

# Youth Service Learning Discovery Project

Exploring service, service learning and civic  
engagement opportunities for Connecticut's youth.



## Youth Service-Learning Discovery Project: A State-Level, Cross-Sector Landscape Review

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I hope I have represented them, their passion for supporting our youth and driving positive change in our communities, and their ideas with fidelity, respect and honor. My deepest gratitude to everyone who participated in a strategy meeting, interview or focus group.

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# PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

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## Purpose

Serve Connecticut, Connecticut’s Commission on Community Service, commissioned this qualitative landscape review in Fall 2021 to provide Serve Connecticut with a “more comprehensive understanding of what is happening in communities around the state; and positively impact the youth service, service-learning and civic engagement landscape in Connecticut, particularly as it pertains to underserved middle- and high-school aged youth.” (Serve Connecticut YSLDP Request for Proposals, 2021).

Housed within the Office of Higher Education, the Commission funds and supports programs that encourage all Connecticut residents to volunteer. They administer programs under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. The Commission sees youth service, service-learning and civic engagement as a conduit to youth empowerment, personal growth, educational and career advancement, and an investment in an individual’s continued commitment to service into adulthood. Serve Connecticut is committed to continuing and expanding its role in this domain. See Appendix A: Serve Connecticut YSLDP Request for Proposals, 2021.

## Background

As of 2021, there are approximately 513,000 students across 1,500 public schools in 201 school districts in Connecticut. Middle and high school students make up approximately 47.5% of the total student population.

K- 12 Public School Population	Number of Students	Percentage of Student Population
Elementary (PK-6)	269,725	52.32%
Middle (7-8)	78,232	15.23%
High (9-12)	165,658	32.25%

Source: [https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/enrollment-dashboard?language=en\\_US](https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/enrollment-dashboard?language=en_US)

The breakout of student population across Connecticut’s eight counties, shared below, illustrates the wide range in enrollment levels across the state with more than 160,000 students per county in three of the largest counties and under 30,000 students in four of the smallest counties in the state:

County	Total Est. Population	Youth (age 5 – 19)
Fairfield	943,332	184,818
Hartford	891,720	161,432
New Haven	854,757	178,546
New London	265,206	44,982
Litchfield	180,333	28,690
Middlesex	162,436	25,648
Tolland	150,721	28,036
Windham	116,782	20,879

Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

Baseline data, including information collected initially by Serve Connecticut, from the 2016 Civic Health Index and other sources also provide helpful context.

DataHaven, a Connecticut-based nonprofit organization, conducts statewide surveys, including the Civic Health Index, which ask questions regarding the overall civic health of the state and its local communities:

- The 2016 Civic Health Index showed that Connecticut residents’ rate is higher than the national average on certain civic health indicators related to civic engagement. These indicators include volunteering and donating to charity, among others. However, these same indicators, as well as other related indicators, have been dropping in recent years in the state. Gaps in civic engagement rates in these indicators are widest based on income and education; individuals with lower income or education levels participate less in voting and volunteering (DataHaven, 2016 and Appendix A: Serve Connecticut YSLDP Request for Proposals, 2021).
- The Civic Health Index also suggested wide disparities in [civic] involvement exist based on age, with young adults aged 18-24 being significantly less likely to give to charity, attend public meetings, or register to vote (DataHaven, 2016).
- The 2018 Community Wellbeing Survey showed a wide gap based on income and education to the questions around whether or not respondents have volunteered in the past 12 months. Higher income individuals were much more likely to respond affirmatively than lower income respondents. The education gap between respondents with a bachelor’s degree or higher respondents (48%) and individuals with high school or less (29%) was almost 20 points (DataHaven, 2018).

2019 Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data add insight into the specific experience of

Connecticut's youth and highlight the significant number of youth who may be disengaged from organized activities:

- Connecticut high school students reported an overall 60.7% participation rate in 2019 in “organized after school, evening, or weekend activities (such as school clubs; sports; community center groups; [etc.]” (Connecticut YRBS, 10 Year Trends, 2019).
- When this participation rate indicator is disaggregated by race, the rate of participation is 65.1% among white high school students, 52.6% among black (non-Hispanic) high school students, and 52.4% among Hispanic high school students (Connecticut YRBS, 10 Year Trends, 2019).
- 2019 data also demonstrates a “significant association” between higher rates of participation in organized activities and higher grade achievement on report cards, with students who participate in these activities being more likely to earn mostly A's and B's (Connecticut YRBS, Health and Academics, 2019).

Further, as noted by Serve Connecticut in their baseline data collection, “Connecticut minority high school students report lower engagement in organized activities and see corresponding lower rates of earning higher academic grades, mirroring data trends associated with the state's acknowledged academic achievement gap”. This achievement gap is noted in numerous publications, including a 2019 report from the Connecticut Office of Legislative Research (see Appendix A: Serve Connecticut RFP; and Callahan, 2019).

There are also key programs, policies and organizations integral to the youth service, service-learning and civic engagement landscape for middle and high school students that were known at the outset of this investigation including:

- Numerous programs supported by the Connecticut Secretary of State's Office, along with other partners such as the Connecticut Democracy Center and the Connecticut Department of Education to engage schools and students in civic engagement, including the Red, White and Blue Schools initiative, Connecticut's Kid Governor program, and a collection of civic education lesson plans and curricular materials (<https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Education/awards-and-programs/Civic-Engagement-Initiatives>).
- The state's high school graduation requirements include a ½ credit course on Civics and American government. For this requirement, social studies teachers are encouraged, but not required, to employ an inquiry-based curriculum and include civic engagement activities.
- Opportunities offered out-of-school time in Connecticut include:
  - Chapters of national youth organizations;

- A number of higher profile Connecticut-based nonprofits guiding youth in service-learning and civic engagement;
- Elected youth leadership councils that engage high school and young adult tribal members, featured by the state’s two recognized tribal nations, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Mohegan Tribe; and
- A network of municipal departments of youth and recreation, fraternal organizations, faith-based organizations, and local neighborhood organizations that offer youth service, leadership, and civic engagement programs and activities. (See Appendix A: Serve CT Youth Service-Learning Development Project Request for Proposals.)

As the compilation of data shows, and national data highlighted in a recent national landscape report from the Association of State Commissions (ASC) confirms, there is “potential for growth for youth programming across the country.” While there are opportunities, structures, and numerous programs, the local and national data suggest that a substantial number of students do not have access or opportunity to engage as volunteers, civic and community leaders, and changemakers in Connecticut and across the country (America’s Service Commissions, 2022).

The findings and future directions outlined in this report provide a qualitative deep dive into understanding the current landscape, surface the challenges and barriers, and propose steps forward to effectively broaden opportunity and access to youth service, service-learning and civic engagement for middle and high school students in Connecticut.

## METHODS & CONTEXT

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### Initial Research Questions

At the start of the project, Serve Connecticut posed six primary research questions. While limited in scope and resources, the findings and future directions in this landscape review offer valuable insight into several of these questions, especially the questions listed below.

- What is the accessibility and reach of existing youth service, service learning and civic engagement activities for Connecticut middle and high school students?
- What programmatic, demographic, and/or socioeconomic barriers may be impeding youth participation in existing youth service, service-learning and civic engagement opportunities in the state?
- Where are the gaps in existing youth service, service- learning and civic engagement

opportunities in Connecticut? Who are the state’s highest need, most underserved youth in the area of youth service opportunities?

- What youth service, service-learning and civic engagement models are most aligned with meeting that need? How can those gaps be filled?
- What is the potential role for national service in better meeting youth service, service-learning and civic engagement needs? What evidence-based and/or innovative new AmeriCorps State approaches can our Commission fund and support through our program-strengthening training and technical assistance programming?

