



LAKE EFFECT LEADERS

Lake Effect Leaders Host Site Projects and Descriptions 2022-2023

Focus Area: Economic Opportunity

Priority Area: Employment/Workforce Development

Erie Neighborhood Growth Partnership (ENGP) - Erie, PA - (1):

The goal for this position is to build capacity for the Ground Corps and Green Team programs that will help the City and its neighborhood organizations confront a brownfield crisis in the form of vacant and abandoned residential sites. Additionally, these programs will connect young adults (generally students transitioning out of high school) to livable wage jobs, training in environmental fields and remediation of hazardous materials, and leadership development. The VISTA will help create the foundation for the Ground Corps and Green Team programs by identifying and applying for funding sources, connecting to potential skill/ trade partners, working alongside Neighborhood Organizations (members of the ENGP), create a volunteer base for the programs, and develop a plan for recruitment of residents to be engaged in this work.

Erie Together/Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) - Erie, PA - (3):

Erie Together works to achieve economic stability for everyone in Erie County by facilitating cross-sector alignment and collaboration to help more kids become successful adults, more people secure jobs and more families become self-sufficient. To help ensure more young people grow up to become successful adults and more individuals can secure family sustaining employment, our VISTA will build Erie Together's capacity by developing, leading and/or supporting cross-sector career-connected learning initiatives, expanded student connections with employers, efforts to increase broad community engagement, and methods to diversify relevant funding streams.

Mission Empower - Erie, PA - (2):

To ensure that people with disabilities break the cycle of poverty by becoming competitively employed even for individuals with more significant barriers to employment, the VISTA will build capacity through Mission Empower's Mission Employment program services within the PRE-ETS services and Discovery programs by assisting staff to create a marketing/recruitment plan for program participants and potential employers, develop outreach presentations for program participants and potential employers, create a database of potential employers and their employment needs to be matched to program participants strengths, and assist staff to diversify funding streams for Mission Employment services.

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants/Erie Field Office (USCRI) - Erie, PA - (1)

It is well-documented that refugees and immigrants are critical to the economic strength of Erie: reversing the city's population decline, expanding home ownership, and driving growth in the workforce of northwestern Pennsylvania. This demographic makes up the only sector of the population in this region that is growing. Today, USCRI Erie is the only refugee-serving agency in the area that still conducts the full range of resettlement services. Volunteer support for these programs normally comes in various forms such as English language conversation partners, sorting donations for winter clothing and professional clothing, soliciting donations for hygiene supplies, or making personal connections with potential employers. VISTA support will help USCRI Erie to re-activate volunteers who have lapsed since the pandemic, and recruit new volunteers who will help to get people jobs and keep them employed through these difficult times.

Priority Area: Housing/Neighborhood Revitalization

Crawford County Mental Health Awareness Program (CHAPS) - Meadville, PA - (2):

The goal of this project is to help ensure that transition age youth (ages 16-24) experiencing mental illness and/or housing instability have opportunities for safe and stable housing and recovery driven support which will assist them in breaking the cycle of poverty and improve their overall wellness. The TAY VISTA project will enhance the Host Home, Pathfinders, and YHDP programs in areas such as programming, marketing, and outreach. In addition to these areas of development, VISTA can contribute by building program capacity through connecting with community resources, including recruiting volunteers and mentors, connecting with area employers, and establishing ongoing referral sources. VISTA placement could support Pathfinders program sustainability by researching current models, and assessing outcomes for future funding sources.

Erie City Moms - Erie, PA - (1):

Erie City Moms supports Mothers figures in at-risk and marginalized populations in their quest to reach personal and professional goals that improve family stability. Our goal is to improve housing stability for Mother-led households and increase homeownership (currently at 51% of city residents according to the US Census Bureau). Based on the findings of our research, we will begin partnering with local realtors, landlords, neighborhood and community watch directors, and the city government. This VISTA member will build capacity for this initiative by researching best practices to support clients of the program, creating relationships with local stakeholders to build program supports, and designing volunteer recruitment and management mechanisms.

Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA) - Erie, PA - (1):

The Authority plans to apply for funding through HUD, Housing and Urban Development's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes, PA Department of Health, and other available sources. The purpose of this program is to address health and safety issues within the homes of families living in poverty. The goal of this position is to build a process and system that better connects residents with housing needs related to health issues in underserved areas of the city.

This will be done by utilizing data already collected and furthering collaborative efforts with neighborhood groups, community organizations and health providers in the area. The VISTA will help create the process to better identify funding sources, program partners, and the capacity needed to move this initiative forward.

Mercy Center for Women - Erie, PA - (3):

With MCW, individuals receive the educational, financial, and emotional support they need to help break the cycle of poverty. The Mentor Corps VISTA project will build capacity for Mercy Center for Women by developing community resources and other support required to sustain and expand the past success of MCW's housing program. The Mercy Center for Women project goal is to provide individualized support services in a safe, healthy environment enabling graduates to move into safe and affordable housing, giving them the skill sets so they do not relapse into homelessness. VISTA activities include participant outreach, program development and delivery, partnership development and procurement of financial resources.

Our West Bayfront (OWB) - Erie, PA - (1):

The Our West Bayfront VISTA will develop the OWB Community Stewards Program to empower community leaders of all ages. The program will identify, support, and expand the number of community leaders who are equipped through training and resources to provide support directly to neighbors in need, and to organize residents to respond to issues facing the West Bayfront's low-income community. In addition to researching examples from other communities, the VISTA will work collaboratively with the strong network of partners in the West Bayfront including neighborhood watch groups, schools, and the City of Erie, to design, seek funding, and implement the first stages of this important new initiative.

Priority Area: Bridging the Digital Divide

Priority Area: Other

Allegheny College: Community Development & Economic Revitalization - Meadville, PA - (2):

The primary focus of the proposed VISTA assignment will be on the Meadville community and broader Crawford County area. The AmeriCorps VISTA member will work with the Executive Director of the Community Development Corporation (CDC) to support revitalization efforts, reinvestment initiatives, and economic growth in the Meadville community. The VISTA member will work to leverage the resources of partner institutions such as Allegheny College and the City to ultimately contribute to the economic development goals of the 2013 City of Meadville Comprehensive Plan and the City of Meadville Strategic Management Planning Program Report (Chapter 6: Economic and Community Development). These goals include developing strategies for downtown revitalization, blight reduction, and tax base growth and stabilization and will confront some of Meadville's biggest challenges in a sustainable way. The VISTA member will conduct research, develop local awareness efforts, complete a feasibility study and more to build capacity for this work.

Focus Area: Healthy Futures

Priority Area: Access to Health Care

Crawford County Drug and Alcohol Executive Commission (CCDAEC) + Crawford Health Improvement Coalition - Meadville, PA - (1):

The VISTA program will give priority to projects that meet health needs for economically disadvantaged individuals. This project addresses the Healthy Futures priority of the Lake Effect Leaders/AmeriCorps VISTA program. By increasing vaccination rates and thus decreasing health consequences and deaths from the COVID virus as well as its other initiatives, this project increases overall health in the community and the overall economic stability of the community. The project would also address additional health issues mitigated by vaccine efforts and treatment including HPV and other STIs. Moreover, efforts to enhance both COVID and other vaccination campaigns will stimulate increases in all types of vaccinations in youth populations and increase collaborations between the grantee and the community agencies and organizations for vaccination efforts and other health related campaigns/endeavors.

Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) + Meals on Wheels - Erie, PA - (1):

GECAC Meals on Wheels serves to address these needs by providing home-delivered meals to homebound individuals living within Erie County. The Meals on Wheels model is based on having volunteers deliver meals to homebound individuals' (particularly seniors) homes. This model has been proven to impact the meal recipient's health and nutrition. The VISTA in this project will develop a formalized volunteer recruitment, training and retention program for GECAC's Meals on Wheels program. Increasing the volunteer capacity of GECAC's Meals on Wheels program will directly impact the number of days per week that meals are being delivered. Additionally it will increase the program's capacity for taking on more MOW clients. Currently, since staff are delivering meals, the ability to open new consumers is limited.

