



ELEMENTS

Effective Service Corps Programs



Oregon

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To: Interested Oregon Youth Conservation Corps Service Corps Programs

This document is intended to serve as a resource for potential, new and existing school year programs administered by the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps. It was developed during the 2001-2002 school year after extensive visits and evaluations of three well-established school year programs, with the help of their staffs, and with the benefit and guidance of OYCC personnel and experience.

In our months spent contrasting and comparing the three programs, we witnessed some differences. We also noticed many similarities. We've found some basic concepts that generally hold true and lead to more efficient, more productive programs. In the following pages, we'll highlight some of these findings. And we'll include other suggestions and tips OYCC has learned in its 15 years of administering conservation corps programs.

OYCC does not intend to prescribe a one-size-fits-all package. There is no one – or best – way *“to create meaningful opportunities for youth through significant resource projects that enhance the Oregon community.”* There are many. By introducing some effective practices of three proven programs, OYCC aims to offer insight and support with the development and enhancement of your alternative education program.

For practical purposes, we visited three diverse Portland-area programs that, year after year, live the OYCC model. Each of the three programs operates in its own way and for its own reasons. Each has honed its program over time and with the benefit of experience to meet its specific needs and the needs of its communities, as every good program should. We recognize that programs in smaller communities may face unique situations, but we suspect the basic elements are relevant to all programs.

Initially under the assumption that a major and crucial difference lies in the management of these programs, we chose to focus on a variety of administrative organizations. We visited Multnomah Youth Cooperative, a program within Reynolds School District's alternative school, in Fairview; Open Meadow Alternative Schools' CRUE (Corps Restoring the Urban Environment), a private nonprofit in the St. John's area of North Portland; and Cascade Education Corps, a program run from Westview High School, in Hillsboro, through the Northwest Regional Educational Service District. We determined that administrative differences aren't as important as other elements.

Credit is due the programs and their staffs for running awesome programs that effectively reach many students every year, and for graciously hosting us and opening themselves up to scrutiny for the enhancement of OYCC programs statewide.

Utilizing one another's experiences can only help strengthen and enhance each of our programs. If there's anything OYCC can do to achieve this goal it's to build a bridge between programs throughout the state, for the betterment of all programs – and ultimately the state's population of at-risk youth and the partners who sponsor them. Let this be the next step in the cooperative effort.

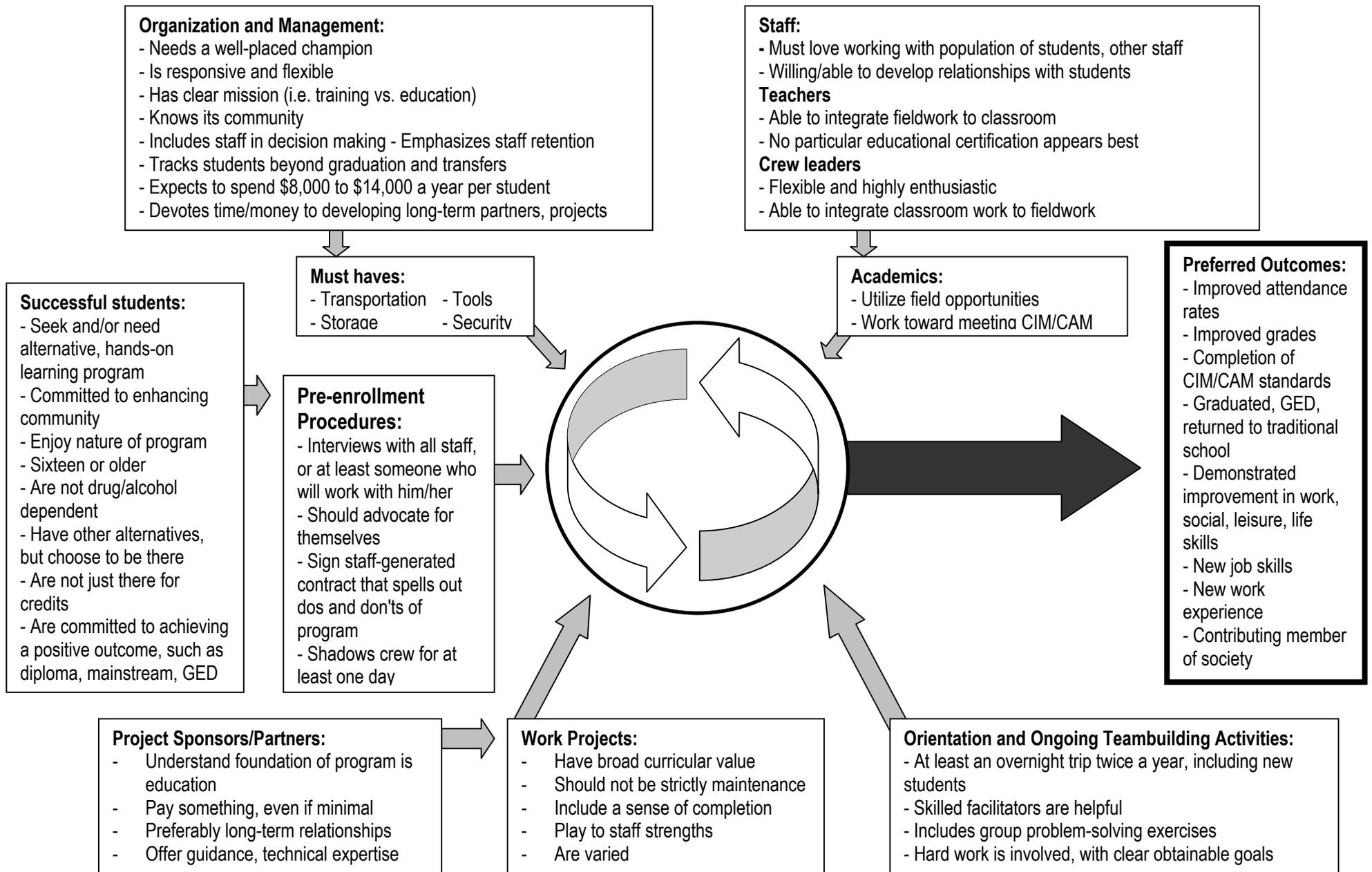
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ELEMENTS of Effective OYCC Service Corps Programs



The ***ELEMENTS***:

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- IG2 Service to your community
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2. Administration

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- C1 Daylong crews
- C2 Crew schedule
- C3 Crew consistency
- C4 Student crew leaders

The ***ELEMENTS***

1. Intentions and Goals

No program can serve every student, nor should it try. Effective programs have a clear sense of whom they intend to serve, what they hope to accomplish and how they plan to go about it. Goals will vary from program to program. There is more than one way to reach each goal. Whatever the goals, they should be stated clearly and consistently, and everything the program does should reflect those goals and help achieve them.

IG1 – Clear and Consistent Mission:

The mission should dictate the types of activities the program pursues. Programs shall offer employment and educational opportunities to students targeted as disadvantaged and/or at-risk. How they do that is up to them.

Programs should also offer a life skills component that teaches basics, such as how to be responsible, how to work in a team and how to get along with and respect those with different views, opinions, beliefs, backgrounds. Allowing students opportunities to make decisions as individuals and as a group will help them achieve greater responsibility.

Ultimately, the balance your program strikes between training for the work force and college preparation should reflect the community's goals and commitments. Whatever the mission, it should be clear to the community, the school and students.

IG2 – Service to your Community:

These programs, by statute, are to promote service activities. While it may be difficult to avoid strict fee-for-service dependence, it is important that students get exposure to a broad range of volunteer activities as well. Those may include childcare services, elderly and disabled care services, literacy education programs, and recycling and other waste reduction services.

Volunteer community service activities should be selected with student input and they should be incorporated into the school year schedule.

IG3 – Defining and measuring outcomes:

This is tied to the program's mission. How your program defines and measures success determines what direction you'll choose and the outcomes you'll get. It also helps you determine whether you're on the right track.

Do you measure success in improved attendance rates, graduation rates, grades, job skills, career exposure or leisure skills? Grades, graduation rates and attendance rates are easy to measure. How can they be compared to traditional schools'?

How will you quantify the immeasurable outcomes to determine levels of effectiveness and/or areas in need of improvement? Student and staff evaluations are one way. Anecdotal case studies may offer another. Daily point sheets may measure conduct, attitude and participation levels and, therefore, give an indication of overall conduct.

