The human element in this program makes the difference—it adds great strength to the skills aspect. The youth receive structured, caring guidance as it pertains to their development as an individual as a student, and a human being.

Angela Wenger
Director of Education
Camden Aquarium
Recruiting

Recruitment strategies for your organization will depend on how you have decided to organize your program. Once again there are some questions to answer before you can move forward.

- Do you have a specific group of students in mind?
- Who are they and what's the best way to reach them?
- Where can you advertise in order to interest the students?
- Can you connect with community papers, hospitals, schools or in local coffee shops and malls?

Remember to consider the students who helped you with the program development focus groups. This group of students can help you to develop and pilot your first Youth Program. If you already have a Youth Program and are looking to strengthen it, still consider using this approach. If you are having trouble with recruitment gather the current students, and maybe even some students who have dropped the program. Talk to the students, ask them why retention and recruitment are down and find out how they can help you to make improvements.

The ACES summer recruitment process runs from late April through June.

April:
Youth Program staff visit partner high schools. Staff make presentations to small groups of students and distribute program information and application materials.

Current ACES students discuss the program with interested students from their schools.
We have limited enrollment to five schools and have worked hard to maintain relationships with these partners. Please Touch Museum decided to open the program only to public school students because they have fewer opportunities for educational enrichment than students in the surrounding private and parochial schools. With our museum’s future expansion, our enrollment protocol may change. We attempt to bring students from different neighborhoods together in our program. Many of our students have not spent significant time outside of their neighborhoods and their time at the museum gives them the opportunity to meet peers from very different parts of Philadelphia. Students also learn how to get around the city on public transportation during our program. We have made it a priority to include students with disabilities and students from diverse backgrounds into our program.

Selecting hours that work for students and museum

The hours selected must work for four parties involved: the museum, the students, their schools and their parents. Scheduling program time becomes a delicate balance especially for long-term programs like ACES. Students constantly need to adjust their time in the museum, no matter what program schedule you select. Since the students participate in our program for three to four years they often get involved in additional activities at school, church and with their families. Please Touch Museum has found that it is essential to be flexible with student and family needs.

After considerable trial and error, we decided to have the students come to the museum on Tuesday afternoons and Saturdays every week. Students meet their mentoring requirement by leaving school right before their last class of the day, one day per week.

We have found that this schedule is a strong fit for our museum as well as the schools, students and their families.
Saturdays are quiet in the office area of Please Touch Museum and the students are able to bring their energy into the museum without disturbing other staff. They are able to assist our Education Department when the gallery is short staffed and they consistently take the information gleaned from the mentors and apply it to their large group project. This schedule gives students the chance to work both under the close supervision of a staff person and then to experiment on their own with the ideas learned.

Students in front of a giant wooden piggy bank at Navy Pier, Chicago.  
Back row: Antonio Owens, Victoria Craig, John LaVenture, Brandon Jones, David Castillo, Joe Brevoort (Please Touch Museum staff), Shondell Ayala (Please Touch Museum staff), Francis Man-Khanu, Tiara Hudson. Front row standing: Dion Robinson, Davetta Fleming, Antonio Thomas, Tydell Edwards, Shannon Garrison. Front row sitting: Jennifer Arnold (Youth Program Manager), Jesus Lopez.

How big should our program be?

Always start small!

One of the most wonderful things about our program has been our ability to spend a lot of time and energy on a few students. Our program is holistic and we have found that 15 to 25 students is a perfect number for our museum. Each student is known on a personal level and we are able to engage students academically, in the work environment and on an emotional level.

There are several factors that make it necessary to limit program size so that we can provide a highly individualized program in Please Touch’s current facility. These factors include:

- The museum’s relatively small physical space.
- The limited number of full-time staff who can serve as mentors.
- The program’s emphasis on providing each student with highly individualized attention.
- The program’s long-term nature—students remain in ACES for three to four years.