

The Belfry Center

A Student Union for Lexington's Teens

Business Plan

May 2003

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Acknowledgements

The members of the Belfry Center Organizing Group would like to acknowledge all of the people in Lexington and in neighboring communities who so generously and graciously contributed their guidance, skills, experience, written materials, research and humor to this business plan. We realize that this project, for citizens unknown, began years ago with the work of committees, boards, religious organizations, parent groups, PTAs, and all the other venues in which the need for a teen space was explored. We are grateful for their contributions and for the fact that their work established “the need” long before we entered the conversation.

We would also like to state emphatically that what we offer in this business plan is our best guess about what might be possible for the Belfry Center. It is a draft proposal. We are answering the call for a clearer statement of what our particular mix of citizenry hopes to achieve. Ideally, this business plan will galvanize Lexingtonians to embrace the concept, the goal, and the unique location. We eagerly seek the ideas and opinions of a wider community circle.

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I. Executive Summary

The Beginning

For years, Lexington has recognized the need our middle and high school population has for a relaxing space of its own. The community conversation concerning this need has been shared by many, but in 2002 a group of parents began to brainstorm in earnest. Given the limitations of available space and resources, this discussion remained theoretical until the Forest St. church was put on the market in February of 2003. With a suitable property at hand, a group of parents began to meet to explore the feasibility of creating a student union at this location. As more parents joined the group, four subcommittees were formed: (1) Programming, (2) Community Outreach, (3) Business Planning, and (4) Fundraising. These groups have met on a regular and frequent basis since February 2003 to research and develop this project.

Description of the Student Union

A student union in Lexington will serve the critical and central purpose of providing our youth with a safe place to go within their community, where they can be together outside of school in an environment that promotes social, recreational, and educational growth. We must give our young people somewhere other than the town center and local wooded areas to congregate. Gatherings in private homes, often unsupervised, frequently result in opportunities for alcohol and drug use. Town youth often complain about how little there is to do in town, apart from going to the movies or hanging out at Starbucks. They need a fun, relaxing and constructive environment in which to socialize, organize, and just be kids.

The Belfry Center will provide for our Lexington youth a safe and chemical-free facility where they will have access to services, programming and social activities that they themselves determine are important. The youth in our community will help establish, regulate and contribute to the center, participating in the creation of a space where respectful behavior is modeled by peer leaders, as well as by the center staff. The youth will take ownership in its mission and act as shareholders in its success.

Staffed by adults, but with job opportunities for students, the Belfry Center will provide an environment that fosters mutual respect and responsibility. Studies indicate that with the presence of caring adults in their lives, youth are much less likely to succumb to the peer pressures so prevalent during these formative years. With a role in the programming of the facility, our youth can build self-esteem and be encouraged to discover themselves as persons of infinite worth and potential. Fundamental to the facility's mission will be a commitment to foster mutual respect and acceptance between neighbors and generations, and to create an inclusive community that enables personal and civic enrichment.

Programs and Activities

The programs to be developed and offered at the Student Union will be designed and targeted to meet the needs of a diverse audience--by age, gender, special interests and needs. Our goal is to provide opportunities for learning that are seamlessly integrated into chosen events and activities. The specifics will be developed in cooperation with the management of the Student Union and the Student Advisory Board.

The programs will generally fall within at least one of four categories, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

1. Social Life
2. Performing and Visual Arts
3. Adolescent Development
4. Professional Activities

These activities and programs will range from drop-in activities, to refreshment and relaxation, to special events, to adolescent development issues, to creative and performing arts. Most of the programs will be age/grade segregated.

Critical Factors to Success

There are four critical factors to the success of any youth center:

1. Its location must be accessible to middle and high school students, whether or not they are licensed drivers.

The Carnegie Commission on Adolescent Development states that transportation issues are what “limit the ability of many young adolescents to participate in clubs or other activities away from home or school.” In 2000, a survey of 87 teen centers across the nation was conducted by Peter Witt, holder of the Elda K. Bradberry Endowed Chair for At-Risk Youth Programming at Texas A&M University. Transportation (56.8%) was listed as the most common obstacle teens faced in participating at sites, with peer pressure (37.0%), and center location (32.3%) also listed as impediments.

