



## LAKE EFFECT LEADERS

### Lake Effect Leaders Host Site Projects and Descriptions 2023-2024

#### **Focus Area: Economic Opportunity**

#### **Priority Area: Employment/Workforce Development**

##### **1. Allegheny College, Meadville PA (2)**

**Goal:** The primary focus of this Allegheny College VISTA project will be on the Meadville community and broader Crawford County area. The AmeriCorps VISTA member will work with the Executive Director of the 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 of Meadville to ultimately contribute to the economic development goals of the 2013 City of Meadville Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Management Planning Program Report (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. Some of the VISTA member's duties will include seeking and leveraging downtown investment opportunities, establishing a CDC website and social media presence, completing a feasibility study for Park Avenue streetscape improvements, and networking and establishing partnerships.

**Website:** [www.allegheny.edu](http://www.allegheny.edu)

##### **2. Erie's Black Wall Street, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** This AmeriCorps VISTA project will align with the focus area of Economic Opportunity with a priority in employment/workforce development and increasing accessibility to resources specifically for Erie's African American/Black and minority population. EBWS has designed workshops to increase knowledge, engagement and participation to create opportunities for sustainable change at the interpersonal, familial and community levels. Workshops include credit education, home ownership, entrepreneurship, money management and budgeting, and other local general resources. The goal of this VISTA project is to increase documented and published information about the entrepreneurs that EBWS serves, assist in the launching of new sustainable programs, grow the reach of the existing EBWS programs, and develop a grants database and calendar for applications. These capacity building activities are intended to support and enhance the program delivery model and respond to EBWS's goal of increasing, expanding and enhancing services in order to address pressing community needs.

**Website:** [www.eriesblackwallstreet.org](http://www.eriesblackwallstreet.org)

### **3. Groundwork Erie, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** To build climate resilience in Erie, Groundwork will develop employment opportunities for 14-24 year old residents in urban farming, land remediation, and green infrastructure.

Developing a workforce of mushroom farmers addresses vocational development for employees who will gain skills in biology and agriculture as well as competencies in entrepreneurial practice. The project would place the VISTA member between Groundwork's work-force development and biological and biomedical researchers at Gannon University who will aid and advise Groundwork regarding the applications of mushrooms in the economic and health-care systems. The VISTA member will identify pipelines from existing city programs to mushroom farming training and employment opportunities developed by Groundwork. The VISTA will expand the awareness of mushroom farming employment opportunities with Erie school's after school programs and vocational training programs. The VISTA will work with Gannon University faculty and Groundwork mushroom farmers to identify target areas where mushrooms will flourish within the neighbors, identify local businesses to sell the mushrooms, and communicate and publicize alternative mushroom applications for production and sale.

**Website:** <https://groundworkusa.org/network/groundwork-erie/>

### **4. McLane Church, Edinboro PA (1)**

**Goal:** This AmeriCorps VISTA project will align with the focus area of Economic Opportunity with a priority being employment and workforce development. The goal of this VISTA project is to create a program to bring workforce training opportunities and wraparound support services to the non-metro poor and underserved rural populations of southern Erie County, PA. The VISTA member will connect with businesses to discuss employment needs, research curriculums/teachers to meet the training needs of the business, create online applications for CareerLink programs, promote training opportunities on social media and other online venues, coordinate social services needed for trainees, and research transportation issue solutions for the rural areas.

**Website:** <https://mclanechurch.org/>

### **5. Mission Empower, Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** The goal of this VISTA project is to ensure that people with disabilities break the cycle of poverty by becoming competitively employed, including 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.

**Website:** [www.missionempower.org](http://www.missionempower.org)

## **Priority Area: Housing**

### **1. Crawford County Mental Health Awareness Program, Inc. (CHAPS), Meadville PA (2)**

**Goal:** This VISTA project will align with the focus area of Economic Opportunity with a priority being housing. 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 Transition Age Youth (TAY) VISTA project will build capacity for three pilot programs at CHAPS: Host Homes, Pathfinders and Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). The VISTA will build program capacity through Host Family and volunteer recruitment, fundraising efforts, community awareness, networking and strengthening relationships with community partners, tracking outcomes, and exploring funding opportunities.

**Website:** [www.chapsinc.org](http://www.chapsinc.org)

### **2. Community Shelter Services, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** This AmeriCorps VISTA project goal is to assist CSS in creating accessible and actionable data from which the agency can plan for future needs and goals. This includes assisting the Lighting the Candle housing program by collecting and organizing client information and identifying potential resources to aid with program goals, working to identify needs of our properties such as identifying funding and volunteer services to support maintenance needs, and creating a volunteer database and program to accomplish future projects. The population served through this project are individuals who are homeless and those at risk for homelessness in Erie County, specifically the City of Erie which includes the poorest zip code in the nation (16501).

**Website:** [www.communityshelter.org](http://www.communityshelter.org)

### **3. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** 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. However, during the critical period immediately after arrival, factors such as quality of housing or employment can impact whether refugees choose to stay in Erie, how long it will take them to become financially self-sufficient, and how well children will do in school, which can have life-long and even generational implications. The VISTA position at USCRI will be to re-shape community outreach for volunteer recruitment and management with a primary focus on acquisition and preparation of affordable housing for refugee resettlement in a rapidly transitioning landscape.