(Appendix A: Serve CT Youth Service-Learning Development Project Request for Proposal)

## Words Matter: Purposeful Focus on Broader Language

From the outset, this review purposefully broadened the language utilized in the key informant interviews and group meetings to describe youth service, service-learning and civic engagement.

Several factors informed this deliberate approach:

- Direct feedback from participants, right from the start, strongly encouraged broader, more inclusive language and a wider lens to determine who is interviewed. Participants felt that some of the terminology used in the youth service field could be exclusionary and not responsive to the rich, diverse experience of our youth and the communities in which they live, attend school and work.
- Serve Connecticut’s commitment to gaining a robust and informed understanding of what is happening with youth engagement beyond the individuals and organizations typically expected to respond to terms such as “youth service”, “service-learning,” or “civic engagement.” Using broader terminology ensured that the language did not limit this study’s ability to gather meaningful data on youth engagement, especially in community-based settings and academic departments other than social studies.
- Serve Connecticut’s own initial research established that there may be a disparity in participation in activities, including civic engagement based on geography, race/ethnicity, and age. The recent ASC report reinforced this disparity finding that “youth volunteer participation rates are even lower among youth from low-income families and racial/ethnic minorities.” (America’s Service Commissions, 2022). This study aimed to avoid underestimating the level of youth engagement by focusing on narrow terminology.

“We will need to redefine the approach and definition of service-learning. Our students are leading and learning differently.”

- *Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Leader, Launch Meeting, Dec 2021*



A key strength of this investigation is the deliberate insistence on avoiding limited, potentially exclusionary language to label the kind of engagement we wanted to learn about. The impact of this initial decision cannot be overstated.

In short, words matter. And in this case, moving away from prescribed and potentially exclusionary terminology significantly and positively impacted the quality of the data and the richness of the insights collected.

## **Main Data Sources**

Four main data sources informed the findings included in this cross-sector landscape review:

1. Key informant interviews with state-level leaders.
2. Key informant interviews with local/regional leaders in schools and community-based organizations, especially focused on out-of-school time (OST) programs that engage middle and high school age youth.
3. Stakeholder meetings before (December 2021) and after (May 2022) individual key informant interviews were completed.
4. Review of recent research and reports, both Connecticut-based and national.

## **Key Informant Interviews**

The key informant interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol. Questions were altered slightly depending on role (state or local leader) and setting (school-based setting, out-of-school-time program, higher education institution, AmeriCorps program, other). In a few cases, questions were skipped due to time constraints. In all cases, the interviewer used broad terminology to capture the fullest picture of the ways in which the interviewees engage youth in their schools, programs and institutions.

The interview protocol included five broad questions:

1. Current State: What exists now in your school/organization/program that is related to the types of youth experiences described?
2. Future State: What changes/content are on the horizon at the state or national landscape that the interviewee thinks will be important to consider if we wish to expand opportunities for youth to participate in the experiences described?

3. Future Vision: What is the interviewee’s personal vision or “wish list” for what they would like to see happen in the future to expand these experiences with/for youth?
4. Barriers and Gaps: What is the interviewee’s understanding of the major gaps and barriers that impede opportunities for youth to engage in the experiences described?
5. Training and Support: Suggestions for what kinds of training and support would be helpful to support the types of experiences described, especially in the short term?

Twenty-five key informant interviews were completed. Interviewees were selected based on baseline research and individual recommendations to represent a cross-sector, geographically diverse cohort from which overall trends, opportunities, barriers, and gaps could be identified to inform future directions.

<b>TOTAL INTERVIEWS</b>	
Statewide	11
Regional/Local	14
<b>BREAKOUT BY SECTOR</b>	
K-12	9
Out-of-School Time (OST) youth programs	8
AmeriCorps	2
Higher Education	3
Other: local govt, civic engagement (all ages), non-affiliated	3
<b>BREAKOUT BY COUNTY</b>	
Hartford	5
Mashantucket Pequot Tribe	1
New Haven	4
Tolland	1
Fairfield	2
New London	3
Statewide	11

## Stakeholder Meetings

In addition to the key informant interviews, three stakeholder meetings occurred during the course of this project. The first meeting, in December 2021, informed the interview process and provided initial

recommendation to identify potential interviewees. After the key informant interviews were completed, two additional stakeholder meetings occurred in May 2022 to solicit valuable feedback and to clarify the initial findings and potential future directions shared in this report. Of note: most participants in the May stakeholder meetings had participated in prior meetings or completed an individual interview.

## Limitations & Additional Context

There were several limitations to this study. Among them:

- Time and resources did not allow for every school district or municipality to be included in the landscape review.
- Due to the limitations of this study, quantitative data was not collected or analyzed.
- A limited number of school-based teachers were interviewed for this review. Due to the unprecedented stress our schools are under, it was challenging to connect with school-based individuals, especially middle school, for the interview portion of this review.
- The entire study occurred during the pandemic with all interviews and group meetings conducted via videoconferencing.

Note on terminology: The terms “youth” and “student” are used throughout to refer to middle and high school age students, approximately aged 12 – 19.

## MAIN FINDINGS

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1. **Language is important.** Broadening the language used to describe youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement resulted in a richer, more inclusive and more expansive landscape review. Focusing on the qualities of the student experience rather than the terminology used to label the experience led to the inclusion of programs, institutions, and collaborations that otherwise may have been overlooked and significantly enriched our understanding of the opportunities, gaps and challenges for youth in Connecticut. For example, by widening our lens and broadening our language, we learned about programs such as Our Piece of the Pie’s Youth Service Corps (YSC) in Hartford, a program that combines youth development, workforce readiness and service.

## EXAMPLE: SERVICE-LEARNING & WORKFORCE READINESS

Since 2016, Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) has partnered with the City of Hartford to implement the Youth Service Corps (YSC). The YSC, initially envisioned by the Mayor of Hartford to address the lack of employment, connects youth with city department staff and local agency partners to implement service projects that meet identified community needs. In the process, students gain first-hand experience about how local government and community agencies work to address city residents' needs. Students are paid to participate in YSC, and the program is integrated into OPP's broader array of services focused on personal development, academic achievement and workforce readiness. Service project examples include:

- Seasonal yard cleanup for Hartford homebound
- Preparation of non-perishable items at FoodShare events
- Operation of The Carousel at Bushnell Park
- Community Garden Projects
- Hartford Community Beautification Initiatives

Source: <https://opp.org/services/workforce-readiness/>

2. **Mental health is a top concern.** None of the interview questions asked explicitly about youth mental health, yet this concern came up in most interviews and group meetings in both December 2021 and May 2022. Teacher burnout and concerns around the ability to staff afterschool programs were also raised consistently.

These mental health concerns echo the significant alarms raised by pediatricians, policymakers, and parents in Connecticut and nationally (American Academy of Pediatrics, October 2021; Hartford Courant, June 2022). Several interviewees, especially those working in out-of-school time (OST) programs, noted that they emphasize mental health, employ social-emotional learning curriculum and bring in additional clinical support for youth.

Notably, and perhaps related to the pandemic, several participants talked specifically about their concerns that students are

“disconnected” and “lonely”. This concern was echoed at the national level and noted in a 2022

“We have really had to slow down, listen to the youth, and see where they are because it is not the same day to day. Some days you can charge forward, and they are excited. Other days you really just need to have time together, time for conversation, and an opportunity to address issues in your own personal life before you can take on the world. We are stopping to listen more.”