Location is a crucial element to the success of the Student Union. Youth need to be able to get to and leave from the Belfry Center with both ease and safety. The current First Church of Christ Scientist on Forest St. is an ideal location because of its proximity to the high school and to downtown Lexington. Located within walking distance to Depot Square and Mass Ave, this site permits ready access to public transportation. Having a student union next to the high school and two blocks from the downtown area has several other advantages. The facility will draw students from the high school with both its activities and its café. Students will go to the Belfry Center instead of congregating on Mass. Ave. outside businesses or going to other unsupervised locations.

2. Activities, programs, and services must be attractive to the students.

First and foremost, what we intend to provide for our teens is a place to decompress; a place to spend unstructured time with friends. By providing an environment that offers unpressured, fun opportunities for learning, we will afford our teens an opportunity to combine their social pursuits with educational activities. Naturally, then, an equally important goal is the availability of programs selected and designed in consultation with the Student Advisory Board.

3. Our youth must know that their community values and supports them.

Research shows a stunning level of antagonism toward teenagers. It also shows that most of these negative perceptions are based on fear rather than reality. News media tend to report aberrant and violent behavior of underage offenders more often than they broadcast teenagers' good deeds; some adults therefore characterize the whole generation of adolescents by the actions of a few. Communities need to see teenagers as a public asset, a group to nurture and assist.

4. Teens attending the Student Union should respect and enjoy the adults who will be working with them.

What will attract our teens to the Belfry Center will be primarily the people, not the programs. Committed, quality adult leadership will therefore be critical to the Belfry Center's success. A positive working relationship between teens and staff will build trust, allowing the two generations to break down barriers and learn from one another. This collaborative approach will give community members a chance to work directly with teens, not just worry about them.

Financial Forecast

The Belfry Center Organizing Committee has reviewed a number of programs throughout eastern Massachusetts to better understand the best practices for a successful student union. This committee is also mindful of the current fiscal situation of the Town, the Commonwealth, and the Nation. As such, we are proposing a phased-in schedule of programming, the benefits and costs of which can be evaluated at each level. The Belfry Center Organizing Committee intends to establish the value and suitability of the Student Union to the students, the neighborhood, and the community at incremental steps, before incurring the expense of a fully developed program.

The Student Union will be staffed by three employees with the responsibility for program development and management, youth supervision and support, and volunteer training and coordination. In addition to the proposed budget, the Student Union will be supported with a "revolving fund" to develop and implement programs, with participants paying a fee to cover the costs. Finally, a non-profit support organization is being formed with the goal of financially supporting the Student Union through fundraising activities. Management of the Student Union will also work with volunteers to seek funding grants.

Financing Requirements

In addition to the \$1.6 million church property, there will be some initial capital expenditures necessary to make the Belfry Center building equipped for the proposed usage. The following work will need to be completed prior to use of the building:

- New air conditioning and heating system installed (\$35,000)
- New kitchen installed (pending special permit) (\$35,000)
- Existing bathroom facilities renovated (\$27,000)
- Fire sprinkler system installed (\$18,000)
- New handicap accessible door installed (\$18,000)
- New walkway installed from back room door (\$1,200)
- Lighting & electrical work (5,000)
- Extension of “stage” apron in sanctuary (TBD)

This work is expected to cost \$139,200. The anticipated costs for the furniture, fixtures, and equipment is \$25,000.

II. The Need

This section summarizes a number of published research studies and reports from both local and national sources. These reports illuminate critical issues in the development of adolescents and explain why the creation of teen centers has become widespread in recent years.

Lexington's Need

Lexington 2020 Vision

The Lexington 2020 Vision process, begun in 2000, is an ongoing town-wide effort to engage residents in helping to determine what the town of Lexington will be like in the year 2020. After six months of discussions involving hundreds of residents on a variety of topics, the 2020 Vision Committee issued a "Status Report on the Planning Process" in January 2001. The report put forth a number of themes and goals, the first being to "Promote and Strengthen Community Character," through the "design and promot[ion of] community gathering places and events."

Health Assessment Advisory Committee

In December 2001, Lexington's Health Assessment Advisory Committee completed a report entitled "Lexington Community Health Assessment: Health Priorities for the Town." On the topic of substance abuse, the committee made the following recommendation to the Lexington Board of Health and its associated agencies:

"Substance abuse remains a highly complex issue that cannot be resolved through a single program or approach. This health issue is often a symptom of larger health issues facing an individual, family or the community itself. The Board of Health should work with agencies in Town that currently work to address this issue in order to evaluate the problem, assist key agencies working on substance abuse (i.e., the School system), and provide, where possible, possible interventions."