**Website:** <https://refugees.org/uscri-erie>

## Focus Area: Healthy Futures

### Priority Area: Access to Health Care

#### **1. Gannon University, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** This AmeriCorps VISTA project will align with the focus area of Healthy Futures by addressing the issue of tobacco related disability and premature death which is more predominant in individuals and families who are economically disadvantaged. The VISTA member will increase awareness of tobacco use risks through targeted health communication campaigns, research best practices and evaluate current programs and initiatives, collaborate with Gannon and community partners in advocating for policy change and adequate funding, identify grant funding sources to support tobacco-free lifestyles in adolescents and young adults, and track outcomes.

**Website:** [www.gannon.edu](http://www.gannon.edu)

### Priority Area: Food Security

#### **1. Allegheny College, Meadville PA (1)**

**Goal:** The Allegheny College VISTA member for Food Security and Resource Coordination will build the capacity for the campus to address systemic campus food insecurity among the student population in a more systematic and coordinated manner. With an approach that includes data collection on students' measurable gains in food security through research, development, and a build out of interventional and educational programming, the VISTA member will ultimately bring more individuals out of poverty on campus. The member will also be another community leader at the local food coalition roundtable in terms of building a stronger network of support between the college and among the community organizations who are addressing gaps in the food system and supporting more food insecurity locally.

**Website:** [www.allegheny.edu](http://www.allegheny.edu)

#### **2. Bayfront East Side Taskforce (BEST), Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** 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.

**Website:** [www.besterie.org](http://www.besterie.org)

#### **3. Gannon University, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** Gannon, like many colleges and universities across the US, has seen a substantial rise in the needs of students and their families, particularly when it comes to accessing healthy and

affordable food. Food security is a fundamental need to ensure student success at the collegiate level. A VISTA will be instrumental in increasing awareness of food insecurity on campus, researching best practices for on-campus food pantries, establishing sustainable processes to support campus food drives and innovative food delivery systems, raising funds, and tracking outcomes.

**Website:** [www.gannon.edu](http://www.gannon.edu)

#### **4. Meadville Market House, Meadville PA (1)**

**Goal:** The goal of this VISTA project is to increase food benefit usage inside the Market House and at our outdoor farmers' market. The Market House and farmers' market is located downtown, within walking distance of many neighborhoods. The Market House is 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; the Market House offers an accessible location with fresh foods where people can use their benefits. The VISTA will work with existing support organizations and other community groups to increase awareness of the Market House, build out the market token program to be easily used, and ultimately increase the number of people buying local foods with their assistance funds.

**Website:** [www.meadvillemarkethouse.org](http://www.meadvillemarkethouse.org)

### **Focus Area: Education**

#### **Priority Area: College access and success**

##### **1. PennWest Edinboro: E-BORO Teach, Edinboro PA (2)**

**Goal:** PennWest Edinboro 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 PennWest Edinboro VISTA program goal is to ensure first-generation college and high school students receive the educational, social, and emotional support they need to help them break the cycle of poverty. PennWest Edinboro will infuse participating school districts 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.

**Website:** <https://www.pennwest.edu>

## **Priority Area: School readiness**

### **1. Early Connections, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** 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.

**Website:** [www.earlyconnectionserie.org](http://www.earlyconnectionserie.org)

## **Priority Area: Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

### **1. STRONG GO Trade, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The overall goal of GO Trade is to increase the number of Strong Vincent Middle School (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 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.

**Website:** [www.gannon.edu/eried.org](http://www.gannon.edu/eried.org)

## **Priority Area: K-12 success**

### **1. United Way of Erie County, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** This VISTA project will address poverty by helping to remove barriers to learning that many students in Erie's 16 Community Schools face. Their work will focus on building the frameworks needed to ensure sustainable strategy implementation in the following areas: attendance improvement through expanding safer walking routes, vision correction by expanding mobile vision clinics and implementing the Vision To Learn model, and out-of-school time programming by researching best practices, developing a localized framework, and supporting the initial implementation of programming.

**Website:** [www.unitedwayerie.org](http://www.unitedwayerie.org)

## **Focus Area: Environmental Stewardship**

### **Priority Area: Awareness & Stewardship**

#### **1. City of Erie Government, Erie PA (2)**

**Goal:** 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.

**Website:** [www.cityof.erie.pa.us](http://www.cityof.erie.pa.us)

#### **2. Our West Bayfront, Erie PA (1)**

**Goal:** The Our West Bayfront VISTA will develop and implement a neighborhood sustainability strategy to enhance our neighborhood environmental assets and reduce harmful impacts on the environment. The VISTA will work collaboratively with neighborhood residents and community partners to develop systems to assess and prioritize improvements to the neighborhood tree canopy and sidewalk conditions. The VISTA will implement strategies to reduce litter, to increase energy efficiency in the neighborhood's older properties, and to calm traffic to promote pedestrian activity. The VISTA will also develop outreach activities to enhance understanding of the environmental assets of this urban community ultimately improving individual quality of life and the region's environmental future.

**Website:** [www.ourwestbayfront.org](http://www.ourwestbayfront.org)