2. Administration

Programs come in many forms. We chose to visit a private, nonprofit program, an alternative school within a school district and a program run by an Educational Service District, believing one might prove to be more suitable or preferable than the others. We believe each is functional and successful in its own way.

While administrative structure may or may not make a difference, there are some helpful things that apply equally to whatever structure you're working with, such as the need to be communicative with staff members, the ability to be flexible, to recruit, build relationships with and dismiss students and to find and work with potential sponsors, partners and other funding sources on short notice.

A1 – Local Demographics:

To leverage funding and to show results, it's important to know and emphasize the starting point and background of the students. It helps to be able to cite the community's unemployment rates, the percentage of households living below the poverty level, the dropout rate from community high school(s), the percentage of the population with high school diplomas, college experience and college degrees, as well as other factors (usually listed on Census reports) that may lead to students' scholastic difficulties.

A2 – Long-term Community Partnerships:

The key to balancing the financial needs of a program and the educational needs of students is long-term partnerships. The more long-term your partnerships are, the more stability you are afforded. Long-term partnerships also provide a track record for your program. Long-term partnerships may offer more flexibility in determining schedules and include projects that better cater to the curricular needs of your students.

At the start of a program, day-to-day projects are a necessity. They help establish a work history. No outside groups would want to get involved in large, drawn-out grant projects until there's a work history and they know your program and the students can and will deliver. You shouldn't make promises until you know you can keep them.

Publicity of your activities will make the program more effective and integral to the community. It could also lead to more partnerships.

A3 – Responsiveness and Flexibility:

Surprises are inevitable. Funding sources are never permanent. Does your organization have the ability to be nimble in times of tight budgets? The director needs to be able to act quickly to seize opportunities. Excessive bureaucratic requirements may limit possibilities and hinder progress.

Student, staff and public relations issues may arise with little warning. Examples may include broken or missing tools, broken-down vans, sick/absent students and vandalized work sites. Does your program have the freedom and flexibility to deal with issues appropriately and in a timely fashion?

A4 – Funding and Support:

These programs are expensive compared to traditional high schools. They usually cost between \$8,000 and \$14,000 a year per student. Low staff-to-student ratios, for example, contribute to costs beyond a traditional school, but the benefits are

immeasurable. It's a small price to pay if it means the students keep connected by staying in school. The "powers that be" may often need to be reminded of that.

Given the expense and nature of these programs, it's crucial to have a champion that supports what you're doing and how you're doing it. It may be a superintendent, the school board, principal or community partner. The value is immeasurable in obtaining resources in times of tight budgets and when long-term partners are being sought.

OYCC funds will amount to a small percentage of a program's annual budget. You can't survive on work projects and Average Daily Membership; you have to continuously search for grants and other funding sources. Stable and diverse funding is absolutely necessary. Someone in your program should be devoted to finding multiple sources of funding.

Costs vary from one program to the next. A vehicle capable of carrying the crew and tools to and from sometimes-distant work sites is necessary. Suburbans, vans and mini school buses are all viable options, depending on the number of students in your program. Some programs find that a trailer helps to carry larger tools and materials and to meet safety requirements.

A cache of tools, including loppers, shovels, hazel hoes, mcclouds, pulaskis, rakes and saws, is mandatory, unless, in the rare case, your project partners will be providing them.

Additional costs may include raingear, hardhats, gloves, boots, water jugs and a dry, secure storage space.

A5 – Evidence of Success:

How will you know if you've benefited the students or the community? What do you think students have gotten out of the program? Why? What do students believe they've gotten out of the program? Why? What do their parents or guardians believe the results have been?

Your program should develop a mechanism that tracks students beyond their graduation or transfer to other schools. Knowing whether your students gained work, life, leisure and academic skills that translated to the "real" world is of immense value.

Anecdotal information may help you determine whether you're on the right path and how you can improve, while affording you some tangible examples of your program's outcomes.

How will you prove your value and involvement to the community and potential partners? Informal, word-of-mouth references may do the trick, but having tangible proof of successful projects would be very useful to a program. Try to get letters of recommendation. Documenting work with photos taken before, during and after completion is a good idea, as is saving and posting any newspaper clippings acquired along the way.

A6 – Continuous Improvement:

These are alternative programs, but the mainstream schools are increasingly embracing the concepts. Finding new ways to engage youth in service and learning is what OYCC is about. That's also how your program will stay relevant and fresh as an alternative to mainstream education.

We believe even the best can get better. Never fall into a rut, even if it's a comfortable rut. Constantly evaluate the program internally, while inviting and incorporating suggestions from outside. Seek it out.

Keeping in touch with other local, state and national youth development programs will help you stay in front of issues and ahead of the field. Sponsors may also lend helpful insight.

3. Staff

The backbone of every program is its staff. OYCC can't tell you whom to hire, but we can tell you that extra care should be taken when selecting the line staff who will work alongside the students day in and day out.

Both teachers and crew leaders must possess a love for their work. They should be willing and able to invest themselves in the program and the students. They should, either informally or formally, serve as advocates for students. Many of these students are lacking positive role models and good, solid relationships with adults. Those students need emotionally available and supportive mentors.

Crew leaders should have some work experience in natural resources (or other fields in which the program's crew will work) and some concept of and experience in youth development. Crew leaders, in particular, have to be highly flexible and enthusiastic. Regardless of their background, they should have internal enthusiasm for the projects on which they'll be working.

Teachers who can utilize and integrate fieldwork and service learning activities into classroom lessons are invaluable. Crew leaders should be able to carry the classroom lessons into the field and seize opportunities as they are presented at work sites.

Some teachers successfully double as crew leaders. That may enhance the connection between class and crew. It may also burden the teacher/crew leader with too many tasks and limit the students' opportunity for positive adult relationships. Each job requires full-time focus, especially with the need to constantly seek new project partners. OYCC suggests that separate individuals fill the two positions.

Some programs have their crew leaders out in the field every day leading alternating groups of students while another group of students stays in the classroom with the teacher. We've seen this work, but we've also seen it lead to quicker crew leader burnout and a lapse in communication between teachers and crew leaders.

Some crew leaders accompany students to class and serve as teacher's assistants on non-crew days. This method fosters greater continuity between crew and class and allows crew leaders time to connect with community partners while getting some respite from the weather. This assumes that all the students need the same class curriculum or that they can be divided once in the classroom.

S1 – Who are they?

No particular educational certification best prepares teachers for these types of service-learning programs. Some have found elementary certification helps because teachers often have the classes for the whole day, teaching a variety of academic areas. Others are trained in Environmental Education, or are certified science teachers.

Crew leaders need no certification. They do need abundant energy and enthusiasm. Typically, younger professionals fill the positions. The more real-world work experience they have, the more likely they are to value and respect the obligations your program has with your community partners.

S2 – What do they provide?

Staff members must be committed to youth and community. They should be good role models. Crew leaders must possess good common sense and the ability to act quickly and responsibly. They should be awarded the freedom and flexibility needed to oversee a crew at a public work site. They must be intimately versed in safety and first aid.

Experience, understanding, or at least familiarity with the subject matter being taught in the classroom and the work in the field is essential for crew leaders.

It's preferred that crew leaders and teachers have some experience working in the field in which the program will focus.

S3 – Professional Development:

Perhaps the greatest asset to effective programs is its staff. Effort should be made to retain good staff members. To retain competent, effective and fun teachers and crew leaders, they should be included at every level of decision making. They should be given flexibility and trust to make day-to-day decisions. They need to develop ownership in the program. Communication lines must be wide open between administrators and staff members. Pay and benefits should be competitive and training should be ongoing.

Recognizing that the crew leader position, in particular, is demanding and that it may be considered as a stepping stone to your staff may help them achieve their personal goals, while maintaining high morale, respect and longevity.

We believe there's value in crew leaders and teachers touching base and swapping ideas with others in their professional community. Activities that cater specifically to alternative education teachers and staff are rare. OYCC holds an annual training that may benefit both seasoned veterans and first-year teachers and crew leaders. There, they can learn the basics and also build upon experiences and network. The more experienced staff who attend, the more everyone benefits. A mid-year in-service retreat may also be offered, where program staff may pick and choose topics relevant to them.

Weekly meetings should be scheduled to include all staff members and to discuss programmatic.

4. Project Sponsors/Partners

Project partners must realize, accept and believe in what your program is doing. They must place a high value on education. They should understand that time will be set aside to introduce lessons and, sometimes, to deal with situations.