- *Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Leader*

report on findings from the CDC’s 2021 Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey (Jones et. al., 2022).

3. **Students want to be engaged.** More than 60% of the key informant interviewees across diverse roles and geographic regions felt that students are eager for opportunities to engage in community service and be active leaders and “change-makers” in their communities.

However, interviewee enthusiasm for youth leadership was tempered by the significant concern for the mental health issues noted above. When probed on how to support youth leadership while not exacerbating mental health concerns, multiple participants pointed to the need for multiple pathways and diverse opportunities for youth.

Several participants also reflected on the potential of youth service, service-learning and civic engagement to serve as an “antidote to the grief and the lack of control some youth have felt over the last few years.” One teacher interviewed said, “mental health issues would be improved if students were given more of these opportunities to do meaningful work...because for some students, mental health issues come from the lack of meaning in high school.” ASC reported similar findings in their report noting that “teachers cited volunteering as having impact on students’ social emotional competencies and behaviors.” (America’s Service Commissions, 2022).

National reports, both the ASC report cited previously and a 2021 report from Civic/Hart Associates, *Ready To Engage: Perspectives of Teachers and Parents on Social and Emotional Learning and Service-Learning in America’s Public Schools*, confirm the potential to link social-emotional learning (SEL) with youth service, service-learning (SL) and civic engagement. *Ready To Engage’s* survey of parents and teachers found that they “view SEL and SL as having a reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship.” Their findings indicate that parents and teachers believe service-learning (SL) programs would help improve students’ social and emotional skills and suggest that “This mutually reinforcing relationship offers educators and policymakers a powerful opportunity to simultaneously cultivate students social and emotional competencies

“Not every student necessarily wants to be a leader all of the time. It’s ok to know that you can do small things to make a difference. You do not have to lead everything all of the time. I think that when there’s a lot of focus on “traditional leadership”, students who don’t feel like being leaders feel pushed aside and feel like they don’t have anything to contribute. Important message for students – you don’t have to lead to have a big impact.”

- State level Program Leader

“In the same classroom, some of our students are ready to take on more and some are totally mentally exhausted!”

- Teacher

while preparing students to engage and give back to the community through SEL and SL.” (Atwell, et. al., 2021) (For a more in-depth discussion of the connection between social-emotional learning and service-learning, see Jagers, et.al., 2019. *Transformative Social and Emotional Learning: Toward SEL in Service of Educational Equity and Excellent.*)

4. **Findings indicate lack of access and opportunity for all students in school-based settings.** While opportunities for youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement exist in middle and high schools, a lack of uniform curriculum, limitations of the school day, and hesitancy on the part of some schools and teachers lead to inconsistency across schools and a lack of opportunity for all students.

- This review, which included interviewees at the local and state levels, suggests that the existing high school civics half-credit course requirement does not lead to hands-on youth service, service-learning, or civic engagement for all students.
- Program and curricular examples of youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement collected for this review are primarily social studies and science curriculum, high school capstones, grade-level integrated curriculum, afterschool clubs, service hour requirements, and state-sponsored programs. Many school-based approaches, including the examples shared by key informant interviewees, offer substantive learning components and civic dialogue. However, the experiential component, or what is sometimes referred to as “taking informed action” in the social studies curriculum, is widely varied, inconsistently offered, and not always connected to a curricular objective. In most cases, when offered, the experiential component was primarily in afterschool hours.
- At least one interviewee suggested, based on personal experience, that the service or engagement component is lacking in some of the larger cities.
- Several interviewees also suggested that the inconsistent engagement of students in school-based settings was due to a lack of accountability for local districts, overall and with respect to the implementation of specific state requirements.
- Numerous studies confirm the findings above, especially the lack of access for all students and the overall inconsistency and variability of the experience. Further, the *Ready to Engage* study found “troubling gaps for rural and low-income students” (Atwell, et. al., 2021; see also: America’s Service Commissions, 2022 and Afterschool Alliance, 2019).
- Of note: Few middle school teachers participated in this landscape review. This is a limitation that may merit further investigation.

5. **Out-of-school time (OST) programs are well-situated to expand opportunities for youth.** The vast majority of OST program interviewees (11 out of 12) and several state-level key informants felt that expanding opportunities for youth in OST programs is feasible and possible with additional funding and support. Some of these programs, perhaps more than previously known, already provide these kinds of youth service-connected experiences for youth aged 14 -26 (age range varies) as a central program aim or component of a larger program model. These programs have demonstrated the ability to be responsive to needs and concerns of young people, especially during the pandemic.
6. **There are significant barriers impeding efforts to engage more youth.** Study participants noted significant barriers to student engagement in schools and OST programs at the macro and micro level. These barriers, outlined in the chart below, are wide-ranging and confirmed in other studies referenced throughout this report. Highlights include:
- **Transportation to/from afterschool activities** was especially noted by interviewees in rural, urban, and urban-ring communities, including places such as Windham and Waterbury.
  - The **socio-economic reality**, noted in the chart below, was also cited by key informant interviewees across all sectors, school, out-of-school and state level.
  - Several **OST** program interviewees noted **staffing shortages**, paid and volunteer, as a barrier, as well as recent challenges recruiting AmeriCorps members.
  - Several **longer-standing OST programs reported fewer logistical barriers** to youth participation.

### Barriers to Expanding Opportunities for Youth

School-Based Programs	Out-of-School Time (OST) Programs	Socio-Economic Reality	Logistical Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing school-based service-learning model challenging to implement, especially the experiential component</li> <li>• Lack of flexibility in the school day</li> <li>• Lack of standard curriculum</li> <li>• Lack of accountability to implement current requirements</li> <li>• Lack of training for adults and youth</li> <li>• Lack of funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sources of funding lack flexibility and longevity to expand opportunities for youth</li> <li>• Workforce shortages to staff programs</li> <li>• Need more volunteers</li> <li>• Some programs report challenge developing partnerships with public schools</li> <li>• Lack of training for adults and youth</li> <li>• Lack of funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing economic conditions, including access, availability and affordability of afterschool care, require middle and high school students to work and/or take care of younger siblings after school. Often, this precludes them from having the opportunity to participate in school-based or OST programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of transportation in rural and in under-served urban/urban ring communities preclude students from the opportunity to participate in school-based or OST programs.</li> </ul>

7. **The current political climate is a real concern.** Participants, in both individual interviews and all three stakeholder group meetings, voiced significant concern about the politicization of public schools and its impact on their ability to implement service-learning and civic engagement curricula for middle and high school students. **This concern contributes to teacher and school hesitancy to engage students in service and civics.** As one participant who works at the statewide level put it, “teachers are afraid to teach civics because sometimes what they are teaching, parents find it objectionable for some reason or other.”

8. **Local collaborations with AmeriCorps members and higher education are successfully engaging youth.** Study participants shared several promising examples of local collaborations supporting effective youth engagement that include AmeriCorps members and higher education partners working with public schools, community-based organizations and local government.

Interestingly, while some interviewees and stakeholders reported increased challenges in building collaborations, especially with public schools, organizations with a longer history of working with schools and other partners felt this was not a challenge. This finding may, at least in part, be due to the severe limitations and challenges placed on schools during the pandemic.

