp; Ruturaj Rana</b> (1) created a <b>wordpress</b> website to showcase on-line resources and curriculum that will serve as the homepage at PCCs in Parks and Recreation Centers, (2) Developed specific Microsoft Office curriculum to be implemented by PCC staff and volunteers.	In 2011-2012 an AmeriCorps VISTA will use the resources developed to inform a process for centrally recruiting, training and placing volunteers in Parks and Recreations' PCCs.
Increasing access to and appreciation of public green space	<b>Greenworks</b> calls for "500 new acres of green public space in the city" and teaching Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards to ensure sustainability of these green investments.	Develop programming in Recreation Centers that engages consistent volunteers and educates youth on environmental stewardship and sustainability.	<b>Jamie Smolen &amp; Jon Tehrani</b> (1) Developed a six-week environmental education program for 150 youth spread across 7 Recreation Center day camps in North Philadelphia, (2) Cultivated a team of Parks and Recreation staff, VISTA facilitators, WorkReady counselors and college student volunteers to carry out weekly program sessions. More than 150 youth participants became stewards of 27 container gardens, gained basic knowledge of how to care for trees and learned to recognize tree damage and disease on roots, trunks, and leaves.	A comprehensive resource binder - including weekly lesson plans, summary of required resources and volunteer recruitment strategy - was developed to assist Parks and Recreation staff in replicating the program in the future.

Challenge	City Strategy to Address this Challenge	Citizen Engagement Strategy Developed by Summer VISTAs	Impact	Sustainability
<b>Improving quality of life and neighborhood development in the Francisville section of North Philadelphia</b>	<b>Greenworks</b> calls for “500 new acres of green public space in the city” and teaching Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards to ensure sustainability of these green investments.	Organize community clean-up efforts and develop database to assist volunteers and Francisville Neighborhood Development Corporation (FNDC) in their long-term tree tending strategy.	<b>Patrice Murphy and Keisha Smith</b> (1) Increased visibility of environmental stewardship in the community through continual maintenance of trees, Francisville Orchard and Senior Garden, and (2) Improved resource infrastructure for FNDC.	The president of FNDC will use the database compiled in Summer 2011 to more efficiently and effectively drive volunteer recruitment and deployment in the coming year.
<b>Supporting community members in stopping illegal activity and promoting public safety in Fairhill Park</b>	<b>The PhillyRising Collaborative</b> connects City leaders with community leaders to identify and solve problems.	Build on the momentum and relationships developed in the flagship PhillyRising Neighborhood to develop a network of committed community leaders to plan positive community events and create a town watch in the Fairhill section of Eastern North Philadelphia.	<b>Tiffany Perez</b> Coordinated community organizations, neighborhood residents and youth leaders to design and carry out positive, family friendly activities in Fairhill Park.	Individuals and organizations involved in summer activity planning have committed to continue collaborating into the future. A series of fall activities have already been scheduled.
<b>Creating a “Green Zone” in North Philadelphia by addressing neighborhood violence and decreased use and maintenance of Hunting Park</b>	<b>Greenworks</b> calls for Philadelphians to become conscious environmental stewards to ensure the development and use of green spaces.	Collaborate with community members and Parks and Recreation Staff on clean-ups, events, and job training to create a safer neighborhood through renovation, maintenance, and encouraged positive use of the park.	<b>Noel Deaza and Julia Hillengas</b> (1) Conducted community outreach to increase volunteer activity in Hunting Park, (2) Provided seven local youth with job skills and work experience through litter clean-ups and landscaping. Youth increased sightline elevation in Hunting Park to decrease illicit activities during the day.	A seasonal maintenance training program through Parks and Recreation will continue park maintenance. Youth volunteers will assist Parks and Recreation and PHS staff during the school year. Hunting Park United will employ and train youth next summer.
<b>Developing a stronger, sustainable infrastructure to meet hunger needs among Philadelphia’s aging population</b>	The <b>Mayor’s Commission on Aging</b> (MCOA) is charged to convene partners to support the creation of an “Age Friendly Philadelphia.”	Conduct a needs assessment of home delivered meals programs in order to inform action steps that will align volunteer engagement strategies with program needs.	<b>Margaret Ernst</b> (1) Surveyed the city’s largest home delivered meals programs about needs in several areas, including: facilities, volunteer engagement practices, funding and client capacity.	In Fall 2011, an Americorps VISTA, working closely with the MCOA, will develop volunteer engagement strategies in order to increase the city’s capacity to meet senior hunger need.