Long-term community partnerships generally lead to successful, long-term Service Corps programs. But they don't sprout on their own overnight. They require effort to build, good community networking and a strong, well-deserved reputation.

PSP1 – Who are they?

To the extent practicable, the program should enlist state and federal agencies, local government, nonprofit organizations and private businesses to act as sponsors. Private citizens may also offer projects, so long as they create visible public benefits.

PSP2 – What do they provide?

Selection of sponsors should be based on the provision of related educational and job training opportunities and the availability of resources. Good sponsors serve as a link to the community and their staff serves as additional role models for students. Partners

provide oversight, guidance and feedback on the projects. They provide necessary materials, time and training. They explain career opportunities in their field. They may potentially offer internships, summer work or full-time jobs to students upon their graduation.

Above all, community partners are the beneficiaries and assessors of your program's work output. Effective sponsors are the tool that measures the extent to which your program's students learned and applied the skills and knowledge the partner envisioned or directed.

PSP3 – How are they found?

Every organization is setup differently with regard to partner enlistment and project selection. The ideal is to have someone directly responsible for this task, whether it's the program director or the crew leader. Projects that play to the crew leaders' strengths are preferred, so they need to be involved early on. If the crew leader is the only developer of project sponsors adequate time must be budgeted for the task.

Over time, the program's reputation should attract solid, lasting partnerships.

PSP4 – What do they get out of the relationship?

More often than not, education is a key component of your partner's mission, so your partnership advances their agenda. Your students complete work that is of value to your partners.

Some sponsors have landed future employees who come trained and familiar with the work. They get the positive public relations material that comes with helping disadvantaged and/or at-risk youth with education and job training.

5. Work Projects

OYCC is traditionally a natural resources-based agency, but your program may take on other types of work projects, such as construction projects, demolition projects and other social services that demonstrably provide a public value to the community. The more crew options, the greater the chance of meeting a variety of students' needs. The focus should be on community needs, student interests and staff strengths.

Prospective projects should be evaluated based on curricular value and community benefits. Safety concerns, logistics (travel time), skill diversity, length of commitment, monetary benefit to program and potential conflicts with local businesses must also be considered. (See Appendix A.)

Students should get a sense of closure from their work projects. Starting something that never ends is frustrating, as is starting something that someone else finishes. In the ideal project, the students identify the task, develop the plan and work to complete the plan. It helps if they see and understand the reasons and benefits behind their efforts.

WP1 – Curricular Value:

While these programs teach work and life skills, they are primarily academic. Labor should not be the primary focus of work projects. Most any project has academic potential, but some projects invite learning more than others and they should be sought.

WP2 – Community Benefits:

State statute stipulates that there is some community benefit to the work the students perform. That's a broad target and doesn't preclude projects on private land.

WP3 – Variety:

Programs should have more than one work site. Both crew leaders and students will burn out with continuous maintenance projects and/or visits to the same work site day in and day out. While seasons may dictate the type of work your students do and when, the schedule should be broken up whenever possible to keep things interesting and fresh.

6. Target Students

A program should not serve as a dumping ground for school districts. Programs such as these can't expect to fulfill every student's needs, let alone all of those who don't fit into traditional educational settings. These programs may support students with academic or behavioral issues, but also students who need hands-on learning exercises or who want job training and work experience.

In many cases, programs offer more credits than the traditional school, and students who have fallen behind are referred. Credits should not be the primary reason students enroll in the program. Credits may attract students to your program, but they are not enough to keep them.

Ideally, districts have options for a variety of students and the OYCC program is one of those. Students, then, who enroll in the OYCC program do so selectively.

Some in the business of youth development believe that programs should recruit particular types of students who fit into their particular program profile. Others believe the program should fit the student. That choice is yours. Certainly student buy-in builds ownership into the program, which will make it stronger and more relevant to the students. Crews and classes that are diverse and more representative of the community are ideal.

TS1 – From where/whom are students referred?

Students are usually referred to programs by counselors, teachers, students and, occasionally, themselves.

Directors, teachers and/or crew leaders should periodically visit with counselors, teachers and others who refer students to the program. That will help give a clearer picture of the program and the students it serves. Some present the program in the form of a slideshow, others through phone calls or visits. In any case, those who are seeking placements for students should know precisely what the program is about, who it serves and how.

TS2 – Successful students:

- Choose to be in the program
- Are committed to positive outcomes, such as earning diploma, GED or transferring to a traditional school
- Are committed to enhancing community
- Enjoy nature of program and the work that will be performed
- Are generally 16 or older (see MYC, CRUE summaries for explanation)
- Seek and/or need alternative, hands-on learning program
- Advocate for themselves

TS3 – Red Flags for Prospective Students include:

- Emotional instability
- Drug and/or alcohol dependency
- Untenable Individual Education Plans

7. Pre-Enrollment Procedures

In order for students to understand what they're enrolling in, it needs to be explained to them in detail. No explanation will give a completely accurate portrayal of the program, so some shadow time should be afforded where the potential student joins the crew and class for a period of time. Interviews and shadows combined should give the program staff and students a solid reference for making enrollment decisions.

PEP1 – Interviews:

Each student should interview with all staff, or at least one line staff member who will work with the student. Parents/guardians should be welcome for a portion of the interview, but there should be a time set aside with only the student, where he/she has to advocate for him/herself.

The interview should explain the program in detail and lay out the expectations, as well as the consequences of broken rules.

PEP2 – Shadows:

Prospective students should shadow a crew for at least one full day. A week or two is ideal, so the student and staff can accurately tell whether the program is an appropriate fit. Shadow days should accurately reflect the program. During the shadow period, a prospective student is afforded little leniency. It's his or her time to demonstrate that they take themselves, the program and the program's policies seriously.

PEP3 – Contracts:

Students and their parents should sign a contract that the staff has created. Initially, the contract should try to be as detailed as possible, with the realization that everything can't be included. At the start of the program, the contract should be followed religiously and serve as a disciplinary backstop, though there are always gray areas that no contract can cover. As time and experience lend themselves, exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis. (OYCC has sample contracts.)

The bottom line that should be spelled out in the contract is that staff has the right to deal appropriately with any action that threatens harm to others and the program. Students should be given trust and respect and the chance to demonstrate that they know what is appropriate.

8. Teambuilding and Orientation

Good programs foster a sense of identity and self, while helping youth develop a sense of group membership. They should provide opportunities for youth to showcase their work and skills, to use journals, self-evaluation and self-reflection as well as to form relationships. Students should gain a sense of the greater team and how they fit into the whole.

At the start of the school year and every time new students are added, some sort of teambuilding activity should be conducted.

Outside facilitators are great, but create a different dynamic that may disrupt overall team chemistry. They allow staff to participate as members of the group. They also may be better able to broach sticky subject matter without lasting negative impacts to the team morale and camaraderie.

TO1 – Overnight Trips:

Nothing builds bonds and contributes to a more lasting team atmosphere better than overnight trips. Longer trips are ideal. At least two nights are best to create and take advantage of added opportunities for bonding and teambuilding. When students are required to cook, eat, sleep, clean and take part in other activities together boundaries break down. The trips should involve group problem-solving exercises and hard work with clear, obtainable goals. It's hard to reach the same end with one-day activities.

A clear agenda helps keep schedules and eases tensions and apprehensions.

Overnights will require parental consent and heightened vigilance from staff. Make sure staff members are ready for 24-hour responsibility.

The trips don't have to be expensive. Facilities may be traded for work.

TO2 – Hard work with clear goals:

Wherever the orientation or teambuilding exercise takes place or for however long, it should include a measured amount of work that can be accomplished and completed by hard, organized teamwork. Working hard alongside one another on a collective goal for a length of time will contribute to lasting bonds among students and staff. It creates a memorable shared experience that helps build empathy and understanding, as well as respect, cooperation, pride and satisfaction, both on a personal level and as a group.

TO3 – Circles:

Teambuilding also develops from regular, planned group conversations. They should take place at least once daily. A morning and/or afternoon check-in, or circle, is a great way for students and staff to hear and speak their minds. Circles can incorporate current events, thoughts to ponder, feelings and ideas about class and crew, weekend and evening pastimes... They are an excellent opportunity to find out where individuals are at and what the group feeling may be. They help build a culture and group camaraderie.

9. Crews

We've concluded that ideal crews consist of eight students or fewer. The more intimate the crew, the greater the likelihood of positive, nurturing relationships being formed with peers and program staff.