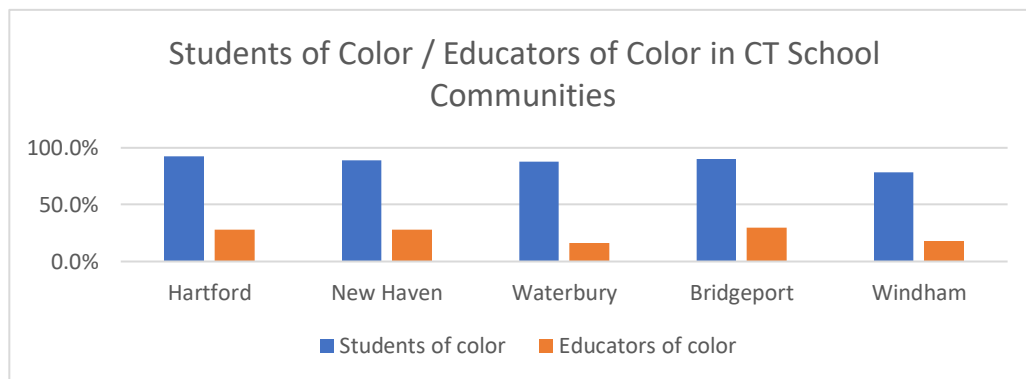
“Our AmeriCorps members are fantastic...They really care. They go out of their way to do outreach and to make new partnerships and give everything they can to the students we work with.”  
- AmeriCorps  
Program Leader

9. **More state-level coordination, support, and visible public leadership are a core need.** Participants, in both state-level and local roles, identified a need for more state-level coordination across civic engagement, education, and community agencies providing youth employment, leadership, and development programs. **School-related participants suggested that more visible support and more state-supported, sanctioned, and celebrated opportunities for middle and high school students, classrooms, and schools is needed to build and sustain support for local efforts.** Existing programs such as the Red, White & Blue initiative, Civics in Action, Kid Governor, Civic Ambassadors and others were mentioned as good examples of the kinds of activities to expand.

10. **Training and peer-to-peer shared learning are needed.** A majority of key informant interviewees (20 out of 25) from school-based and OST settings cited the need for training and peer-to-peer support for teachers, youth program staff, national service members working with youth, volunteers, and the youth themselves. A prioritized list of training and support needs are shared in the Training and Professional Development Topics chart below. These needs include:



- Training on **how to incorporate authentic youth voice and center youth experience** was raised frequently and identified as a high priority by both school and community-based participants.
- Training on **how to incorporate youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement programs into existing youth development programs** was also consistently raised. For example, one participant suggested training on how to integrate a meaningful service component into youth sports programs.
- Training on **diversity, equity and inclusion** was noted by more than half of the interviewees and included both **general training and training in the context of supporting youth service, service-learning, and youth as “change-maker” initiatives**. Several interviewees talked candidly about the challenges inherent in having a majority Caucasian staff engaging with a majority BIPOC student population to explore critical social issues. Based on data compiled by the Connecticut State Department of Education’s EdSight online database, this disparity between teachers of color and students of color is especially evident in urban and urban ring communities. For the 2021 school year, statewide data show that there were 51.4% students of color and only 10.6% educators of color, representing a 40.8% disparity in Connecticut public school districts (excluding charters, technical schools, etc.) Drilling down into a few of the communities represented in this study, we see an even greater disparity:



CITATION: [https://public-edsight.ct.gov/educators/educator-diversity-dashboard?language=en\\_US#related-links](https://public-edsight.ct.gov/educators/educator-diversity-dashboard?language=en_US#related-links)



Training and Professional Development Topics for Teachers, Youth Development Professionals & Students	OST Settings	School-Based Settings
Youth Voice: Link to social emotional learning initiatives and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion training	High Priority	High Priority
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Including how to effectively support youth service-learning and related programs given the racial/ethnic disparities that exist in some settings (schools, community-based youth programs and organizations) between teachers/leaders and predominantly Caucasian teachers and BIPOC youth	High Priority	High Priority
Peer to Peer Networking: For teachers, across curricular areas (not only social studies); youth development professionals, AmeriCorps and other national service streams; volunteers and youth	High Priority	Priority
How to facilitate/guide youth-led service-learning, social action and related initiatives: in classrooms; and in existing youth development and sports programs	High Priority	Priority
How to incorporate reflection and demonstration of learning into project/curriculum: Including innovative use of tech, podcasts, video, etc.	Priority	Priority
How to identify and collaborate with local government, schools, and other community partners	Noted	Noted
Skill-building for youth to strengthen their leadership	Noted	Noted

## Potential Areas for Further Investigation

Other preliminary findings from this investigation worthy of further consideration include the following:

- Take a closer look, perhaps as part of future state-level coordination and collaboration efforts, at existing and new local and state-level school accountability systems to:
  - Leverage existing school accountability levers such as the state-level Next Generation Accountability System.
  - Encourage schools to revisit and strengthen their vision for students’ civic competency upon graduation by incorporating it into vision their “portrait of a graduate” or creating a

“pathway” or “K-12 ladder of participation” articulating the skills, knowledge, and competencies they want students to achieve throughout their educational experience.

- Consider expanding the scope of Serve Connecticut’s work and investigation to include elementary age students and utilize the insights, data and findings of Dr. Jennifer Murrphy’s recent dissertation, *Elementary Social Studies Curriculum in Alliance Districts: Actions that Support Successful Implementation*, to inform such an effort (Murrphy, 2022). The interest in and success of Connecticut’s Kid Governor program for fifth graders also suggests there is an opportunity to engage more youth starting in elementary school as a first step in pathway toward engagement in middle school, high school and beyond.
- Consider whether and when it would be of added value to collect updated data on the Connecticut Civic Health index, or work with partners at DataHaven and the State Department of Public Health to incorporate additional questions into the Community Wellbeing Survey and Youth Behavior Risk Survey, respectively.
- Investigate further where there may be opportunities to engage and train pre-service teachers through the range of pathways available, both traditional and non-traditional, including those supported via national service programs. For example, Johns Hopkins School of Education has partnered with Teach for America to provide a master’s degree program that includes a module on “student advocacy”. Additionally, the Connecticut Office of Higher Education has the Alternative Route to Teacher Certification (ARC) program, an accelerated hybrid program.
- Dig deeper into feedback on the current challenge of recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers to support community-based programs to determine if there is a role for Serve Connecticut in helping to shore up volunteer resources and support.

## MOVING THE NEEDLE IN CT: POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS FORWARD

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The findings and research presented in this report suggest that existing youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement programs, models, and curricula are not available and accessible to all students in Connecticut. To address this gap in access for Connecticut’s youth, the following directions forward for the Commission to take action are outlined below for consideration:

- Articulate a Broader, More Inclusive Vision
- Build Capacity Through Investment in Training and Peer-to-Peer Support
- Strategically Deploy Commission Resources to Expand Access and Opportunity
- Strengthen Collaboration & Partnerships at the State Level

## Articulate a Broader, More Inclusive Vision to Expand Access and Opportunity

Articulating a broader, more inclusive vision for youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement is an essential next step. It will open up opportunities where there may have been limitations in the past and will support multiple entry points to engage Connecticut youth. It may also help “make a compelling argument for why it matters” to middle and high school students, as one interviewee pointed out.

As this broader vision is developed, it will be important to:

- reflect the central tenets of service-learning, as defined in federal law and outlined most recently in the *Inspired to Serve* report (National Commission on Military, National and Public Service, 2020);
- use language that is inclusive and focuses more on what we want students to experience and less on what it is called;
- center youth as one primary audience for this vision; and
- include both school and community-based settings.

