FUNDING

Meeting the challenge of building community may seem daunting, but any steps in that direction create opportunities to build relationships and increase the purpose and significance of learning.

Firefox Level One Coursebook

Dion Robinson at the Batting Cages
Finding Funding

The museum’s long-term financial commitment to the program is essential. Interrupting or terminating a long-term youth program could be detrimental to the students. Each fiscal year, Please Touch creates a budget that is dedicated to the program that includes money for workshops, field trips, various other supplies and Youth Program staff. Please Touch Museum budgets $25,000 for the program plus the salary/benefits for our Youth Program staff. Funds to support the ACES program are sought from local foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Funding is essential to the continuation of our program. Please Touch Museum has consistently involved the students in budgeting and fundraising for projects and events. The Development and Youth Services departments work together to find appropriate funding streams for the students to pursue. ACES students write grants in sections, and work with staff to improve their writing skills and to clarify requests. In past years ACES have published calendars and attempted to collect one million pennies to fundraise for large community events and projects. Students working in our Development department research funders to apply to and familiarize themselves with fundraising software like Raiser’s Edge.
Involving students in the fundraising process is challenging, yet important. The students are the most invested in their program and gain tremendous skills from participating in the leg work towards funding the program. Students learn about Request For Proposals (RFP’s), the importance of meeting deadlines, and how to hone their writing skills by creating grant proposals. They enhance their creativity, network within the community, and articulate their need by designing and implementing fundraisers. Students gain a window into the non-profit business world through this process that is so vital to the survival of most youth programming. By involving the students in the survival of their programs they will begin to own their program, and be better prepared to make helpful and productive suggestions to ensure a long future for your youth program.

Although our Development and Youth Services team work together to find most of the funding, the students have a pivotal role in sustaining their program. When creating your

Youth Program, remember that students have opinions, ideas and the ability to keep the program going. Staff guidance and student energy can create a powerful resource that will impress funders and help students learn about what goes into running their program.

Student involvement in funding their programs must go beyond using students as an example of the wonderful things you have accomplished. They must be involved in the decision making and the usage of money earned. Students at Please Touch Museum are involved in budgeting funds raised. They decide how to spend our advertising budget and vote on most workshop topics coming to the museum. Students learn valuable information about computer spreadsheets and about doing a lot with limited resources. Depending on how you structure your program; involving your students in fundraising may not be essential to the success of your program. We find however that involving our students adds an additional layer that further reinforces their ownership of the program and their desire to participate.
STUDENT OWNERSHIP

"Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know you trust him."

Booker T. Washington
ACES reaches beyond an exclusive focus on work readiness to nurture the development of the “whole” student. Students participate in work-based learning opportunities in the arts, sciences and humanities; they become involved in challenging group projects and take part in extracurricular activities—trips to cultural institutions, colleges and historic sites, along with leadership and team-building projects. ACES opens up a world of exciting possibilities; a world that might remain off limits otherwise. According to Shawntel Singletary, Class of 2004, who is in her sophomore year of college at Lock Haven University:

"I wouldn’t be going to college if it wasn’t for the ACES program. That’s because ACES showed me that in order to get a real job in the real world you had to have a degree. Before I came to ACES I had bad grades, but I liked the program, and I wanted to keep my grades up to stay in it. Also, the people at Please Touch helped me a lot, with my coursework and other things. ACES has given me the opportunity to travel to places I wouldn’t have gone to otherwise. ACES exposed me to different cultures, and made me aware that, besides Philadelphia, there’s a bigger world out there, and that world is filled with opportunities."

Shawntel Singletary
Student Ownership

To maintain a high retention rate, ACES must implement strategies that encourage students to become fully invested in the program. Students should feel they “own” the program, perceive themselves and their peers as part of a team and hold the conviction that their three years in ACES will add up to something positive for the future.