Human Services Committee

In December 2002, Lexington's Human Services Committee issued "Mental Health Services in Lexington, Massachusetts: A Report to the Board of Selectmen." This report identified and described the availability of mental health services in an attempt to identify unmet needs.

"The zero tolerance policy of Lexington High School concerning drug and alcohol use and threats or instances of weapons or violence has the effect, in the judgment of those we interviewed, of 'killing the possibility of preventive work with students.' Students who have these and related problems now tend to avoid the staff of the LGD [Lexington

Guidance Department], whom they know to be obliged to report student suspects to the administrations.”

And ... “The greatest unmet need in Lexington, in the judgment of the staff members we interviewed, is the need for group counseling and group therapy sessions for adolescents.”

Finally, on the subject of teenagers: “Solo practitioners, mental health practitioners within the agencies, and others we contacted in the course of this project concur generally that Lexington, with all of its abundance of helping talent, displays a serious lack of services for adolescents.” [Emphasis theirs.]

Why Is a Student Union Needed in Lexington?

“There’s nothing to do in this town!” If you’re a parent to a local teen, this may be a common refrain in your home. Lexington prides itself on the beauty of town land, the safety of its residents, and the excellence of its public school system. And yet we provide our young people little in the way of a safe gathering place outside of school. Never hesitating to devote substantial resources toward addressing discrete adolescent problems, we as a community would benefit tremendously from investing equal attention in preventive measures aimed at keeping our teens safe and productive.

Unlike many neighboring communities, Lexington affords no youth/teen center (Brookline, Cambridge, Hingham, N. Andover, Sudbury, Winchester), bowling alley (Belmont, Cambridge, Woburn), Boys/Girls Club (Arlington, Maynard, Medford, Newton, Waltham, etc.), or YMCA (Cambridge, Newton, Waltham).

With a median household income of \$67,380, Lexington’s general affluence brings rewards and challenges to the task of raising healthy young people into adulthood. Successful program design should consider the unique attributes of Lexington’s teen population. Inner-city youth centers often focus on problems such as teen pregnancy, gang violence, computer illiteracy and student retention. In contrast, Lexington enjoys highly motivated, top performing students with access to myriad opportunities-- academic, artistic and recreational. And yet, it is apparent that an over-enriched life engenders a different set of pressures and problems.

In 2002, a Columbia University study showed that 10th graders from affluent suburbs had significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety and substance abuse than their inner city counterparts. (“Privileged But Pressured: A Study of Affluent Youth,” by psychologist Suniya Luthar, Columbia University). The researchers found support for two possible causes for these problems: achievement pressures and isolation from parents. In their study they note that suburban parents' pressures on children to achieve can involve "maladaptive perfectionism," which they define as not merely striving for high and realistic goals but as "excessive investment in accomplishment and need to avoid failure.” Even extracurricular activities such as organized sports are cited as additional sources of stress. Also, "there is often a ubiquitous emphasis on ensuring that children secure admission to stellar colleges," they write. "The other thing that can be implicated is lack of

adult after-school supervision." Lexington is not immune to the biggest structural change in this generation: the growth in single-parent households and families in which both parents work outside the home.

According to Lexington's high school age Youth Risk Behavior Survey taken in 1999 and preliminary results from 2001:

- 42.4% of Lexington high school age youth drank alcohol in the month prior to taking the survey
- 23% used marijuana in the prior 30 days
- 47.3% report that drugs were made available to them on school property
- 60.4% believe substance abuse is a very serious problem at their school
- 25% report considering suicide in the past 12 months
- 20% reported that they made a suicide plan

When our teens experience stress and alienation, many of them are turning to high-risk and destructive behaviors in an attempt to relieve the pressure they feel. Lack of supervision and a safe place to be with their peers no doubt play a role in teens' making such detrimental and dangerous choices.

In an era when there is much well-founded concern about losing a vital sense of community, a student union could provide our town's youth the profound collateral benefits of building solidarity, mutual aid, and civility. Lexington's youth, who do so many positive things to improve our community, need to be celebrated and supported. The creation of a gathering place where they have a sense of ownership and involvement will enrich the lives of our teens and of our entire community.

National Research

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development

Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century represents the final report of the Council and the culmination of ten years' work. This report, published in 1995, aims to stimulate public attention to the risks and opportunities of the adolescent years and generate public and private support for measures that facilitate the critical transition to adulthood.