“Change-making looks lots of different ways. And we want all of our students to see themselves as powerful leaders...and grow their leadership capacity over time.”  
- Teacher

Examples of language shared over the course of this review offer a potentially useful starting point:

- Several study participants from both community and school settings utilized the terminology of “change-maker”, “making change”, and “taking action”. For example, the State Department of Education’s (SDE) Be The Voice for Change grant program uses change-oriented language in their program description, encouraging high school students to “get involved, be heard and make change.” (<https://portal.ct.gov/Voice4Change/V4C/Voice4Change-Program>). Common Ground High School, an environmental charter school in New Haven uses the “take action” language in their values statement (<https://commongroundct.org/about/>).
- One study participant articulated the experience they want students to have this way: “engaging young people in the process of shaping and influencing what they want their neighborhood, community, and work to be.”
- The 2016 Connecticut Civic Health Index report’s “Call to Action” includes terms such as “participate in community problem-solving” and “engagement in community-strengthening efforts.” (DataHaven, 2016).

## Build Capacity Through Investment in Training and Peer-to-Peer Support

Findings strongly indicate a need for training, peer-to-peer support, and shared learning. Training is a critical component – and an identified gap – of any plan forward to ensure that best practices inform future efforts and that adults lead with cultural competence, content knowledge, and skills. Several recent national reports also cite the need for a renewed focus on training (Atwell, et. 2021).

Participants noted an especially critical need for training on how to “center” youth voice, lived experience, diversity, equity, and inclusion in these programs. Other topics raised by a spectrum of study participants include:

- Resources and training to support reflection and demonstration of learning (including innovative use of technology, podcasts, video, etc.)
- Training on social-emotional learning theories/curriculum and the connection to youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement.
- The need to create space for peer-to-peer networking, support, and knowledge-sharing. As one higher education interviewee put it, we need “a convening of a community of folks to share knowledge.” Further, this effort may present opportunities for co-convening and partnership with the education programs and departments within Connecticut’s higher education institutions.

See page 17 for a more complete list of prioritized training needs suggested by participants.

## Strategically Deploy Commission Resources to Expand Access and Opportunity

### Incentivize and support local partnerships that include AmeriCorps and higher education partners to support schools and OST programs.

Findings suggest expanding upon Serve Connecticut’s 18-year track record of supporting youth engagement through its AmeriCorps portfolio to include initiatives taking a local approach to centering student well-being, learning, and youth engagement as volunteers, community problem-solvers, and leaders, locally and globally. As noted previously, we found promising examples of these partnerships across the state including Health360’s project with AmeriCorps and local public schools, and New Britain’s innovation partnership with Central Connecticut State College staff and students to support youth development, community service and college readiness.

“I do think that when communities come together to work on challenges, there will be buy-in.”

- *Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Leader*

The Afterschool Alliance, a national organization that promotes and supports afterschool programs also recommends partnership building with AmeriCorps. An article in their newsletter, Afterschool Spotlight, points out that nonprofits need the support of local partners: “Leading service-learning projects can be a heavy lift for small nonprofits. Develop strong community partnerships and consider adopting the AmeriCorps model to overcome time and budget limitations.” (Afterschool Spotlight, accessed July, 2022).

The same concept applies to schools. Recognizing the pressure our schools and teachers are feeling – especially the burnout and politicization of public education – supporting local-level partnerships may serve to shore up school-based efforts, marshaling the resources of AmeriCorps, higher education partners, OST programs, Connecticut’s Civic Ambassador program, and other state-level initiatives directed toward schools. As one teacher interviewed for this report put it, “we need partnerships and people,” especially help to partner with and communicate with families, to make this work sustainable and systemic in our schools.

**Expand funding and support for OST programs that include a youth service, service-learning, or civic engagement focus or program component with the capacity to serve more youth.**

Connecticut is fortunate to have exemplary programs addressing a broad array of youth developmental needs and social supports *alongside* youth service, service-learning, and civic engagement. These programs often include clinical support, social/emotional learning, youth leadership, workforce development, career readiness, the arts, and sports. Numerous examples, including organizations such as the Hartford area YWCA, Waterbury’s Bridge to Success, the New London Talent Show, and many others, are listed in the Connecticut Resources section of this report.

Further, this study and other national reports suggest strong consideration for funding OST programs, such as career/workforce development programs, that combine one or more of these approaches and provide stipends or other forms of payment to youth as an incentive to participate (Atwell, et. al., 2021). There are programs with this combined focus across the country, including some administered by state commissions. One example, administered by California State Commission, is the Californians for All Youth Job Corps (<https://www.californiavolunteers.ca.gov/youth-jobs-corps/>).

**Identify and support innovative approaches to mitigate or eliminate the socio-economic and logistical barriers articulated in this report.**

- **For OST programs and local collaborations**, the most concrete barriers to address are **transportation and the need for young people to work and/or take care of younger siblings during afterschool hours**. Addressing these barriers will significantly expand access and opportunity for **Connecticut youth**. One solution is to provide adequate funding to OST programs for transportation and stipends or other forms of payment for students whenever possible. Additionally, there are examples of individuals and communities developing other creative, cost-effective solutions, including:
  - New London is experimenting with a no-cost/low-cost “smart ride” for all residents, including students.
  - One interviewee suggested allowing younger, elementary age siblings to join in on afterschool activities so middle and high school students can fully participate.
  - Several OST programs consulted for this study use the school facilities for afterschool activities, thereby reducing, but not eliminating, the need for transportation.

OST programs also report needing support to “de-silo” funding and integrate their strategies to support the holistic needs of youth over a longer period of time. As one participant explained: “...we have to recognize with the pandemic and the mental overlay...it's more complex. And it's not that little pep talk we used to do 20 years ago. It looks very different now. And we have to really stack our programs differently and have those contractual services nimble and responsive enough to meet the needs of our young people.”

- **For school-based programs**, mitigating the known barriers could include at least two main approaches:
  - **Encouraging collaboration between career development, workforce readiness, civic engagement, and social-emotional learning initiatives to expand opportunities for youth (similar to how making these programmatic connections can expand opportunity in OST programs)**. This may expand access and alleviate some of the barriers cited in this report. Typically, workforce readiness programs in school-based settings exhibit more flexibility during the school day and sometimes have access to transportation as well.
  - **Supporting training and incentivizing schools to implement more service-learning and civic education initiatives that can largely be implemented during the regular school day**. This may include programs such as peer-to-peer tutoring and mentoring, environmental education, and other academically-connected initiatives. **The ESSR-funded Be the Voice for Change grant awards offer several examples of school-centered, student-led, school**

climate-focused initiatives that can happen during the school day. (see list of winning proposals with brief descriptions at [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Voice4Change/V4C\\_Winning\\_Proposals.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Voice4Change/V4C_Winning_Proposals.pdf)).

## **Strengthen Collaboration & Partnerships at the State Level**

Findings suggest that crossing traditional organizational and programmatic boundaries to partner in new ways with the State Department of Education (SDE), as well as other state agencies and state-level organizations/associations invested in public schools, youth development, and civic engagement, will strengthen the state's overall capacity, infrastructure, and resources. Strengthening these partnerships will provide a latticework of support for local-level efforts to significantly expand opportunity and access for Connecticut youth.

