



Lake Effect Leaders Host Site Projects and Descriptions 2024-2025

Focus Area: Economic Opportunity

Priority Area: Employment/Workforce Development

Common Roots, Meadville PA (1)

Goal: Community Roots' mission is to develop sustainable, permanently affordable homes that build wealth, security, and community for low-income Meadville residents. As part of this mission, Common Roots is establishing an innovative workforce development program in partnership with Sturdy Boots, a social enterprise, community-minded construction company partially owned by Common Roots. This program focuses on helping low-income workers, especially individuals in recovery, develop skills and find purposeful work in the building trades by contributing to Common Roots' mission. The goal of this VISTA project would be to identify stable revenue streams for the program and to build programmatic infrastructure. The VISTA member will help create workforce development strategies through researching and analyzing the workforce development ecosystem, and researching best practices in program design. The VISTA member will create sustainable grassroots fundraising infrastructure through campaigns and fundraising events.

<https://commonrootspa.org/>

Erie's Black Wall Street, Erie PA (2)

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. The VISTA project will focus on workshop/program implementation, spotlighting entrepreneur profiles, and launching sustainable programs to broaden EBWS's impact. The overarching project goals include expanding program reach and establishing a comprehensive grants database for sustained growth. By tracking organizations' contacts and referrals, the VISTA project aligns with EBWS's mission to elevating services, empowering entrepreneurs, and creating enduring community solutions.

<https://www.eriesblackwallstreet.org/>

Erie Maritime Foundation, Erie PA (1)

Goal: Erie Maritime Foundation's Project Compass is an afterschool program for disadvantaged youth, which provides employment skills and experiences through a maritime lens. The Project Compass program provides a unique mix of on-water adventure, boat shop projects, and career exploration and readiness activities for youth 14-18 years of age. This program builds important but often overlooked employment and life skills while providing a supportive and fun environment. The VISTA member would assist with the development and implementation of the program, including curriculum development, outreach, grant writing, marketing, mentorship,



outcome assessment, and more. The VISTA member would assist with rebuilding the foundation of the Project Compass program to allow it to be a sustainable program for participants to improve their readiness to be successful into adulthood.

<https://bayfrontcenter.org/>

McLane Church, Edinboro PA (2)

Goal: 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 seek grant funding for programs.

<https://mclanechurch.org/>

Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, Erie PA (1)

Goal: The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network's (SSJNN) mission is to provide leadership and advocacy for residents while building partnerships with the broader community to develop opportunities for both personal growth and neighborhood revitalization. SSJNN's Bike Program, with more formal collaborations with local refugee resettlement agencies, organizational capacity building, and targeted economic development initiatives, will promote access to employment, alternative transportation, green infrastructure, and quality of life in Erie. The VISTA member will build the capacity of the Bike Program through building and strengthening partnerships with agencies and community leaders, building bike program volunteer recruitment, and researching and developing long-term funding sources for program sustainability and program independence.

<https://www.ssjnn.org/>

Priority Area: Housing

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

Goal: The goal of this VISTA project is to help ensure that transition-age youth (ages 14-24) experiencing mental illness and/or housing instability have opportunities for safe and stable housing and recovery-driven support that will assist them in breaking the cycle of poverty and improve their overall wellness. The VISTA member will build program capacity for Pathfinders and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) through efforts including volunteer recruitment, fundraising efforts, community awareness, networking and strengthening relationships with community partners, tracking outcomes, and exploring funding opportunities. As a result of the VISTA project, there will be enhanced collaboration and communication between established community agencies, increased public outreach and knowledge of available resources, and expanded program capacity.

<https://chapsinc.org/>



City of Erie, Erie PA (1)

Goal: The Love Your Block (LYB) program in Erie focuses on forging relationships between residents and their neighbors through volunteering, as well as relationships between residents and City Hall staff to educate residents on processes internal to city hall. LYB provides mini-grants to residents to complete small home repair projects at their property, including hand-rail installation, landscaping, and/or exterior painting. In addition to building the overall capacity of this program, the VISTA position will build processes and workflows that connect City Hall staff to existing resources related to home repair, homeownership, and neighborhood revitalization while identifying gaps where additional resources are needed. The VISTA member will coordinate regularly with service providers to understand what types of resources are available, as well as local social work/case workers to be able to connect LYB participants who are in need of additional assistance prior to accessing housing repair funds, which will be a key component in connecting residents to the appropriate organizations.

cityof.erie.pa.us/LYBcontact

Common Roots, Meadville PA (1)

Goal: Community Roots' mission is to develop sustainable, permanently affordable homes that build wealth, security, and community for low-income Meadville residents. Specifically, Common Roots operates an innovative renting cooperative program where residents earn financial assets by working together to manage and maintain their home. Common Roots is launching a shared equity homeownership program in partnership with ERIEBANK and Allegheny College that will create affordable homeownership opportunities for generations to come. Common Roots' programs are targeted at a range of low-income populations and explicitly designed to empower participants to build wealth and reap the material and emotional benefits of long-term economic security. The VISTA project will grow capacity and sustainability by developing grassroots fundraising strategies and infrastructure through growing membership and small donor base, developing strategies and tactics for enhancing engagement, and designing and organizing a unique, mission-aligned fundraiser that can be replicated and grown annually.

<https://commonrootspa.org/>

U.S. Center for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Erie PA (2)

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 continue to re-shape community outreach for volunteer recruitment and management with a primary focus on preparation of affordable housing for refugee resettlement in a rapidly transitioning landscape, both in terms of national refugee policy housing quality/availability in the Erie region.