To retain youth in the program, the museum provides incentives and support strategies that include:

- Recognizing accomplishments by posting students’ poetry, artwork, outstanding report cards, photographs, etc. in strategic sites throughout the museum’s work areas.
- Challenging students—mentally, physically, and creatively—by providing them with achievable, developmentally appropriate opportunities for meaningful accomplishment.
- Providing opportunities for self-expression that encompass a wide range of creative media—art, theater, writing, film, etc.—so that students gain a sense of mastery and an ever increasing knowledge about themselves and the world they live in.
- Using older ACES students as peer tutors and mentors for students whose commitment to the program is wavering.
- Providing museum memberships for students’ families.
- Organizing social events for students, parents and mentors.
- Providing trips and arranging special excursions that encourage group bonding.

One of the most effective ways of maintaining high retention levels is to constantly monitor each student’s progress, concerns and motivational level. This is accomplished by routinely arranging three-way meetings between the student, the staff mentor and the Youth Program Staff. During these meetings the student’s progress is evaluated, goals are revisited and sometimes reset, and concerns are aired. By maintaining regular contact with caring adults, ACES students work through problems and frustrations that might otherwise derail them. ACES’ payment plan is another important strategy for ensuring a high retention level.

During the school year, students receive an hourly stipend for:

- The regularly scheduled ACES work week—nine hours per week.
- Up to an additional 20 mentor-approved hours every two weeks—these hours enable students to complete their work-based learning projects.

During the intensive summer program, students work 20 hours per week and are paid $5.15 per hour. The stipend and hourly wage are of great significance in ensuring students’ commitment to the program: in addition to providing a level of financial independence, students interpret financial compensation as a validation of worth. Students gain a realistic sense of the work experience from being paid. Financial compensation says they are being taken seriously as employees-in-training, motivates a strong work ethic and conveys the museum’s appreciation of a job well done.

Institutional Capacity and Commitment

When considering replicating this program, each Institution must realistically assess how many students it can successfully serve. At Please Touch Museum, the number of students in the program is limited to avoid overtaxing our institutional capacity. The modest size ensures that each student receives highly individualized attention.

Please Touch Museum’s senior staff views the ACES program as a mainstay of our Community Programs department. They recognize that ACES is a fertile ground for applying the museum’s mission and core values. Senior staff are also involved in helping the program obtain funding and in-kind support. Members of management also serve as mentors.
Staff has helped organize student community service projects and other ACES projects. Staff input has helped the students think about alternative and creative ways to complete tasks, making the ACES experience more interesting and unique. The museum's full investment and commitment in the ACES program is demonstrated daily by the level of attention that students receive from senior management and other Please Touch Museum staff.

The museum's internal management team recognizes the distinctiveness of ACES as a museum-wide program. This program is a model for other children's museums. By adopting a similar approach, programs in other museums can obtain the same positive results. ACES is successful at Please Touch Museum due to the creativity, energy, flexibility and commitment of the ACES students and their mentors. Student involvement stimulates our staff to stretch themselves and take a closer look at how their everyday duties can take on a new meaning when seen through a new set of eyes.

Students are involved in many museum projects and initiatives. Strong mentors involve students in long-term projects important to the museum. For example, together Anne Svonavec, Community Programs Manager and Angel Collazo, Sophomore ACES student, attended many community meetings to develop outreach programs for Latino communities in Philadelphia. Anne worked with Angel to make sure he had a vital role in the meetings and this experience stayed with Angel long after the project was completed.

"I liked the... meetings, because they talked about my culture. I also liked meeting new people and having fun at the same time."  

Angel Collazo

ACES students dance outside the museum with a band that plays often at Please Touch Museum, "Fandango." Left to right: Ileana Alicea, Bkeema Brooks, and Antonio Thomas.

Angel's confidence in these meetings was vital for him because he struggled in school and had trouble reading and writing. Please Touch Museum became a consistent, safe place where he could be successful and contribute his skills. Angel enriched the meetings on community needs and he fostered his artistic talent by creating the drawings for a hopscotch mat, elaborately decorated with images of things native to Puerto Rico.

What kind of space is required within the museum?

Space is an important consideration for all youth programming. If you are going to create a Youth Program, it is essential to dedicate at least a small space to it. Students need a place to store their possessions and to be able to gather for meetings, program evaluation, and work time. Please Touch Museum has gradually enhanced the space available to the students over the past ten years.