Priority Area: Opioid Prevention and Recovery

Gannon University: Opioid Prevention Project - Erie, PA - (3):

An AmeriCorps VISTA member will be placed in the Morosky College of Health Professions and Science and will marshal resources that connect Gannon University students and faculty with an opioid and drug campaign developed in partnership with the Erie County Department of Health. In collaboration with faculty, students and the Health Department, the VISTA member will also directly train faculty and students on how to utilize campaign materials to raise awareness. They will also be tasked with upkeep of the virtual, educational materials created by the previous VISTA positions for campus leaders to educate others at a faster rate. This partnership has resources to measure impact of said campaign through tracking the pounds of medicine disposed of properly on campus. In addition, as part of a grant awarded to the Erie County Department of Health, the University of Pittsburgh is creating evaluation tools to measure impact of this program. The project will also utilize website analytics from the Script to Scrap website.

Priority Area: Food Access

Bayfront East Side Taskforce - Erie, PA - (2):

The BEST Fresh Foods Initiative VISTA will work to improve the access our low income residents have to fresh, local, and healthy foods. This VISTA project will work directly with residents to develop solutions to the lack of desired foods available to our neighborhood. The BEST VISTA will research ways other communities have overcome these challenges and develop long term solutions. Our neighborhood has a high rate of poverty, low access to transportation, and exists in a food desert. The BEST VISTA will work to overcome these challenges and better provide for our residents. The BEST VISTA will benefit from working with an organization with a history of success in developing projects that make this the BEST neighborhood to live, work, and play while being given freedom to bring new ideas to our residents. The anticipated results of this food insecurity project are that the residents of the Historic East Bayfront neighborhood will have more access to foods they desire.

Erie Downtown Partnership - Erie, PA - (1):

Our VISTA project will aim to implement a SNAP matching program at the Downtown Farmers Market that not only breaks down barriers to food access, but also lessens the financial burden of purchasing healthy food for those in our affected area. This is a brand-new program, the need for which was determined last year when surveying those that attended our Farmers Market. This program will provide access to fresh produce to some of Erie's lowest income populations and will also provide individuals with preexisting conditions that utilize farmers market vouchers a convenient spot to redeem the vouchers and access foods that fit into their prescribed diets. The VISTA member will be tasked with developing project plans, designing outreach efforts, and building feedback mechanisms to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) - Erie, PA - (2):

The Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) seeks to identify challenges and advocate for opportunities that create a successful, sustainable, equitable and secure local food system in Erie County and the surrounding region (Erie Foodshed). The FPAC VISTA will continue to focus on building the capacity of this young coalition, enhancing the efficacy of local efforts that target food insecurity among impoverished populations. The VISTA's duties will include leading a Communications Team to maintain social media pages aimed at building local food system literacy, scheduling and hosting guest lectures, and publishing periodic newsletters; hosting community forums and other community engagement events; and collecting and aggregating data to determine priority areas in our food system and define the direction of future FPAC endeavors, including a comprehensive food system analysis. This increase in communication amongst food system stakeholders and relevant, transparent data will allow for more impactful, inclusive, and comprehensive work within the local food system and will reduce redundancies between organizations.

Meadville Market House - Meadville, PA - (1):

The goal of our VISTA project is to increase food benefit usage inside the Market House and at our outdoor farmer's market. The Market House and farmer's market is located downtown, in

walking distance of many neighborhoods; in addition, we are one of just a few stores in town that offer fresh and local foods. Food benefit programs such as SNAP and WIC are available to support adults and families who may be experiencing poverty; we can offer an accessible location with fresh foods where people can use their benefits. Our VISTA will work with existing support organizations and other community groups to increase awareness of the Market House, build out our “market money” program to be easily used, and ultimately increase the number of people buying local foods with their benefits. The VISTA member will be tasked with increasing community awareness of the program, implementing and developing the Market Money Program, and building volunteer capacity to aid the Friends of the Market House program.