Examples of what state-level coordination, collaboration, and leadership could take on together include:

- Expand state-sponsored/sanctioned and publicly celebrated programs to increase school and individual teacher participation in innovative and meaningful civic engagement and service-learning projects, especially in school-based settings. The level of involvement in programs such as Red, White and Blue, Civics in Action, History Day, and Connecticut's Kid Governor suggests that these programs generate interest and are a growth opportunity. Teachers and school leaders interviewed felt more state-sponsored events and opportunities would help strengthen local support. One participant noted that it would be helpful to have a state leader come to their school to speak about the value of service learning and civic engagement, and another suggested that state-level leaders can "help our local Board of Education understand what we are doing with civic education in the school and tell our story."
- Collaborate with Everyday Democracy and its partners to expand the Connecticut Civic Ambassador program. As of this writing, there are 142 Civic Ambassadors in 54 cities and towns. Approximately 14 ambassadors are aged 17 and under (mostly closer to 17 years old), and another 16 are aged 18-24. Expanding this program to include more youth represents another significant growth opportunity for the state (Connecticut Civic Ambassadors Summit, 2022).
- Work with state agency partners to amend policies and review regulatory levers associated with OST programs that receive workforce development funds, specifically addressing barriers they face in trying to center and prioritize the well-being of youth and social-emotional learning, including civic education and engagement. As one participant put it, fewer barriers could lead to "organic collaborations that are youth-focused and led by them, their brilliance and their agency."



- Partner with Connecticut Department of Education colleagues as well as the Connecticut Social Studies Teacher Association to understand how existing curricular standards across academic subject areas (i.e., not only social studies), graduation requirements, including the high school mastery requirements and capstones, and accountability systems can support, strengthen and expand opportunities for students in school-based settings. **Several school-based interviewees suggested taking a step beyond the current civic education ½-credit course requirement toward requiring service-learning and/or civic engagement.** As one interviewee put it, state-level laws and requirements “create space at the [local school] board table to share the new law, provide context, gives voice...it clarifies that it is not random that we are going to do x and y.”
- **Reach out to other, potentially un-tapped, state-level partners such as the Association of School Superintendents, Connecticut Judges Association, Connecticut Humanities, Connecticut Nonprofit Alliance, Connecticut Association of School Administrators,** and others that support schools, community organizations, and local collaborations.

## The Future Landscape

Based on the research and interviews conducted for this landscape review, there are other efforts currently underway, longer-term developments in process, and potential opportunities that Serve Connecticut may want to monitor or pursue in the next one to three years.

### Funding:

- There is renewed interest by AmeriCorps and the federal government to consider new funding for service-learning, as recommended in the *Inspired to Serve* report completed in 2020 (National Commission on Military, National and Public Service, 2020). Recommendations for this effort will be submitted to the federal legislature in Summer 2022 for consideration.
- With renewed interest on the part of AmeriCorps agency and new AmeriCorps CEO Michael Smith, there may be greater potential to leverage AmeriCorps & Volunteer Generation Funds (VGF) to support K-12 youth engaged in service.
- There has been an uptick in interest by state and national funders in supporting youth in out-of-school time; and significant funding for school-based and afterschool programs from the federal government through Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) and American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds.

### New Local and State Leadership:

- A New Commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Education was appointed in 2021 along with a new five-year plan for the schools.

- The new Connecticut Secretary of the State was sworn into office in July 2022.
- Given the significant teacher and out-of-school time staff turnover reported in this study and elsewhere, Connecticut may have many newly graduated educators and program leaders eager for additional training and the opportunity to utilize new strategies to engage their students.
- New interest and commitment to youth voice across multiple platforms, including state and local commissions and boards.

#### **Other Developments to Watch For:**

- In 2022, the Perrin Family Foundation is updating its 2012 field scan on youth development in Connecticut.
- The State Department of Education and Connecticut Social Studies Teachers Association are working on a Civic Education curriculum project in Summer 2022 to support social studies teachers.
- High schools across the state will be offering a new elective course on Black and Latino Studies starting in the 2022-23 academic year.
- Discussions are underway to identify a funding source to support data collection for an updated Connecticut Civic Health Index report (the last one completed was in 2016).

## Connecticut Resources: Individuals, Organizations and Agencies

The following list includes many individuals, organizations, schools, programs and agencies researched or consulted for this study. **Please note:** While several organizations and schools listed below were represented in key informant interviews and stakeholder meetings, this listing *does not* include all the individuals, organizations, or schools that participated in the study.

### **Organizations, Schools, Programs & Agencies include:**

AmeriCorps Connecticut Project Report: 2020 Year in Review. (2020). AmeriCorps.gov

[https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/upload/state\\_profiles/pdf\\_2021/CT%20Combined.pdf](https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/upload/state_profiles/pdf_2021/CT%20Combined.pdf)

Ball Headz

<https://ballheadzct.com/>

Blue Hills Civic Association

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

Bridge to Success

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

Campus Compact

<https://compact.org/>

Central Connecticut State University, Office of Community Engagement

<https://www.ccsu.edu/communityEngagement/>

Common Ground High School, New Haven, CT

<https://commongroundct.org/about/>

Connecticut After School Network

<https://ctafterschoolnetwork.org/>

Connecticut Area Health Education Center Network

<https://health.uconn.edu/connecticut-area-health-education-center-network/>

Connecticut Center for Arts and Technology (ConnCAT)

<https://conncat.org/>

Connecticut Civic Ambassadors, Everyday Democracy

<https://www.everyday-democracy.org/civicambassador>

Connecticut Council for the Social Studies

<https://www.ctsocialstudies.org>

Connecticut Democracy Center

<https://ctdemocracycenter.org/>

Connecticut Office of Higher Education, Alternative Route to Teacher Certification (ARC)

<https://www.ohe.ct.gov/arc/default.shtml>

Connecticut Office of the Secretary of State

<https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Education/awards-and-programs/Civic-Engagement-Initiatives>

Connecticut State Department of Education

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE>

Connecticut's Kid Governor program, Connecticut Democracy Center

<https://ctdemocracycenter.org/our-programs/kid-governor/>

Everyday Democracy, Civic Ambassadors Program/Civic Health Index

<https://www.everyday-democracy.org/>

Girl Scouts of Connecticut

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

Health360

<https://www.health360.org/>

Hearing Youth Voices

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

Leadership, Education, & Athletics in Partnership (LEAP)

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

Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation

<https://www.mptn-nsn.gov/default.aspx>

New England Science and Sailing (NESS)

<https://nessf.org/>

New London Talent Show

<https://newlondontalentshow.com/>

Our Piece of the Pie

<https://opp.org/>

Perrin Family Foundation

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

Red, White and Blue Schools, Connecticut Office of the Secretary of State and State Department of Education

<https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Education/RWB-Schools/Red-White-and-Blue-Schools>

Serve Connecticut

<https://servect.org/>

The Alliance: Voice for Community Nonprofits (including the CT Nonprofit Center)

<https://ctnonprofitalliance.org/>

United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut

<https://unitedwayinc.org/>

University of Connecticut, The Nancy A. Humphrey Institute for Political Social Work

<https://ssw.uconn.edu/humphreys-institute/>

The Village

<https://thevillage.org/>

Voice4Change, Connecticut State Department of Education

<https://portal.ct.gov/Voice4Change/V4C/Voice4Change-Program>

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Voice4Change/V4C\\_Winning\\_Proposals.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Voice4Change/V4C_Winning_Proposals.pdf)

Wesleyan University, Jewett Center for Community Partnerships

<https://www.wesleyan.edu/jccp/>

YWCA Hartford Region

<https://www.ywcahartford.org/welcome.html>

### **Individuals consulted include:**

- Donna Sodipo, Chief Program Officer, YWCA Hartford Region
- Joe Goldman, Social Studies Teacher, E.O. Smith High School
- Joel Tollman, Director of Community Impact & Engagement, Common Ground High School, Urban Farm & Environmental Education Center

- Justin Mitchell, Executive Director, Ball Headz Inc.
- Lily Egan, State Commissioner, Serve Connecticut
- Matt Farley, Director of Administration & National Service Programs, Campus Compact
- Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Executive Director, Connecticut Afterschool Network
- Sally Whipple, Executive Director, Connecticut Democracy Center at Connecticut's Old State House
- Sam DeCarlo, Director of Workforce Services, Our Piece of the Pie
- Tina Prakash, Special Assistant to the Deputy, Connecticut Office of the Secretary of State