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

Priority Area: Federal Benefit Access

Erie United Methodist Alliance (EUMA), Erie PA (1)

Goal: EUMA manages a number of programs to assist those who are most vulnerable in the community, including the only family shelter, a seasonal overflow shelter, a veteran's transitional shelter, a transitional housing program for youth aging out of foster care, and Erie's largest Rapid Rehousing program. All of these programs include an assertive case management component, which includes connecting clients with benefit programs. Many of EUMA's guests and clients have limited capacity and bandwidth to struggle through the often complicated application processes to receive the benefits so crucial to their success in finding permanent, stable housing. The VISTA member will work to create a streamlined process for release of information amongst the various agencies, which would allow EUMA staff to communicate with case managers at the Department of Welfare about client benefits.

<https://euma-erie.org/>

Focus Area: Education

Priority Area: K-12 Success

United Way of Erie County (UWEC), Erie PA (2)

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.

<https://www.unitedwayerie.org/>

Focus Area: Healthy Futures

Priority Area: Food Security

Allegheny College, Meadville PA (2)

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 and data-informed decision making on students' measurable gains in food security and basic needs through research, development, and collaborative efforts, the VISTA member will ultimately bring more individuals out of poverty on campus. The member will also be another community leader at the countywide food coalition roundtable in terms of



building a stronger network of support between the college and among community organizations that are addressing gaps in the food system and supporting more food insecurity locally.

<https://sites.allegheny.edu/community-engagement/>

<https://sites.allegheny.edu/health-wellbeing/>

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, establishing sustainable processes to support campus food drives and innovative food delivery systems, exploring the utilization of the Gannon Goodwill Garden to support food security initiatives for college students and their families, garnering funds, and tracking outcomes.

<https://www.gannon.edu/>

Groundwork Erie, Erie PA (1)

Goal: The Groundwork VISTA member will partner with Erie Farm to School to increase the number of K-12 students' participation in extracurricular garden based and climate safety activities, support and provide programming for after-school garden clubs incorporating PA science standards, and develop recruitment strategies for Groundwork Erie's signature employment program, Green Teams, which works to enhance food security through urban farming and family gardens. The VISTA's work will ultimately expand Groundwork's outreach initiatives of reducing barriers that families face in accessing local foods/fresh produce, preparing home-cooked meals, cultivating home gardens, and providing culinary education to youth and their families.

<https://www.groundworkerie.com/>

Penn State Behrend, Erie PA (1)

Goal: The work of the VISTA project for Behrend's Sustainable Food Systems Program (SFSP) will result in increased access to fresh produce for individuals on campus and in the community, a better understanding of how to improve the local food system, and the network and skills to make sustainable change regarding food security. The VISTA member will educate diverse populations (i.e. students, educators, advocates, small-scale growers, etc.) about adaptive growing techniques and the broader food system dynamics operating on a local scale, collaborate with local farmers to facilitate food distribution to areas designated by the USDA as food deserts, and lead/educate Behrend students in increasing production of fresh produce to be donated to underserved Erie community members and food insecure students.

<https://behrend.psu.edu/>

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB), Erie PA (1)

Goal: SHFB is implementing a Service Insights Initiative, which is an approach to collect and track data across the Feeding America network to improve efforts to alleviate hunger across the



nation. Through this initiative, SHFB will be contributing to the largest national data infrastructure to understand hunger through local, regional, and national data, shape advocacy efforts, enhance food delivery systems and programs, and prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion through more accurate data about our neighbors in need. The VISTA member will work towards the development and initial groundwork to build SHFB's electronic data collection process throughout both the food bank and the network of agency partners. The VISTA member will test the Service Insights platform, set up accounts for agency partners, and assist with onboarding and training agency partners in use of the platform.

<https://nwpafoodbank.org/>

Priority Area: Access to Healthcare

Center for Family Services, Meadville PA (1)

Goal: The VISTA project at the Center for Family Services will aim to empower economically disadvantaged populations by addressing poverty-related challenges through enhanced access to critical services centered on social determinants of health. This project will create sustainable solutions improving access to resources (such as mental health support, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, preventive care initiatives, and more) by conducting research and community assessments to identify gaps and barriers, developing comprehensive community outreach programs, forging partnerships with healthcare providers and other state and local entities, and implementing education campaigns to increase awareness and access to essential services.

<https://www.ctrforfamilyservices.org/>

Focus Area: Environmental Stewardship

Priority Area: Awareness & Stewardship

Bike Erie, Erie PA (1)

Goal: Bike Erie is targeting bicycle safety and infrastructure, recognizing the connections that transportation can make for public health and employment, having a direct impact on longevity. Investments in bicycle infrastructure and safety will often boost surrounding businesses, housing, walkability, and overall community engagement. The VISTA member at Bike Erie will build organizational capacity to advocate for bicycle safety, infrastructure, and awareness through building and maintaining partnerships, growing the membership and volunteer base, seeking funding and in-kind donations, researching Erie rider priorities, and more.

<https://bikeerie.org/>

Our West Bayfront, Erie PA (2)

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.

<https://ourwestbayfront.org/>

Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, Erie PA (1)

Goal: The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network's (SSJNN) mission is to provide leadership and advocacy for residents while building partnerships with the broader community to develop opportunities for both personal growth and neighborhood revitalization; the organization services six Census tracts in the urban core of the City of Erie. The VISTA member for this project will improve community engagement through developing best practices, outreach, and surveys, connect and engage local businesses and community members with the SSJNN garden and farmers' market, and implement physical improvements and revitalization interventions.

<https://www.ssjnn.org/>