Safety should be a major concern while on crew. Large safety issues should be introduced at the initial orientations. Each work site will present its own hazards and concerns. Safety should be kept at the forefront of everyone's mind by conducting related conversations daily while stretching and warming up at the work site – before work is begun. Students may take turns leading the warm up and safety conversation.

C1 – Daylong Crews:

While some programs have found success with splitting days between academics and crew projects, we've found it most efficient and more productive to spend entire days either on academics or on work projects. That lessens the proportion of time spent on travel, cleanup and wardrobe changing, with more time spent on lessons and/or work projects.

C2 – Crew Schedule:

OYCC suggests a 40-40-20 division. About 40 percent of the students' time should be spent on academics, 40 percent should be spent on work projects and the remaining 20 percent should be spent tying the classroom and field work together, performing volunteer community service activities or additional career development activities, such as visits to post-secondary schools, trade schools and professionals in their field.

Some programs alternate days between crew and class. Some go out on crew twice a week. Some alternate weeks, with half the class out in the field with a crew leader all week while the other half stays in class with the teacher. Some programs may be obligated to fit into a school's schedule, where there is little room for experimentation.

Those who prefer alternating days say it breaks the schedule up more, to the delight of staff and students. They don't burn out as easily. Proponents of the week in/week out schedule say it accommodates inevitable fluctuations in output and attitude as well as bigger work projects and longer academic lessons. It also may quickly burn out students and staff because crew leaders are always out in the field, leading alternating groups of students while the other half of students is in the classroom.

OYCC has witnessed the merits of each crew schedule. None appear superior, though the twice-weekly crew-day schedule seems to allow for more variety.

C3 – Crew Consistency:

How often you mix students among crews and/or classes depends on functionality and relationships. Many programs prefer to keep crews intact for a whole term or semester. This reinforces the fact that students should learn to respect, appreciate or at least work alongside others with whom they may not easily get along. Changing crews more frequently can create chaotic social chemistry and may make curriculum delivery more difficult.

Most programs dabble in the art of social engineering, strategically placing individuals and types of personalities in different mixes. Crews have to spend large amounts of time together performing as a team, so care should be taken when constructing crews, while also considering the crew leaders' strengths and personalities.

C4 – Student Crew Leaders:

Leadership skills are learned. If you expect a student to perform in a position of leadership, you must give them the tools and support necessary to be successful.

Deserving students should have the opportunity to serve as student crew leaders. Rotate them weekly. Give them the responsibility of checking out/in tools and (respectfully) keeping corps members on task. Ultimate responsibility rests with staff, of course, so things aren't likely to get too out of hand.

Summaries of Studied Programs

Cascade Education Corps

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Visited between Oct. 29 – Nov. 15, 2001

CEC's mission:

"Cascade Education Corps provides an educational learning opportunity that recognizes strengths in youth through teamwork and community service."

Vision:

"CEC provides an environment that increases student's sense of self-worth and encourages personal growth through challenging and positive experiences in team settings and individually. CEC provides high school students the opportunity to earn high school credit that aligns with CIM/CAM standards."

Administration:

Operated through the Northwest Regional Education Service District. CEC serves Beaverton, Hillsboro, Forest Grove, Banks and Vernonia school districts.

Facilities:

CEC consists of two classrooms, set up in portables behind Westview High School, the state's most populous. One room is devoted to crew, the other to the teacher's class. The crew room houses all the raingear, gloves, boots and leftover clothes students leave for a rainy day (literally) and a refrigerator, microwave and toaster. The crew room is where the whole group meets every morning and conducts check-in.

CEC crews use two Suburbans with trailers. Another mini bus is available for class field trips. A shed, which houses tools, is located near the portables.

Staff:

The key to CEC's success, or any OYCC program's, in the teacher's mind, is its staff, with members who enjoy what they do, communicate and have the support of the network.

CEC has a program director (who also oversees the ESD's Outdoor School), a teacher, a teacher's assistant and two crew leaders. There are about 27 students.

Schedule:

CEC follows the traditional 9-week quarter grading period, with two semesters. Classes run from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday –Thursday. Staff works from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday – Thursday and from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Fridays. Crews get a ten-minute break and a half-hour lunch. Class gets a ten-minute break, 45-minute lunch and a 20-minute afternoon break.

CEC is divided into two halves. One half stays in the classroom all week. The other half is split into two crews. They're on crew all week. The next week, those that had been out on crew, stay in class and those that were in class, split into two crews and go out on projects.

Staff members believe the week in-week out schedule gives an advantage because students can see a beginning, middle and end to what they're doing. When a program has four days in row, there is more continuity. That is better for planning. That gives them four days in a row to allow for rhythms and help them get ready to go back to either crew, class.

The four-day-a-week schedule allows students more opportunities to make choices, and it lets them schedule appointments, etc. on Friday. That's a great opportunity. Students take less unexcused absences because they have three-day weekends already. Longer days allow more impromptu discussions in class. It's nice to have extra time; it doesn't burn them out.

Class:

Often, when half the class is out on crew, the teacher will use the crew room to break remaining students up into various lessons. For the first semester, an AmeriCorps member served as a teacher's aide, occasionally leading crews when others were sick and helping to teach academic lessons. For the second semester, another staff member was hired to serve full-time as a teacher's assistant.

At the end of every nine weeks, CEC holds a celebration of sorts. They hand out awards for most points, best attendance... The teacher and the crew leaders meet with students individually.

Crews:

Crew assignments are made on the basis "of working personality and character diversity." Assignments usually remain the same for the duration of the semester.

Every morning begins with a Check-in, or Circle. Usually it consists of each student and staff member sharing what they did over the weekend, or the evening before. This not only helps with breaking down the morning's barriers and getting the kids and staff to know one another better, but also for them all to touch base at least once a day, since some stay in class. In evaluations, students said they wanted more of these interactions.

At the end of every day, whether in the class or on crew, each student writes in his or her journal in response to staff-generated questions. Questions usually involve their reactions to the day's lessons/activities. Staff members review each journal every day to ensure completeness and to look for examples of clear, concise and accurate writing.

Projects:

The program director develops partners and contacts in the community. He schedules work, allowing some cushion time for students to determine service-learning projects. With all would-be partners, the program director plays up educational sponsorship, since most could get a cheaper workforce.

CEC is two years into a big 3-year contract. Because of that, the program director hasn't had to look too much for more fee-for-service projects. CEC also works with other partners, though to a lesser degree.

Ideally, all projects have an educational aspect. "I try to avoid flat out maintenance, but it happens," the program director says. "If the kids enjoy it, why not?" That provides some "shock therapy." ("If you don't get your diploma, this is what you'll be doing your whole life.")

He'd like to do some projects above and beyond environmental restoration, with more trade-based service learning.

The ideal project sponsor is someone who understands this is an education system and that learning curves happen, one of the crew leaders said. They should not have too high of expectations for work output and they should allow room for error and give students the chance to learn from their mistakes.

Sponsors also need to understand the population we're dealing with, said the teacher. "Sometimes crew time does have to be spent dealing with an issue." Work output varies from day to day.

The crew leaders would like to be able to look for project opportunities. The projects, then, could better play to their strengths and make it easier to be enthusiastic. Allowing students to come up with and work out ideas would allow them to get more involved and invested in the process. On the other hand, the way it is now (with the program director selecting long-term projects) is good because CEC is guaranteed work, staff members say.

Variety in terms of work projects certainly does matter, the crew leaders believe. Having different job sites from week to week would be nice. Oftentimes CEC crews are at the same work site all day, every day. Kids are much more excited about the projects with variety. They get burned out otherwise. Program security is the other side of the argument.

One of the crew leaders would like to do "real" community service, like a homeless shelter drive, reading to school kids, a food drive, SMART reading program... It's a struggle to balance between getting projects to pay for the program and doing those extra, nice, quality learning projects that don't necessarily pay much.

One of the nice things about projects is when kids can see a beginning and an end to it, said the teacher. When they're ongoing maintenance projects, they don't hold a lot of interest and they don't have a lot of educational value. The kids become devoid of pride, because they never see projects get done; they just keep having to do the same thing.

The teacher thinks it'd be nicer to spend more time to reinforce things on crew from class, but they just haven't taken the time to do it. Overall, themes kind of relate; like class learns about wetlands when crews are fixing wetlands, and class is talking about forests when crews are building trails. The teacher has built the curriculum schedule based on work seasons.