Mercyhurst University: Tower Garden Initiative - Erie, PA - (3):

Our project focuses on increasing healthy food access as well as nutrition education through the TGLP (Tower Garden Lending Program) to children, youth, and their families within the USDA determined food deserts of Erie County. In summary, the VISTA member will ensure continuity of the TGLP during and after the member service year so the alignment and fulfillment of the community need can be met and sustained beyond VISTA resources. Additionally, the member will further develop the relationships with local schools, particularly Erie’s Community Schools, including an ad hoc committee that convenes to collect feedback, align programming with individual school needs assessment data, and inform effective and integrated practices with measurable results.

Focus Area: Education

Priority Area: School Readiness

Early Connections - Erie, PA - (1):

The AmeriCorps VISTA will expand the capacity of two community initiatives served by Early Connections, increasing the number of quality child care opportunities for children from families in poverty, and reaching more child care workers so that they may obtain higher credentials through the Registered Apprenticeship Program in the Northwest Region. The initiatives address poverty by improving the impact of the number of children from low-income families served by quality child care, and increasing the number of opportunities for child care staff to improve their credentials. The VISTA member will be responsible for expanding the reach of these programs by creating additional community partnerships, developing data tracking mechanisms for program analysis and fund development, and improving the communities understanding of the aforementioned programs.

Priority Area: College Access for Low-Income Students

Allegheny College: NAACP Youth Post-Secondary Access Program - Meadville, PA - (4):

The Allegheny College VISTA will assist in breaking generational poverty in the Meadville area by creating a Post-Secondary Education Access Program. This program takes a dual approach to youth mentoring and development. The VISTA will first recruit and train college student mentors, empowering them to support the educational plans of at-risk, economically disadvantaged youth in Crawford County. Student mentors, many of whom will be

first-generation students themselves, will assist teenagers in discovering next step educational opportunities after high school. Mentors will assist teenagers in navigating the college preparation and enrollment process, the discovery of gap year programs that would provide educational opportunities and stipends, jobs that provide educational support, trade-school offerings that advance skills and intellectual knowledge, and life skill training.

Edinboro University - Erie, PA - (1):

EU understands the importance and complexities of the transition from high school to college. EBORO-Teach will take a proactive and positive approach to helping students get the resources needed and to build on-campus support since these components are lacking for first generation college students. The EU VISTA program goal is to ensure first-generation college high school students receive the educational, social, and emotional support they need to help them break the cycle of poverty. EU will infuse ESD and CSD with an array of services and supports to increase the academic achievement of every student during the entire academic life cycle from planning to application, acceptance and graduation from university. Throughout the project duration VISTA resources will be utilized to assess current program data, recruit and sustain volunteers, and create new, sustainable programs and community partnerships.

Priority Area: K-12 Success

Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT) + Dafmark Creative Arts Center (DCAC) - Erie, PA - (1):

This project aims to increase k-12 success in low-achieving schools by providing high quality arts education in a safe, structured, after school setting. We know that high quality arts programming can lead to positive behavioral and academic outcomes and therefore prepare students for future career success. The Community Arts VISTA will help to ensure that children who live in economically disadvantaged households and attend under performing schools receive the educational, social, and emotional support they need to help break the cycle of poverty. The Community Arts VISTA project will build the capacity for 2 organizations, Erie Center for Arts and Technology & Dafmark Creative Arts Center. Specifically, the VISTA will build capacity by implementing best practice research, connecting with community partners to establish a network of volunteers, identifying and establishing new funding sources, and developing strategies for recruiting new youth.