"For most young adolescents, the feeling of belonging to a community that offers mutual aid and a sense of common purpose, whether it is found in their families, schools, neighborhoods, houses of worship, or youth organizations, has been compromised. Young people from all economic strata often find themselves alone in communities where there are few adults to turn to and hardly any safe places to go. Inadequate public transportation systems and American reliance on the private car limit the ability of many young adolescents to participate in clubs or other activities away from home or school.

Young people left on their own or only with peers have a significantly greater chance of becoming involved in high-risk behaviors than their counterparts involved in activities under responsible adult guidance. The task, then, is to turn the out-of-school hours into attractive, growth-promoting opportunities for all young people. Communities should provide more attractive, safe, growth-promoting settings for young adolescents during the out-of-school hours—times of high risk when parents are often not available to supervise their children.”

U.S. Department of Education

Beyond Prevention Curricula: A Guide to Developing Alternative Activities Programs was published in 1998 by the U.S. Department of Education. This guide is designed to help educators and youth workers better understand how programs of alternative activities can effectively be used to supplement school-based efforts to prevent alcohol and other drug use among youth, and to encourage schools to become more involved in program development and implementation. This publication strives to clear up some of the confusion over what constitutes a program of alternative activities and what its goals should be, to improve understanding of the potential value of this approach, and to recommend promising strategies for improving the effectiveness of these activities in preventing and reducing use of alcohol and other drugs among youth.

“School accounts for only about a third of the typical student's day; approximately 40 percent is discretionary time, time that ‘represents an enormous potential for either desirable or undesirable outcomes.’ The after-school hours are the most common time for youth to become involved in drug use, sex, and crime. In one important study, eighth-graders who cared for themselves for 11 or more hours a week were found to be at twice the risk of substance use as those who were cared for by adults.”

The National League of Cities

The National League of Cities survey, *Critical Needs, Critical Choices: A Survey on Children and Families in 780 cities across the United States*, found before and after-school programs were the most pressing need for children 10-14 years old, followed by the need for recreation activities, and programs designed to deal with delinquency and youth crime.

Prof. Ray Oldenburg, Chairman, Sociology Department, University of West Florida

Ray Oldenburg, professor of sociology at the University of West Florida, in his book *The Great Good Place* identifies informal public gathering places as essential to community and healthy public life. Oldenburg terms such informal gathering places “the third place.”

“Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality. Since the

formal institutions of society make stronger claims upon the individual, third places are normally open in the off hours, as well as at other times. The character of a third place is determined most of all by its regular clientele and is marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people's more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a radically different kind of setting from a home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends.

The paucity of collective rituals and unplanned social gatherings puts a formidable burden upon the individual to overcome the social isolation that threatens. Where there are homes without a connection of community, where houses are located in areas devoid of congenial meeting places, the enemy called boredom is ever at the gate.

The examples set by societies that have solved the problem of place and those set by the small towns and vital neighborhoods of our past suggest that daily life, in order to be relaxed and fulfilling, must find its balance in three realms of experience. One is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it.”

Robert D. Putnam, Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Harvard University

In his book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert D. Putnam, Malkin Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University, discusses how communities are increasingly disconnected from social structures such as recreation clubs, political parties, and bowling leagues. He believes that this shrinking access to the “social capital” that is the reward of communal activity and community sharing is a serious threat to our civic and personal health.

“The beneficial effects of social capital are not limited to deprived communities or to primary and secondary education. Indeed, precisely what many high-achieving suburban school districts have in abundance is social capital, which is educationally more important even than financial capital. Conversely, where social connectedness is lacking, schools work less well, no matter how affluent the community. Moreover, social capital continues to have powerful effects on education during the college years. Extracurricular activities and involvement in peer social networks are powerful predictors of college dropout rates and college success, even holding constant precollegiate factors, including aspirations. In other words, at Harvard as well as in Harlem, social connectedness boosts educational attainment. One of the areas in which America’s diminished stock of social capital is likely to have the most damaging consequences is the quality of education (both in school and outside) that our children receive.”

Teen Resources Currently Available in Lexington

Hayden Recreation Centre

The Hayden Recreation Centre is a privately endowed non-profit corporation that provides a wide range of recreational, athletic, and social activities for the youth of Lexington. In addition, a special adult program is offered to Lexington residents over age 18 and to adults employed within the town of Lexington. Hayden's current membership numbers approximately 4,200 of which 280 are between the ages of 14 and 18. The majority of Hayden's instructional classes are tailored to serve their predominantly preschool and elementary age members. Programming provided to Hayden's teen-aged population consists primarily of access to the weight room and gymnasium. In March 2003, Hayden began a "Dinner and a Movie" program for its 6th, 7th and 8th grade members. Every Friday between March and May, Hayden offers a light dinner and a PG-13 movie. Hayden has no current plans to expand its facilities to provide a drop-in center for teens.