Teambuilding and Orientation:

At least two days throughout the year are spent on ropes courses to create additional opportunities for bonding between students and staff. The exercises build trust and team camaraderie. Longer trips mark the beginning of each semester.

The intent of the longer trips is to teach them to bond. They offer new experiences for students. Sometimes CEC performs work during orientations. The teacher has also used camps for tool safety training, contracts and other introductory topics, but it depends on how and when the trip falls.

Ropes courses allow for individual and team exercises, but not the camaraderie that overnights provide. Ropes courses or other day trips never offer down time, running around getting silly, getting to know one another, listening to music, pranks, eating all meals together. That's invaluable. They still talk about those occasions.

Anything that requires group activity fosters team building. That can be done on some ropes courses.

Students:

CEC can't recruit and has to rely on school counselors to find students who fit. Counselors recommend students, and then the applications go to the program director. Then the students shadow class and crew for two weeks to see if everything fits, but admission is really up to the counselors. There could be an advantage in going to the counselors and explaining the program; we could really answer the nuts-and-bolts questions, said the teacher. It might be nice to have a couple of kids and staff members go and explain. Otherwise, it turns into a game of telephone, where things get jumbled. There are so many people involved that the message gets lost. We feel the message still gets through the program director, but some kids we get are very confused about what it is we're doing.

If counselors only send difficult kids, then they're setting the kids and maybe the program up for failure. Every student has the right to prove they want to be here; that's why we have a shadow period. They have two weeks to prove that they want to be here.

The teacher simply looks for someone who wants a different education and wants to be here -- not because they've been expelled and it's the only place for them. Anyone who is forced to be here has never succeeded. It's hard at that age to do something you don't want to do.

Having alternatives is key. Westview, in particular, is really good about hooking kids up with alternatives. Westview has tons of options and they're willing to work with us.

Contracts:

CEC would like to add a clause that says we have the right to "vote them off the island" for anything that could harm the program. The current contract is wordy and tries to spell out everything. No matter how much you say, students will do something else.

What pertains to one district within an ESD may not pertain to the next. There are cultural differences that are hard to account for in a contract. Some things may be zero tolerance in one school, but a non-issue for another.

It's a personal decision in terms of how loose or strict you write the contract. The key is to stick with it once you write it. Staff talks about bending the rules once a week. There is an explanation for everything.

Attendance policies:

Students are allowed three personal days over the course of the nine-week grading period.

Sick days, doctors' appointments, court appointments... are all counted as personal days. If absent for any reason, students still must call in before 7:30 a.m. that day for the absence to be an excused personal day. If under 18, the guardian must call within three days, too.

For each nine-week grading period, students may make up two absences with a pre-approved activity, such as attending government meetings, visiting work sponsors and volunteering for other nonprofit organizations.

Having three-day weekends leads to better overall attendance.

Points, credits and disciplinary measures:

Students may earn up to four credits per semester, as opposed to 3 from traditional high school. Credit is based on "the quality of (the student's) participation in the classroom and on work crew, completed classroom assignments and attendance."

Staffers complete Daily Performance Logs for each student, every day. They list "Performance Areas," such as preparedness, responsibility, good productivity/quality, participation, respect, positive attitude, complete journal, corps image, initiative/teamwork, safety and clean-up. Students earn up to three positive points for being on time and two points for each of the other areas. Staff members tally the logs daily and make comments on the reverse side. Students review the logs every day for the previous day, and they are encouraged to question or dispute scores and comments.

Negative and disruptive behavior may lead to students receiving "strikes." Three strikes and they're out of the program.

Unexcused absences count as strikes. Four tardies are allowed every nine weeks before a strike is issued. Verbal and written warnings are issued for refusal to follow directions and "poor public image," poor attitude, inappropriate dress, unsafe behavior. Strikes are given for abusive and/or threatening behavior.

Open Meadow C.R.U.E.

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Portland, OR 97203
Phone: (503) 285-0508
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Visited between October 1 – 19, 2001

Mission:

"To educate in small, relationship based programs emphasizing personal responsibility, academics, and service to the community."

Local Demographics:

In North Portland, according to Open Meadow literature:

- 28 percent of population 25 or older has no high school diploma
- 58.8 percent has no college experience
- 15 percent have college degrees
- Roosevelt High School dropout rate for 4 years is 33 percent
- 30 percent of households with children fall below the federal poverty line

Administration:

Open Meadow is a private, nonprofit alternative high school and middle school contracted with Portland Public Schools. CRUE (Corps Restoring the Urban Environment) is a program within the school.

Facilities:

CRUE has two mini buses and a van with utility racks on top of each for tools and supplies.

The classes are spread throughout an old Victorian Mansion, but it will be moving within two years. The third floor is dedicated to CRUE. That's where Circles and celebrations are held. CRUE houses its tools in a small shed and some of its additional tools and supplies are stored in an otherwise-unused greenhouse.

Staff:

There are seven staff members in CRUE: three teacher/crew leaders, an internship coordinator, an academic coordinator, a program director and an administrative assistant.

Each of the three teacher/crew leaders serves as an "Advocate." Advocates sponsor students throughout their Open Meadow career, serving as counselors and case managers by maintaining contact with guardians, court counselors, social service workers.... Advocates, along with the academic coordinator, manage their students' transcripts, credits, work samples and help develop goals. They meet one-on-one (sometimes in fun places like restaurants over breakfast or coffee) and keep in contact almost daily. All issues come back through students' advocates. Budgeted money helps pay for breakfasts, coffee meetings and birthday parties.

CRUE holds a weekly 3-hour staff meeting where all 7 CRUE staff members lend input on program scope and goals, student issues, academics, supplies, etc.

Schedule:

Open Meadow breaks the year into three, 12-week trimesters, each divided into 6-week grading periods.

School runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday-Friday. An additional 8 a.m. period is offered to students needing credit. Everyday begins with a half-hour Circle, which includes updates, announcements and points to ponder. Circles allow everyone to participate in supporting and developing school policy. They are designed to promote friendship, fun, trust and support for its members. Students and staff commit to Values: "Taking Care of Yourself, Taking Care of Others, and Taking Care of This Place." Usually at week's end, students who have dropped the ball on any of the commitments have to explain how and why, and how and why they won't do it again. Then they recommit.

Tuesdays and Thursdays are crew days. Students lose points if they don't have their CRUE shirts on, along with other appropriate work attire. Monday, Wed., and Friday are class days. Each day involves an "A" and "B" period for different classes. Mondays include 30 minutes for advocate groups to meet and discuss projects. Wednesdays include 50 minutes for project crews to meet and discuss related lessons, projects, etc. Fridays include 75 minutes for advocate groups and quiet reading time.

Crews:

There are three crews offered at CRUE: Natural Resources, GIS and Human Services. A crew leader, who also serves as a classroom teacher, leads each crew. Having combined teachers/crew leaders doesn't necessarily lend more education into the field because you can still have class time for projects, says the program director.

Kids have to apply to change crews, but can only change at the beginning of a trimester. The crew-change application is a one-page write-up to show they want to move actively *toward* something and not run away from something.

Crews are set up based largely on curriculum and credit needs over a two-year cycle to make sure CRUE offers every credit required for graduation. The crew leader has to know which credits need to be offered throughout three trimesters to tailor projects and curriculum.

Money is available (\$300 per crew) for crew leaders to spend at their discretion while on crew and for individual meetings with students.

Projects:

The key to balancing the financial needs of the program and the educational needs of the kids is long-term partnerships, said the program director.

Initially, it's a dollar issue; the projects are going to be day-to-day, fee-for-service projects because you don't yet have partners who believe in you and who know your track record. Outside groups will not get involved in big, long grant projects until there's a track record and they know your program has kids who will deliver.

Some projects are definitely better than others. A variety of work activities are preferred. There will always be boring aspects to some. One key is crew leader enthusiasm. Kids can't get interested for long if leaders aren't into it or try to fake it or use gimmicks to make it seem more interesting.

CRUE seeks and develops long-term partners. The program director primarily searches for funding, with crew leader input. Crew leaders/teachers provide him with a sense of what they're looking for. Projects have to play into teacher/crew leader strengths.

Very little of CRUE's budget comes from fee-for-service projects. It operates through a variety of donations and grants, the biggest being through Work Systems Inc. That allows CRUE to be flexible and to negotiate and pick up opportunities at the last minute. They are partnered with the Wetlands Conservancy.