Gannon University: Mother Teresa Academy - Erie, PA - (2):

The goal of this project is to help ensure that Mother Teresa Academy builds and sustains an effective after-school program for Kindergarten-8th grade students. Mother Teresa Academy (MTA) offers 200 students access to a K-8 private education for inner-city children. MTA is a mission-based school offering a 90% rebate through individual donations. Over the span of three years, the AmeriCorps VISTA will work to identify after-school program needs and develop targeted community partnerships to address the needs. A leadership team consisting of MTA employees, GU employees and other stakeholder(s) will guide and track the development of this after-school model.

YMCA of Meadville - Meadville, PA - (1):

The Meadville Family YMCA will focus on school readiness and learning loss for economically disadvantaged children. The goal of this program is to decrease the achievement gap and increase student opportunity while boosting self-confidence and engaging families in the education process. The YMCA Scholars Academy program works to address summer learning loss for children living in under-resourced areas. The goal of the YMCA Scholar program is to enhance overall youth development and academic performance. The overall program design includes: Strong partnerships between YMCAs, schools and community partners, serving scholars at schools with the Title I designation or with a significant number of families with limited financial resources, providing scholars access to a positive developmental experience through both an academic-focused program and enrichments that strengthen social-emotional and physical development, focusing on scholars in grades K-6th and maintaining a minimum 1:12 staff to scholar ratio for enrichment activities and 2:24 academics.

YMCA of Greater Erie - Erie, PA - (1):

The Y's Teen Program focuses its programming on augmenting the academic needs and interests of the students. With parental permission, Y staff have access to the District's Infinite Campus and can see in real time individual student grades, behaviors and school attendance. The Teen Center's robust programming is always evolving as the needs and interests of the teens change, participation and attendance ebb and flow based upon season and school commitments etc. In addition to the Leadership & Career Pathways, the Teen Center offers programs in culinary arts, cosmetology, home repair, financial literacy, youth & government, dance, art and music production. VISTA activities include developing a recruitment strategy for participants from target schools; identify and overcome barriers to participation, building a community database of potential partners for volunteers, guest speakers, job shadow experiences, campus tours, resume building, interview skills, financial skills etc., identifying needs of the teens and community resources for fulfillment; align community resources as directed and more.

Priority Area: Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM)

Gannon University: Feeding Minds STEM Program - Erie, PA - (3):

We propose to engage a VISTA member to create program facilitation plans for a suite of informal STEM learning programs called Feeding Minds at Erie City middle schools and to establish a consistent digital and social media presence to improve communication and the effectiveness of digital informal STEM learning experiences. These high-impact interventions will reflect an advanced academic curriculum that combines STEM education with university resources using an innovative delivery method to increase student engagement, career awareness and workforce growth. The overarching goal of these interventions is to address the academic achievement gap for below grade-level students at these middle schools so they are better prepared to achieve family sustaining careers in science, technology engineering and math. The goal of establishing a digital and social media presence is to more effectively communicate with current participants, reach new participants, and communicate the impact of our interventions to the community.

Crawford Central School District - Meadville, PA (1):

The VISTA Project Goal is to build the capacity to partner Allegheny College students at Allegheny with a struggling MASH student in order to support the academic deficiencies of the struggling high school student so that he/she is able to pass the state assessments. Our goal is to identify what is lacking, comprehension or motivation, then help the student by assisting them with extended instruction, encouragement, and by offering multiple levels of support. Additionally, this project will work to build support systems for the academic progress of students so that they may graduate from high school. The VISTA will work with counselors to identify students who are at risk for academic failure and create a process of evaluating student growth, work with LINK Crew teachers to create programming that will meet the needs of students, develop a sustainable schedule for tutoring, work with principals to develop communication about assignments and concepts needed, design online tutorial programs that students can access outside of the mentoring program, and create a communication plan to provide updates to parents.

