

Hampton Youth Commission

Overview

The Hampton Youth Commission, established in 1997, is one of numerous initiatives implemented by the city of Hampton, Va., to support youth engagement in the community. A sample of other initiatives includes UthAct, a youth activism organization; Youthinc, an effort to organize youth-driven organizations together; WORD! magazine; service learning for elementary and middle school students; and out-of-school time programs throughout the city. Because of its work with young people, the city of Hampton was recently recognized as one of the 100 Best Cities nationwide for youth and is the recipient of the 2005 Innovations in American Government Award.

Getting Started

In 1990, at the request of the mayor, city representatives and nonprofit organizations in Hampton came together to develop recommendations for a plan of action to ensure the city's youth would become productive members of the workforce and community. This group, the Coalition for Youth, embarked on a community research process to look at the quality of Hampton's workforce in the 21st century and identify ways that young people could become an economical force in the city. A youth development organization, Alternatives, Inc., played a key role in the research process that included a one-year data collection process to assess community needs. Data were collected from youth, parents, businesses, youth advocates, and civic, social, and faith-based organizations.

This process culminated in the development of a Youth Master Plan focused on identifying solutions to the problems facing children, youth, and families. The Youth Master Plan became the city's approach to meeting the needs of these groups; it identified several desired strategic initiatives:

- strong families;
- healthy neighborhoods;
- youth as resources (i.e., youth civic engagement); and
- investments in the first two decades of life.

One entity was assigned to develop, oversee, and ensure a strong connection among each of the strategic initiatives. The Youth Master Plan has been updated twice since its initial development, and it has been folded into the Hampton Community Plan. In addition, young people have their own component of the plan, the only one of its kind in the nation, written and maintained by young people.

The city's approach to youth engagement—what Hampton calls youth civic engagement—is strongly grounded in youth development and viewing youth as resources. The pathway to youth engagement is based on the assumption that youth will have opportunities for service, influence, and shared leadership. As such, young people participate in short-term hands-on projects planned by youth and adults; they organize and participate in summits, speak outs, focus groups, advocacy, and policy-influencing events; and they

take on positions of authority where they have an equal voice with the adults at the table.

Specific positions include two youth city planners and 20 to 25 youth commissioners and other youth who participate on boards and commissions throughout the city. To ensure the effectiveness and success of these activities, a strong emphasis is placed on training youth and adults to work in partnership to address community issues, to build caring communities within their neighborhoods and schools, and to create opportunities for youth to serve the community.

Operation/Organizational Structure

The Coalition for Youth, a department within city government, has responsibility for developing and overseeing Hampton's youth civic engagement initiative through its partnership with Alternatives, Inc. Among its many functions, the coalition oversees and supports the **Hampton Youth Commission**.

Staffing and Other Supports

A full-time program coordinator and a half-time youth secretary/administrative assistant staff the commission. Both positions are funded with city general funds. The Youth Commission also benefits from the management and support of the two youth planners, the director of the Coalition for Youth, the director of the city planning department, and city planners who work with the youth planners. In addition, an adult staff person from Alternatives, Inc., is assigned to the Hampton Youth Commission. This person attends the commission meetings, retreats, and other events; helps identify training needs; and designs team-building activities to support the young people's work.

Programmatic Activities

Young people engaged in the Hampton Youth Commission have the opportunity to participate in activities that contribute to the community and influence decision-making. These include philanthropy, policy, partnerships, and programs. Each year, the youth commissioners determine which of these areas they will focus on during the year.

- Through the Hampton Youth Commission's philanthropy or grant program, youth commissioners fund projects operated as youth and adult partnerships that will help address major youth issues in the community. Youth commissioners have sole responsibility for determining the eligibility requirements, writing up the applications, advertising the grants they want to offer, reviewing grant applications, selecting eligible grant recipients, evaluating funded projects and reporting to the city council on the successes of grant recipients. The grant program not only gives youth commissioners the opportunity to fund programs, but also enables young people in the community the opportunity to start their own projects without competing with agencies and providers in the community for city funds.
- Another important aspect of the Hampton Youth Commission is commissioners' participation in meetings. Youth commissioners hold public meetings to conduct the business of the commission, get public input on the commission's current focus, and enable citizens to alert the commission to important issues. In addition, youth commissioners have the opportunity to present before the city council at least twice per year and monthly to the planning commission as well as present to the school board, other boards and commissions, and the city department heads.