The program director believes grants are the ideal way to go and that at least one person needs to be devoted to searching for and writing them. He said projects are selected on curricular value, strength of staff, strength of partners and availability of dollars, in that order. That is dependent on having other funding, administrative support, a champion and somebody willing to spend the money to do either private fundraising or grant writing.

Teambuilding/Orientation:

Orientation is the first real introduction to students. The intent is to explore students' limits, having them challenge their limits - all of the kids, in one way or another. That way staff really gets to know the kids. It breaks down the posturing and wrecks the cliques. Group problem-solving exercises are good. You have to have somebody that's mildly skilled in facilitating; otherwise you may end up with a big mess on your hands.

CRUE prefers to have orientations last two nights, though at least one night. The overnight experiences create a different dynamic. You could have roughly the same result without an overnight trip, but it would have to be extremely well run.

Orientations aren't generally expensive; costs are mostly for food. The value lies in getting together, cultivating the "esprit de corps." You should have an orientation every time you bring in new kids; otherwise you get cliques, says the program director. If students won't do the orientation, they're out of the program.

Students:

CRUE currently serves 27 students. The number is usually closer to 24.

CRUE students have already dropped out of their traditional high schools, and are thus referred mostly by word of mouth. Potential students have to come in and advocate for themselves at admissions. That's the biggest issue in terms of making the decision to let them enter. Have they done their research? They should have a clear sense of the program, even before they get into the interview. Word of mouth recruitment can lead to blocks of kids, or cliques. So, if friends are recruited, they should be placed on separate crews.

Referrals also come through reputation. CRUE shares information about the program and a profile of desired students with counselors and other referring agencies. In CRUE's first and second years, the program director was aggressively selling the program with a slide projector. "The first time you show up, nobody listens," he said. "The second time, maybe you hook one person. The third time or fourth time, they might really get it. Persistence pays. That's where, in terms of administration, you've got to have someone dedicated to doing that. Counselors from local high schools should be involved from the get-go in defining the program and whom it will serve."

Successful CRUE students:

- Understand why they were not successful in their traditional school,
- Are really driven to get their diploma, and they don't want their GED. Kids know that, for now anyway, getting a GED is easier than getting a diploma, so if a kid is tempted to go in that direction, when the weather turns sour and things get hard, they may quit. They would have that bail out option.

Red flags for prospective students:

- Untenable Individual Education Plans, or have some learning disability that CRUE can't serve,

- Younger than 16. 16 is the magic number, says the teacher/program director. The maturity level is different with younger students. With younger kids, you need more game-like, fun, project-based stuff that's just not real. (There are also labor law issues for students younger than 16.)
- If they have too few credits for their age (17 with zero credits or 18 with 4-5 credits is big trouble). CRUE has had 20-year-olds in the program two years, and then quit. There is a point where a GED is the better option. Older, jaded kids may disrupt younger kids,
- Juvenile justice history is a red flag because it's court ordered, and CRUE often can't get a measure of self-motivation,
- Significant mental health and/or emotional issues,
- Pay attention to home situation. "A tree without roots dies." A very common source of failure is "incidental family conflagrations." CRUE gives a chance to take 6 weeks off to deal with transitional stuff and then reapply.

Admissions:

Before each 6-week block, interested students may attend an admissions interview where they fill out an application and speak with a staff member. The entire staff reviews all applicants and chooses new students. Initially, the student interviews with one, two, or up to three staffers. The program director is NEVER the exclusive interviewer. Usually one staff person makes a recommendation, and everyone else has veto power. The first interview includes reference calls with two unrelated people.

Most of the time CRUE does one-day shadows on crew days, which are very valuable.

Often, students apply more than once for admission. If accepted, students are admitted for a 4-5 week probation period. During this time, both the student and staff watch carefully to see whether the program is a good match for the student. If not, Open Meadow may help students find another school. At the end of the probation period, students meet with OM staff to declare if they want to be a "regular status student." Even if the student has gone over the allotted 4 absences in the probation period, in some cases it may be possible for the student to become a regular status student and go on Academic Probation for the next 6-week period. Returning students are expected to know the rules and, therefore, are not necessarily afforded the same leniency. Credit could still be earned.

Contracts:

Student contracts serve as a disciplinary backboard. Big stuff, such as drug/alcohol, credit awarding and attendance, needs consensual decisions. We have policies that we like to hang our hat on, that we want kids to experience us hanging our hats on. We're not really using our contracts, but we can use them as a hammer if needed. We go over it with every kid when they come in. We tell them we're really looking for them to commit to "Taking Care of Ourselves, Taking Care of Each Other, Taking Care of This Place."

We say something to the effect of: "You're a 16 year old. We treat you like you know how you want to be perceived in the community and we know you want to be perceived responsibly. If you don't, this is a bad place for you. By coming here we're assuming you're willing to engage in the spirit of that."

For a start-up program, you need to have a contract and follow it religiously. Put down dates and notes, letting kids see it, too, so they can see sequences of events. It's better to have the details in writing and explained verbally so the kid gets the spirit behind the contracts.

Attendance:

CRUE prides itself in having a 92 percent attendance rate. Four absences – excused or unexcused – are allowed in each 6-week block. Once beyond four, credit will be lost. If later than 45 minutes for class,

it's considered an absence. In extenuated circumstances (family death or serious illness), staff-approved service-learning activities may make up two absences.

If a class is failed, the student will be placed on academic probation (AP) for the next 6 weeks. No credit is earned for failed classes. If on AP and the student passes all classes, they will return to being a full-status student. If the student fails class while on AP, he or she could lose his/her spot in CRUE.

Incentives, such as \$25 Fred Meyer gift certificates, are awarded for two perfect weeks, with no tardies or absences.

The campus is closed and students who leave are considered absent for the day.

Points and Credits:

Portland Public Schools require 22 credits to graduate. CRUE requires 22.5. CRUE does the extra .5 for a senior seminar class because CRUE recognizes that a much greater percentage of kids is going to college than three years ago, due in part to tuition vouchers and in large part to federal financial support. CRUE feels it needs to be doing more for college prep. It's Open Meadow's diploma, but kids can get a public school degree if they want. Sometimes that would require an additional English class.

The standard load of credits at Open Meadow is 6.75 a year. In CRUE, the standard load is 7.5. The standard load at a traditional seven period school is 7. There's a little more in CRUE because they try to make the trimester system work in a way that mirrors what they might get in public school. Offering more credits does make the program attractive. Some kids may enroll for that reason, but it isn't going to keep them in.

Students get 8 possible points per class; 2 for preparedness, 4 for productivity and 2 for being positive.

Rules are made known well in advance, with no apparent leniency (no homework = lost point).

Students get up to 2.5 credits for CRUE each trimester [1 credit for project class (crew), .5 for each of the two other classes, and .5 for interpersonal skills.] 22.5 credits to graduate.

Multnomah Youth Cooperative

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Visited between Sept. 12 - Sept 30, 2001

Mission:

"The Multnomah Youth Cooperative students and staff make positive contributions to our community by working, studying and playing hard in a trusting environment to better the future."

Administration:

MYC is situated in Reynolds Learning Center (RLC), a Reynolds School District alternative school in Fairview. The district supports the alternative school; the superintendent sees the value in the MYC program, the teacher/program director says. Because of that support and because the crew leaders work to find sponsors and bring in fee-for-service projects, the program gets what it needs.

Facilities:

MYC has a classroom with a refrigerator within RLC and a storage shed in back of the school, which houses tools, raingear and other supplies.

MYC crews ride in mini school buses fitted with cages to transport tools.

Staff:

There is one teacher, who also serves as the program director, and two crew leaders, who serve as teacher's assistants and also seek partners. "The buck stops" with the teacher/program director, but the two crew leaders are free to make decisions, which is necessary given their positions.

The teacher/program director credits the success of MYC to the team atmosphere created by allowing everyone to participate on all levels. "We're all stakeholders," he said

All staffers act informally as advocates, with some students gravitating to different staffers for different issues.

Schedule:

MYC runs on the semester system, with four nine-week grading periods.

MYC alternates days between crew and class, every other week being the opposite. School days run from 8:50 a.m. to 3:10 p.m., Monday – Friday. Staff officially work from 8 – 4. Crews are in the field roughly from 9:30 – 2:30, with two 10-minute breaks and a half-hour lunch. MYC class runs from 8:50 – 11:30. The students then have lunch and then attend other classes within the RLC.