United Way of Erie County (UWEC) - Erie, PA - (1):

This VISTA project will build capacity at the existing and future community schools throughout Erie County by supporting the alignment of community resources with the specific needs of students, their families and their neighborhoods to ensure students are academically successful and families are self-sufficient. The VISTA will address poverty by building the capacity of our local Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Raising Readers, to increase the number of low-income Erie County students who are reading proficiently by third grade. The VISTA will work to build capacity around school readiness goals of kindergarten transitions, on-time kindergarten registration, and immunization support.

Priority Area: Career and Technical Education

Community Access Media - Erie, PA - (1):

Our goal is to create a program that benefits the impoverished youth and young adults (ages 13-22) living in Erie by providing them the free training and access to the skills that will allow them to become gainfully employed in the media production field. After they have gained the skills, our final goal would be to connect them with employment at one of the various media companies or even a nonprofit organization in Erie where they can put their skills to use. The VISTA's activities will be instrumental in building the capacity for CAM to facilitate this program in our community. The VISTA will be in charge of data research, curriculum development, organizational partnerships and youth recruitment, volunteer recruitment and management, grant writing and gaining funds for the program, and program evaluation. Once the groundwork for this program has been laid, volunteers and CAM staff members will ensure its future sustainability. The partnerships that are created with other local organizations and the impact being made on Erie youth and young adults will highlight the program's success and warrant its impact on addressing poverty for years to come.

Strong Vincent Middle School: GO Trade - Erie, PA - (1):

The overall goal of GO Trade is to increase the amount of SVMS students enrolled in CTE programs at Erie High School. The VISTA will accomplish this goal with a multi-pronged approach. First and foremost, the VISTA will be responsible for developing the GO Trade program. The current Community School team is piloting the GO Trade program over the 2021-2022 school with great success. However, with the VISTA member added to our team, the Community School Team will offer 18 different afterschool programs for GO Trade, paralleling the Erie High School Career and Technical program. The VISTA will accomplish this by building relationships with community partners who will volunteer their time and talent in their respective field. Secondly, the VISTA member will also recruit SVMS students to enroll in the GO Trade program. By building relationships with students and being a present face at Open Houses, Parent Teacher Conferences, student lunches, assemblies, and more, the VISTA member will maintain a robust roster of students actively involved in the GO Trade program. Thirdly, the VISTA will work collaboratively with the SVMS guidance counselors and the EHS CTE program coordinator to advertise the CTE program to current eighth graders and streamline the application process.

YMCA of Erie County - Erie, PA - (1):

The VISTA will work with the YMCA Teen Center Director to fully develop a robust leadership and career pathways program that provides post-secondary career, leadership and educational enrichment opportunities for participants through strengthened collaborations with schools, employers, educational institutions, trades and military service. The VISTA will identify collaborators to provide additional student support systems as identified by staff. The VISTA will work to engage community volunteers to augment staffing structure and serve more youth. The VISTA will establish strategies to engage parents in related activities. The VISTA will develop a measurement tool to demonstrate knowledge gains; develop a “success road map” to identify steps required to obtain high school graduation and post-secondary education or employment and research and secure additional funding needs as determined by the Y staff.

Focus Area: Environmental Stewardship

Priority Area: Community Resilience

City of Erie: Urban Environment - Erie, PA - (1):

This VISTA project will align with the focus area of Environmental Stewardship with a priority to build community resilience. Through building data collection methods in the City’s 2030 district and the City’s street tree canopy, conducting outreach to volunteers, developing a sustainability strategy for the City of Erie, building capacity for the Urban Forest Committee and increasing the City’s capacity to leverage more sustainable energy sources for buildings and transportation, the city will experience reduced air pollution, reduced carbon dioxide in the air, reduced stormwater runoff and flooding, reduced urban heat impacts - all of which currently disproportionately impacts individuals experiencing poverty in the City’s urban core neighborhoods. The City of

Erie VISTA position will build capacity for sustainability projects throughout the City of Erie in order to reduce the effects of climate change on the city of Erie's most vulnerable residents.