Financing

The Hampton Youth Commission’s general budget on this page ranges from \$45,000 to \$46,000 per year (see the general budget). This budget covers the program coordinator and secretary positions as well as stipends provided to young people for their participation in public meetings and training services by Alternatives, Inc. These costs are covered by the Coalition for Youth. Separate from these funds, the commission receives \$40,000 in general funds from the city council to support the commission’s youth philanthropy component.

The Hampton Youth Commission also receives significant in-kind staffing support from various city agencies and departments, including the Coalition for Youth and the city’s planning department. Other in-kind donations include meeting space provided by the City and discounts and donations from local businesses.

Sustainability: Keys to Success

The sustainability of the commission rests on its broad base of community support. The director of the Coalition for Youth has focused her energies on developing networks and building relationships with key stakeholders, such as the superintendent of schools, chief of police, and United Way, to ensure their long-term support of the initiative.

The long-standing relationship among the city of Hampton, Alternatives, Inc., and the Hampton Youth Commission has been, and will continue to be, critical to the commission’s long-term sustainability. This relationship not only has ensured the commission receives financial and in-kind support from the city and its key agencies, including the planning department and neighborhood office, but also ensures the commission continues to op-

erate within the broader youth development context. In addition, this relationship ensures young

Hampton Youth Commission Fiscal 2007 General Budget

Coordinator.....	\$18,000
<i>(1/2 of one full-time person)</i>	
Secretary.....	\$2,700
<i>(1 high school-age youth at \$6.00/hr for 10 hrs/wk for 45 wks)</i>	
Stipends for Commissioners	\$3,300
<i>(\$5/meeting for up to 20 meetings)</i>	
Training and Support.....	\$2,500
<i>(Contract with Alternatives, Inc.)</i>	
Youth Planners.....	\$13,260
<i>(2 youth planner positions in the planning department)</i>	
Staff/Commissioner Training and Conferences.....	\$3,080
<i>(Cost of annual commission retreat and 3 commissioners to attend national conference/meeting)</i>	
Printing	\$500
<i>(Brochures, fliers, posters, notebooks, etc.)</i>	
Mileage	\$200
<i>(Compensation for travel to paid employees)</i>	
Food/Operating Supplies	\$2,500
<i>(Meals and snacks for work sessions/committee meetings, office supplies, newsprint, etc.)</i>	
Shirts.....	\$585
TOTAL	\$46,625

people are front and center with decision-makers and the community and they have an understanding of young people's accomplishments and the commission's value.

The connection between the commission's work and an official city government document (the Hampton Community Plan) gives the commission's work more credibility. Because of the value-added, the connection further ensures the commission benefits from continual support during difficult economic times.

Next Steps and Future Challenges

Although the Hampton Youth Commission has been able to rely on the financial support of the city, commission staff members currently do not generate additional funds to finance the work of the commission and/or invest in training and professional development for youth and staff.

At the same time, despite its location within a city department and strong base of community support, an ongoing challenge to the long-term sustainability of the commission is the changing environment in which the program operates. To

address these challenges, staff members spend significant time building and maintaining relationships with key city officials to ensure these officials continue to see youth as a resource and to ensure the work is sustainable. For example, while many city officials have been supportive of the Hampton Youth Commission, others have sought to eliminate the commission in its entirety and reallocate the funds to core city services. As a result, coalition staff and other stakeholders must constantly educate and remind city council members and other key stakeholders about the role, value, and impact of youth engagement in the lives of young people and the community at large.

Useful Resource

Shaping the Future: Working Together, Changing Communities is a resource manual on starting or improving youth commissions.

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