MYC has two crews and one class. On class days, all the students stay together and the crew leaders serve as teacher's assistants and devote time to making/keeping contacts for projects. One of the crew leaders estimates that she spends about 85-90 percent of class time making contacts. The other crew leader often leads class lessons and teaches physical education in the afternoons. The teacher/program director teaches 6 other classes in the afternoons and on crew days.

Class:

The teacher/program director's scholastic planning is embodied in an organizational chart outlining his curriculum and a syllabus highlighting each term's major projects. He's compiled the curriculum from a mix of sources.

MYC class focuses on technology, social studies, language arts and science. MYC students also have half-hour of health education once a week. On non-crew day afternoons, students go to other teachers for other content areas.

The teacher/program director's lesson plan for the year is "Understanding (Oregon) Forest Diversity." They rarely have homework because most just won't do it, the teacher/program director says.

Some projects are longer-term and lend themselves more to "green-space management." Students design and implement strategies to manage these sites. Staff members always try to include academics on site, at least with identification books.

Students write in their journals on most days. Usually they write about whatever they want. Occasionally, the crew leaders and/or the teacher/program director create topics. Sometimes they link topics to lessons.

Crews:

The students are divided into two crews, which change from week to week. Names are drawn out of a hat. MYC staff members say the system works well and mixes the crowd up constantly. One student from each crew is selected to serve as crew leader, another as shop steward. The student crew leader oversees management issues, while the steward makes sure tools are accounted for and that the van is clean.

The teacher/program director liked it best when the program went out on crew two days a week, rather than every other day. But variety keeps it interesting for the kids. If they had to go out on crew all week in rain, attendance would drop off. If they had to stay in class all week, attendance would drop. There's just enough variety to keep them motivated. But there's enough stability that they know from day to day what they're doing.

Crew consistency is informal and changes anywhere from three weeks to a month. It's a subjective call as to when it's time to mix things up. Frequent changes break down the us-versus-them mentality. It kicks them out of their box, forcing them to form relationships with other people. When you go to work, you have to work with people you don't know or may not like. The frequent changes seem to work. Students gripe a little every time, but it's become less so. There's now greater overall cohesiveness. There aren't really any disadvantages to switching up crews so much.

Projects:

The program is reliant on fee-for-service, but flexibility is built in. Killing blackberries has been bread and butter for MYC. Certain sponsors afford more flexibility than others. "That's the nice thing about stewarding green spaces ... we create the plan," the teacher/program director said.

Selecting projects where they steward the land allows kids to come up with the plan, present material to adults about the plan, implement, then go back to adults and be responsible for what they've done. They work better when know they have to make a public presentation about their work projects.

Funding variety is the key to the program's stability. It's based on the relationships MYC has with community partners. Each staff member finds partners. Partners come to MYC because of its reputation. It would be nice to have one person who is a professional grant writer and sales person who constantly develops partnerships, they said.

Good community partners have social mandates to give back to the community. MYC tries to choose partners based on social responsibility and priority on education. The best projects, from a program

perspective, are those that integrate thought processes with physical labor, where there's planning, implementation, follow-up and responsibility. Jobs are accepted on academic value; all projects have education in mind primarily. If projects are not academic, staff is still able to teach students work ethic and other skills, such as how to show up every day, leadership roles, team cooperation, getting jobs done, taking pride in the work you perform. Work and learning aren't mutually exclusive. It's a combination.

When it first started, MYC took what it could get and applied academics in the field as opportunities allowed. Once more money started rolling in, quality projects followed. For new programs, MYC suggests cold calling human service agencies. It takes time and contacts to sell your program. Sell it as a community service education program – that just so happens to charge \$300 a day. The education piece is really the main selling point for potential sponsors. The partnerships afford the partners good public relations, positive publicity. That sells. Plus, MYC promises a volunteer day for every two fee-for-service days. With the volunteer time, it balances out for sponsors.

Teambuilding/Orientation:

MYC strives to teach students how to "work hard, play hard and study hard." The "play hard" component comes in the form of some fun work projects and taking time out within projects to joke, laugh and have fun. Time and money are set aside strictly for the purpose of exposing students to new forms of recreation, entertainment and leisure. One day was spent at a climbing wall. The program spent thousands of dollars, from its fee-for-service coffers, on a two-night, three-day snowboarding trip.

These trips help build a team atmosphere and serve as rewards for the students' hard work. It also helps prevent issues such as those that landed them in the program to begin with. The teacher/program director says it's not on school time when kids get in trouble; it's in the students' free time. "By providing them with positive leisure time skills, the program hopes to promote a healthy life-style," the teacher/program director said.

Orientations are based on hard work. There's something about having to pull together in misery and get something done together. If one person runs out of materials, they share. They help carry one another's tools. It's a cooperative work experience. On those long orientations – the better ones – they've been given green space to manage. They saw the level of work required and could set the pace. The goal has to be obtainable. They should have to sweat to get finish it. Growth comes from getting down and caring enough to get it done, coming back exhausted, tired and happy about it. That's what generates pride from work.

Even snowboarding trips involve cooking and cleaning as a team. Those fun trips also offer students more social experiences than they otherwise might have. Getting the group away from everybody else for a couple of days really builds that shared experience, something they can come back and talk about. On every trip, somebody falls apart and/or gets in fights. That's all teambuilding stuff. Kids may realize that their behavior isn't acceptable, but they're still accepted as part of the group. Daylong exercises, such as ropes courses, just don't reach the same end. The luxury trips give them opportunities to do expensive things that they probably can't do on their own.

Both are very different kinds of teambuilding, neither being more beneficial.

Students:

Seven of the 18 MYC students are girls. Ages range from 14-19, with four "fifth-year seniors." The teacher/program director says younger students present challenges, developmentally.

Students are self-referred or referred by friends, parents, teachers and counselors. The teacher/program director yearly gives slideshow presentations to counselors. It includes the program's mission statement. He shows counselors what kind of work students do in class and how they study hard. He shows them what kind of work students perform in the community, and how they play hard. The

presentations emphasize which students have done the best and how MYC integrates curriculum into field projects.

For the teacher/program director, red-flag factors include kids with unstable home environments and significant drug/alcohol problems. Ninety-nine percent come in as total school failures, with low attendance, little work skills and with bad kid-adult relationships. Common failure factors: attendance, inability to build relationships with the group and drug/alcohol abuse.

Successful students are usually credit deficient, have energy to graduate and are lost and/or lacking a peer group.

That said, everybody has an opportunity to join MYC, the teacher/program director said. MYC doesn't turn anybody down. MYC takes kids on a first come, first served basis. The teacher/program director believes programs should fit around the students, rather than making students fit programs. MYC meets them "where they're at."

Staff members (usually the teacher/program director) let students know up front what's expected. In interviews, he asks about attendance, about commitment, how they feel about getting dirty, ability to do teamwork, how they respond when someone gets in their face, what they do when frustrated and what the student's goals are. He tells them then that MYC calls home and tracks them closely.

They have a four-week grace period to see if it's going to work for them. A couple of times that period has been extended.

Admissions:

Currently, there is a 6-week probationary period, which will probably soon be changed to four weeks. During that time, staff reviews performance in attendance, ability to complete assigned work, level of involvement in group activities and appropriate behavior at the work site.

Preferably all staff members interview each applicant.

The teacher/program director tries not to deny anyone access to the program. The teacher/program director doesn't believe in looking for a type of student to fit into the program. Counselors, kids and parents refer students to the program.

Contracts:

Contracts are signed by staff, students and parents. They serve as a backstop. Actual policies are flexible and depend on individual student situations. The one rule of MYC is: "It all depends," according to the teacher/program director. "Talking up front about issues and problems is a deeper way of relating rather than relying on a set rule. It's not foolproof. It's a lot harder to do it that way. But it's important to remember where the kids are coming from and to encourage them to take steps toward the goal and not expect them to hit the goal right off. We keep the distance in mind, where we want them at the end of the year. We don't try to win the battle to lose the war."

Attendance:

According to the MYC contract, "MYC participants are strongly encouraged to meet a 90 percent attendance standard." Generally, they meet this target. To facilitate this goal, the school calendar has been divided into six-week segments. In any given six-week period, crewmembers are granted three personal days to cover illness, family leave or emergencies. Any days missed beyond this will require a consultation with a parent and/or doctor. Any days missed beyond three in a six-week period can result in a contract with the following: verbal warning, written warning, meeting with parents, 2nd written warning, dismissal from the MYC.