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[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/CSHS/2019CTYRBS\\_Trend\\_Report\\_10Year.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/CSHS/2019CTYRBS_Trend_Report_10Year.pdf)

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## APPENDIX A: Serve Connecticut Youth Service-Learning Development Project: Request for Qualifications

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**Serve  
Connecticut  
Request for  
Qualifications  
Issue Date: September 28, 2021**

Youth Service Consultant  
Youth Service Learning Discovery Project (YSLDP)

Serve Connecticut / Connecticut Commission on Community  
Service Office of Higher Education  
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 707  
Hartford, CT 06103  
<https://www.ohe.ct.gov/cccs/>  
[www.servect.org](http://www.servect.org)

**Youth Service Consultant  
Request for Qualifications  
Youth Service Learning Discovery Project**

**Aim:** Serve Connecticut, the Connecticut Commission on Community Service, seeks to engage a consultant (or consultant team) who can provide subject-matter expertise in the areas of youth service and service-learning to support the development of programming in Connecticut in this area. We are specifically looking for expertise as it pertains to the following:

- Youth development principles and how they relate to community service;
- The use of service-learning as a strategy for teaching, learning and civic engagement; and
- Using service and/or service-learning to improve outcomes for youth and particularly for underserved and historically marginalized youth.

Serve Connecticut expects to do this work in several phases. First, the consultant will perform a landscape survey to help Serve Connecticut understand what is already happening around the state as it pertains to youth service and service-learning as well as what challenges, barriers and needs youth service is facing in these areas. The consultant will then lead an asset mapping process to identify promising practices in the field. Finally, the consultant will work with Serve Connecticut to identify existing promising model(s) and/or develop a program design for youth service that might be implemented or replicated in these communities with Serve Connecticut support.

**Need:** According to the “2016 Connecticut Civic Health Index,”\* Connecticut rates higher on certain civic health indicators related to civic engagement than the national average. These indicators include volunteering and donating to charity, among others. However, these same indicators, as well as indicators related to belonging to an organization, exchanging favors with neighbors, and voting have been dropping in recent years even as national averages have been stable. Further, gaps in civic engagement rates in these indicators are widest based on income and education; individuals with lower income or education levels participate less in voting and volunteering (p. 6-7). These gaps are illustrated in the “2018 DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey,”\*\* where positive responses to indicator questions around whether or not respondents have volunteered in the past 12 months and how much influence respondents feel they have on local government decision-making are more common among wealthy and suburban respondents than among rural, urban periphery, and urban core respondents based on median household income, population density and poverty rate U.S. Census data (p. 3).

According to the “2016 Connecticut Civic Health Index,” “wide disparities in [civic] involvement exist based on age,” with young adults aged 18-24 being significantly less likely to give to charity, attend public meetings, or register to vote. “Civic data reflect the relative political disengagement of Connecticut youth,” with youth voting rates in national elections just over half the voting rate of Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) and voting rates in local elections at a third the voting rate of the Silent Generation (born 1931-1945) (p. 15). The report does note the growing impact of social media on civic participation, particularly among youth, who participate in online activism at higher rates than older adults (p. 16).

According to the “Connecticut High School Survey 10-Year Trend Analysis” report comparing Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results data spanning 2009 to 2019, Connecticut high school students report an overall 60.7% participation rate in “organized after school, evening, or weekend activities (such as school clubs; sports; community center groups; [etc.]” (p. 29). The 2019 YRBS “Risk Behaviors and Academic Achievement Report” demonstrates a “significant association” between higher rates of participation in organized activities and higher grade achievement on report cards, with students who participate in these activities being more likely to earn mostly A’s and B’s (p. 24).

However, when this indicator’s data is aggregated by race, the rate of participation is 65.1% among white high school students (p. 116), 52.6% among black (Non-Hispanic) high school students, and 52.4% among Hispanic high school students (p. 171). Connecticut minority high school students report lower engagement in organized activities and see corresponding lower rates of earning higher academic grades, mirroring data trends associated with the state’s acknowledged academic achievement gap (Connecticut’s Academic Achievement Gap, pp. 2-3).

The “2016 Connecticut Civic Health Index” describes a collaboration led by the Connecticut Secretary of State’s Office to build systemic support for youth civic engagement through civics education interventions in K-12 schools, to both support students in academic success and to plant the seeds for improved civic engagement rates in early adulthood.

Initiatives such as the “Connecticut Election Project” evaluation of civics education in the state, the “Civics First” curriculum, and the “Red, White & Blue Schools” themed civic engagement school competition have emanated from this effort (2016 Connecticut Civic Health Index, p. 16). Further, the Connecticut State

Department of Education (SDE) includes civic engagement as a standard in its “Comprehensive K-12 School Counseling Framework.” Standard A3 in the Framework states that students must “demonstrate an understanding of the habits of mind of an engaged student in relation to all aspects of their lives,” and includes benchmarks for grade clusters 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12 in “achieving life balance [through] service, leadership and [the] ability to work on diverse teams” (SDE Website: Link provided below.)

The broader landscape of middle and high school aged youth service, service learning and civic engagement opportunities offered outside of school curricula in Connecticut includes chapters of national youth organizations such as the Connecticut Rivers Council Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of Connecticut, the Boys and Girls Club, the Connecticut Future Farmers of America, Habitat for Humanity Youth Programs and Youth Volunteer Corps of the United Way. A number of higher profile Connecticut-based nonprofits engage youth in service learning and civic engagement; examples include Leadership Greater Hartford through its Common Ground and Summer Nexus initiatives, the Connecticut Democracy Center through its Kid Governor initiative, and Everyday Democracy through its Youth Engagement Resources. The state’s two recognized tribal nations, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Mohegan Tribe, both feature elected youth leadership councils that engage high school and young adult tribal members. And, the state also possesses a network of municipal departments of youth and recreation, fraternal organizations, faith-based organizations, and local neighborhood organizations that offer youth service, leadership and civic engagement programs and activities.

Based on this basic understanding of the youth service landscape in Connecticut, our commission is deeply interested in learning how we can best leverage our mission “to strengthen communities through national service resources, community engagement, and volunteerism” to connect, educate, enhance, expand, develop, and promote existing and new youth service, service learning and civic engagement network providers. How can we be active partners in removing barriers and improving access to youth service opportunities among Connecticut youth populations currently underserved in this area?

Serve Connecticut views a quality landscape assessment as a critical first step toward achieving quality insight on important questions that directly impact our mission, including:

- 1) What is the accessibility and reach of existing youth service, service learning and civic engagement activities for Connecticut middle- and high school students?
- 2) What programmatic, demographic, and/or socioeconomic barriers may be impeding youth participation in existing youth service, service learning and civic engagement opportunities in the state?
- 3) Where are the gaps in existing youth service, service learning and civic engagement opportunities in Connecticut? Who are the state’s highest need, most underserved youth in the area of youth service opportunities?
- 4) What youth service, service learning and civic engagement models are most aligned with meeting that need? How can those gaps be filled?
- 5) What are the means and sources of funding and other support systems for existing Connecticut youth service, service learning and civic engagement opportunities? Are their additional resources available?
- 6) And, of course, what is the potential role for national service in better meeting youth service, service learning and civic engagement needs? What evidence-based and/or innovative new AmeriCorps State approaches can our Commission fund and support through our program-strengthening training and technical assistance programming? What relationships can we as a Commission help facilitate with other national service streams?