Students are granted three late arrivals or returns, for crew and class. Beyond the three, students get a verbal warning, then a written warning, a meeting with parents and finally dismissal from MYC.

Students may make up absences or late arrivals/returns by arranging a time to do so with a staff member.

Points and credits:

“People come before points,” said the teacher/program director. MYC is more flexible than traditional school. It’s more relationship based. Students can hand in their work anytime during the term, without necessarily losing points. Fairness issues don’t arise because students know everyone has his or her own situation and the teacher/program director lays down the policies up front.

Each student may earn up to 10 points per crew day just for showing up, five if they’re tardy and five when they call ahead with an excuse for being absent. The points are tallied for the term, with bonuses being granted as rewards.

According to MYC contract, crewmembers are “strongly encouraged” to maintain the equivalent of a B average. Every six weeks, crewmembers will be setting goals for academic performance for the quarter, the semester and the year. All crewmembers will be encouraged to meet CIM standards.

When a crewmember’s academic performance does not meet minimum MYC standards, or if a crewmember is not working toward his/her goals, a performance contract will be made between staff and the crewmember. The contract will encourage the crewmember to focus on problem areas as well as to make adjustments in short- and long-term goals for the school year. In the event that the crewmember does not meet the provisions of this performance contract, a meeting with parents will follow. Parents, the crewmember and staff will discuss options and make any necessary changes for the success of the student in the program. If no improvement is made after this stage, a meeting with MYC and RLC staff, parents and the crewmember will occur to reassess this crewmember’s placement in the MYC program and options will be discussed.

Students who show up for crew day unprepared (without one or more items on list, such as rain gear, long-sleeved shirt, gloves, boots, water, lunch...) may be asked to take a personal day. Habitually unprepared students will be put on contract according to the following scale: verbal warning, written warning, dismissal from the program.

MYC crewmembers can earn up to 4 credits each semester. One-half a credit can be earned for each of the following: work experience, career education, English, Social Studies, Science, Math, Wellness, and Technology. The teacher/program director said more credits are earned at MYC than traditional school because the kids are doing more work. They weave two assignments into one with credits for much more than academics. The program helps with life, social, and leisure skills as well. With the low staff-to-student ratio, teachers can tailor the assignments on an individual basis, which creates better efficiency.

CEC, CRUE, MYC Comparison Chart

	<u>MYC</u>	<u>CRUE</u>	<u>CEC</u>	
<u>THEME</u>				<u>OYCC Evaluation</u>
Structure	Program within district's alternative school	Program within private, nonprofit	Program w/in ESD	No apparent advantage, though flexibility is essential
Alternatives in same location	Reynolds Learning School	OM Alternative H.S.	Outdoor School	OYCC crews may not appeal to all
Champion support	Superintendent	Community	Director/ESD	Makes it possible
Cite local statistics	No	Yes	No	Good info for Legislature, sponsors
Project sponsors	City of Troutdale, Port of Portland, State Parks, City of Gresham, Forest Service	Wetlands Conservancy, Workforce Investment Act	Clean Water Services, Oregon Department of Forestry, Tualatin Parks	Variety is crucial
Fee-for-service dependence	Yes	No	Yes	Flexibility vs. money
Referrals	Counselors, students, parents	Counselors, self referrals, friends	School counselors	A good line of communication should be established.
Term	Four nine-week grading periods	3 trimesters, each with 6-week grading block	9-week semesters	Are any easier to stay on track?
Hours of operation	8:50 a.m. - 3:10 p.m., Monday - Friday	9 a.m. - 2 p.m., with optional 8 a.m. class, Monday - Friday	8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., Monday - Thursday	How make worth sponsors' while? How relate to increased credits?
Days out on crew	Every other day in class, out on project	Tuesdays and Thursdays	One week in, one week out, alternating	Alternating days may keep things varied, fresh and interesting.
Credit gain/recovery	Up to 4 credits/semester	Up to 2.5 credits/trimester	Up to 4 credits/semester	How make the sale, compared to traditional school?
Daily point system	On crew only	Crew and class	Crew and class	Ability to track individuals closely
Ability to send kids home -on daily basis -permanently	Yes Yes	Yes Yes	Yes Yes	Programs must have this authority.

CEC, CRUE, MYC Comparison Chart

	MYC	CRUE	CEC	
Emphasis on community, relationships	Yes	Yes	Yes	Programs offer more than academics, such as life, leisure skills
CIM/CAM standards	Yes	Yes	Yes	On par with traditional schools
Contract with student and parents	Written, but flexible	Written for students	Written, strict	Should be strict at first and used as a backstop.
Teacher/CL gender	1 female, 2 male	2 female, 1 male	3 female	Diversity is ideal
Teacher/crew leader background -natural resources -social sciences -other	X X X	X,X, X	X,X X	More important are staff members' commitment to youth and community.
Teacher certification	Master's in Education, Master's in Social Work	2 w/ Master's of Arts in Teaching, 1 with Master's in Environmental Ed.	Certified Elementary	None appears best
Crew leader/teachers	Separate	Combined	Separate	May offer more class/crew continuity
# of Students	18	~ 27	~ 30	More time, stronger relationships
Orientation	4 days/3 nights of work, relaxation at Camp Cody in fall and spring	3 days, 2 nights at Camp Magruder in fall; 3 days, 2 nights camping in spring	2 days, 1 night at beginning of each semester	Builds team atmosphere, camaraderie, trust, morale
Team building	Climbing wall, snowboarding	Winter challenge options	Ropes courses	Build team atmosphere, camaraderie, trust, morale
Types of crews	Natural resource	Natural resource, GIS, Human services	Natural resources	More options, more diverse student population?
Homework	No	Yes	No	How relate to credits, work ethic?
Academic Connection between class and crew	"Green-space management," project time in class, ID books	Project time in class, research on the ground, ID books	Carryover when possible, occasionally ID books	Is a goal, especially to justify additional credits.

CEC, CRUE, MYC Comparison Chart

	MYC	CRUE	CEC	
Use of OYCC curriculum	Very little	None	Very little	Needs revision
Crewmember stipend/awards	Fun trips	\$25 gift certificate for perfect attendance	Surprise gifts, awards for perfect attendance, most points...	Incentives, morale
Advocate	Staffers informally serve students	Each student assigned to one crew leader for career	informal	Having one "go-to" staff member responsible for each student offers a positive mentor relationship
Probation period	Soon to be 4 weeks (from 6)	4-5 weeks before "regular status student"	2 week shadow	Good idea
Crew consistency	Changes every few weeks	Same for (at least) trimester	Same all semester	Depends on overall group size, dynamic
Appreciation circle	Occasionally	Every morning, sometimes on project	Every morning	Reflection, academics
Journals	Most days	Most days	Every day, crew and class	Provides academic angle and insight into students' thoughts, feelings.
Daily performance logs	?	?	Yes	May help track students, points
Open/closed campus	Open	Closed	Closed	Helps with structure.

Prospective Project Evaluation Form

Project Name:		Date Evaluated:		Evaluated By:		
Project Type:		Referring Agency:		Contact:		
Address/Location of Project:						
General Description (including goals, specific duties):						
Project Rating (1=low program value, 5=high program value)					Comments:	
Educational Value:	1	2	3	4		5
Community Benefit:	1	2	3	4		5
Safety:	1	2	3	4		5
Logistics (travel time):	1	2	3	4		5
Motivational Factors:						
Skill Diversity	1	2	3	4		5
Length of Commitment	1	2	3	4		5
Monetary Benefit to Program:	1	2	3	4		5
Competition w/ Local Business:	1	2	3	4		5
Final Determination/Explanation:						

Appendix A

Credit and Recognition

This project was the brainchild of OYCC Executive Director Ron Adams. It was developed and written during the 2001-2002 school year by Michael Lancaster, an AmeriCorps member placed at OYCC. The content of the document was gleaned from insights and interviews with OYCC programs, staff and partners.

ELEMENTS was modeled after similar self-assessment tools in the industry, such as the National Youth Employment Coalition's PEPNet (the Promising and Effective Practices Network) and the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps' ECO Standards (Excellence in Corps Operations).

The Prospective Project Evaluation Form was developed by Nestucca Connections, of Cloverdale.

OYCC would like to know how ELEMENTS has been useful to your organization, and how it could prove to be more useful.

To send questions, comments and suggestions, or for more information about ELEMENTS or OYCC membership, materials and resources,

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