**Background:** Serve Connecticut, the Connecticut Commission on Community Service, administers programs under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. The Commission is dedicated to supporting

service and civic engagement to strengthen communities throughout Connecticut. In partnership with the Office of Higher Education, the Commission funds and supports programs that encourage all Connecticut residents to volunteer.

Serve Connecticut's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan re-asserts the Commission's long-standing commitment to the principles of Community Engagement (a "foundational belief in individual and shared civic responsibility for our neighbors and communities") and Equity ("embrace of every individual as a positive asset"). As such, the Plan includes among the Commission's espoused strategies the "promotion of volunteerism and community engagement for all ages."

For 18 years, Serve Connecticut has funded AmeriCorps Connecticut programs featuring primary interventions around exposing underserved middle and high school aged youth to service learning opportunities. As an eight-year member of the AmeriCorps Connecticut portfolio, HealthForward (previously CT AHEC Network) AmeriCorps members engage high school, college, and health services students in Health Service Corps, where participating students explore health careers while providing community service to diverse underserved populations in community settings across the state.

Previously in the AmeriCorps Connecticut portfolio for six years was Mine. Yours. Ours. (MYO), in which AmeriCorps members trained older high school aged students to serve as mentors to younger middle- and high-school aged students; together they produced dynamic theatrical and other community service projects while learning about personal development, teamwork, healthy relationships, social justice and civic engagement. Finally, also in the AmeriCorps Connecticut portfolio for ten years was Green Crew, a landscaping apprenticeship program that engaged underserved "opportunity youth" aged 16-24 in urban community-scape service and neighborhood improvement activities while developing critical, marketable general and field-specific job skills.

Serve Connecticut sees youth service, service learning and civic engagement as a conduit to youth empowerment, personal growth, educational and career advancement, and an investment in an individual's continued commitment to service into adulthood; Serve Connecticut is committed to continuing and expanding its role in this domain. As such, Serve Connecticut is eager to gain a more comprehensive understanding of and, ultimately, positively impact the youth service, service learning and civic engagement landscape in Connecticut, particularly as it pertains to underserved middle- and high-school aged youth.

**Anticipated Scope of Services:** Serve Connecticut anticipates the scope of the consultant's services to include the following:

- Conduct a community asset/landscape mapping process to identify effective organizations and programs, networks of providers, resources offered by the state and philanthropic community, and a survey of current programs, gaps in services and barriers to services, with the goal of identifying what is currently happening in the state as it pertains to youth service and service-learning, as well as key players and work that can be built upon and/or newly implemented successfully.
- Conduct a literature/practice review to identify promising evidence-based service-learning and youth service program models and practices to consider in program development.
- Advise program development efforts, specifically relating to utilizing service-learning or youth service as a strategy to better youth outcomes in these specific communities and specifically with underserved and historically marginalized youth.
- Participate in regular meetings throughout the process to update and advise Serve Connecticut staff in this process and serve as a subject matter expert.

**Project Timeline:**

- **August-October 2021:** Creation and promotion of RFQ for consultant; identification of consultant (screening/interviews, etc.); initial meetings of Serve Connecticut with consultant to kick off project; research and landscape survey/assessment begins.
- **November 2021-March 2022:** Research and landscape survey/assessment continues including outreach to the defined communities and introductions by Serve Connecticut between consultant and key partners; Serve Connecticut and Consultant to meet monthly at minimum for check-ins.
- **March 2022:** Report is produced by Consultant to share the results of the landscape survey/assessment and report is reviewed by Serve Connecticut, Consultant and partners.
- **April-June 2022:** Identification or development of promising models for youth service that might match the needs and address the challenges/barriers of the identified communities.
- **July 2022:** Wrap up meeting.

**Selection Process:** Candidates are asked to submit the information described below. Upon review of written qualifications, Serve Connecticut will interview qualified candidates as well as check references. Following the selection process, Serve Connecticut staff will work in consultation with the consultant selected to develop the final work plan for this project.

**Contract Size/Timing:** This contract will be billed based on an hourly rate, not to exceed \$18,000 by July 30, 2022 and Serve Connecticut would like the work to begin as soon as possible in November 2021. Please note that the \$18,000 also includes any administrative costs or expenses associated with this work.

**Requirements:** To be successful in this project, in addition to strong expertise and knowledge of service-learning and youth service in Connecticut and in general, Serve Connecticut feels that familiarity with non-profits, school systems and underserved and historically marginalized youth in the state would also be a benefit. The ability to meet face-to-face as well as virtually is also important.

**Submission Content:** To facilitate the review process, submissions should include the following content.

1. **Experience of the Consulting Organization/Individual:** Provide a description of your prior experience and qualifications to provide services in line with what is described above, being sure to address your overall reputation, service capabilities and quality as it relates to this project.
2. **Project Team (Key Staff):** Provide a list of all staff involved in this project, being sure to provide a brief resume and outline the credentials and experience for each person on your team, specifically addressing demonstrated ability to conduct community asset/landscape mapping, deliver effective technical assistance, create strong and productive relationships

with partners, experience with service-learning and youth service, and any specific issue areas you feel most able to support if applicable. Please note that it is fine to be a one-person team; however, if there are multiple team members, substitutions to this team can only be made with Serve Connecticut approval.

3. **References:** Provide the name and contact information for at least three (3) references familiar with the quality of your work of a similar nature.
4. **Project Understanding:** Provide your general understanding of our needs and a basic framework for how you would approach working with Serve Connecticut staff, including actions steps that you will take to complete the project scope outlined above. Identify any potential challenges or special concerns that may be encountered and how you might propose to deal with them.
5. **Other Supporting Data:** Include any other information you feel to be relevant to the selection of you/your firm or the makeup of the project team.
6. **Fee Structure:** Describe your fee structure for this type of a project including any administrative costs or expenses associated with this work.

**Deadline:** Proposals should be submitted via email as soon as possible and will be reviewed on a rolling basis, with preference given to those received by Friday, October 15, 2021.

**Submission Instructions:** Please submit your qualifications via email to [kate.scheuritzel@ct.gov](mailto:kate.scheuritzel@ct.gov).

**Questions:** Serve Connecticut welcomes questions regarding this RFQ; please contact Serve Connecticut Director of Programs, Kate Scheuritzel, [kate.scheuritzel@ct.gov](mailto:kate.scheuritzel@ct.gov), (860) 576-0367.

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#### Sources

2018 DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey: <https://ncoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2016ConnecticutCHI.pdf>

\*\* The DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey is published on a three-year cycle. The next edition will be released in 2021. If awarded, Serve Connecticut will work with DataHaven, the data consultant that conducts the research and analysis for this publication, to access the most current data on indicators relevant to the ASC Youth Service Planning Grant project.

Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS): Connecticut High School Survey 10-Year Trend

Analysis 2009-2019 [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/CSHS/2019CTYRBS\\_Trend\\_Report\\_10Year.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/CSHS/2019CTYRBS_Trend_Report_10Year.pdf)

Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS): 2019 Risk Behaviors and Academic Achievement Report [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/CSHS/2019CTYRBS\\_Academics\\_and\\_Health.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/CSHS/2019CTYRBS_Academics_and_Health.pdf)

Academics and Health

“Connecticut’s Academic Achievement Gap.” Office of Legislative Research (OLR) Research Report. August 19, 2019: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/rpt/pdf/2019-R-0172.pdf>

SDE Website: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/School-Counseling/Comprehensive-K-12-School-Counseling-Framework/Appendix-A---Student-Standards-and-Competencies>