Wayside RePlace

RePlace has been in Lexington since 1970. It began as a youth drop-in center that provided counseling, supervised emergency foster homes, peer counseling, and a child assault prevention program and hotline. In the 1970s, 1980s and until the 1990s, it was identified with the Hancock Church and was housed in the church building. From November 1994 until late 1995, Eliot Community Health Services took over from RePlace and offered drop-in services and peer counseling for youth from a clubhouse in Depot Square. That location made it difficult, however, to reconcile the activities of youth with the business interests of merchants based on the Square.

The present day Wayside RePlace, a program of Wayside Youth and Family Support Network, located on the second floor at 4 Muzzey Street, continues to provide counseling and crisis intervention for Lexington's youth--but with no space for youth to gather. Wayside RePlace services have refocused to further emphasize substance abuse prevention and treatment, and address suicide and depression, as these needs have been identified as the critical issues in Lexington according to the two most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBA) results.

Lexington Student Feedback

[This section awaits the results of a student survey distributed in Lexington's middle and high schools.]

Overview

Available Time

Do the students see a need?

Would they use the Student Union?

What activities would student like?

Are they interested in serving on an advisory board?

Target Audiences

Lexington Demographics

General Demographic Characteristics

(2000 Census of Population and Housing)

Population	31,122
Households	11,110
Males	14,795
Females	16,327

Household by Type

Total households	11,110
Family households (families)	8,429
With own children under 18 years	4,197
Married-couple family	7,336
With own children under 18 years	3,712
Female householder, no husband present	854
With own children under 18 years	404
Non-family households	2,681
Householder living alone	2,312
Householder 65 years and over	1,368
Households with individuals under 18 years	4,344
Households with individuals 65 years and over	3,708
Average household size	2.66
Average family size	3.10

Demographics by Age

Age Group	Population
Under 5 years	1,728
5 to 9 years	2,430
10 to 14 years	2,491
15 to 19 years	1,773
20 to 24 years	640
25 to 34 years	1,982
35 to 44 years	4,896
45 to 54 years	5,338
55 to 59 years	1,829
60 to 64 years	1,481
65 to 74 years	2,716
75 to 84 years	2,099
85 years & over	952

Lexington's population in 2002 was 31,112, with 6,655 under 17 years of age.

Lexington School Population: 7-12 Grades (by School)

School	Students	Grade(s)
Lexington High School	1,776	9-12
Clarke Middle School	285	7
Clarke	236	8
Diamond Middle School	265	7
Diamond	271	8
Total	2,833	7-12

III. Lexington's Student Union

The Vision

The "vision" is to transform the back room of the Forest St. church into a comfortable student gathering place and in the process to establish an attractive "third space" for Lexington's teen population. For those faced with going home to an empty house, the Belfry Center will provide an opportunity to spend time socializing, studying, or becoming involved in a developmental program. Our goal is to provide opportunities for learning that are seamlessly integrated into recreational events and activities.

The location of the church, next to the high school and steps from the downtown's transportation nexus, is ideally suited to meeting the particular needs of this largely non-driving group. The close proximity to the high school will also enable high school students, with just a short time between classes and after school activities, to drop-in and refuel (literally and figuratively).

Fashioned after a typical college student union, the Belfry Center will serve as a central source of student social life, communication, and outreach. These activities would break down into the following categories:

Social Life

We envision the student union as a place where students go for conversation, food, music, and relaxation; where social engagement thrives and all who walk through the door are made to feel welcome. We envision a coffeehouse setting, with food, coffee, juice, comfortable seating, a performance stage, a big screen TV, and a game area.

Communication

A central source of communication, the Belfry Center will provide space to post job opportunities, services, sales, and related information. Speakers of interest to the students could be scheduled, as well as opportunities to participate in special programs and support groups.

Outreach

The Student Union would be a hub from which outreach activities would emanate to both to students and interested adults. Of equal value would be the goal of increasing awareness of youth services already existing within Lexington.

The Mission

The Belfry Center will provide for Lexington's teens a relaxing place to meet when they are not in school, in an environment that will encourage social, recreational, and educational growth. Fundamental to the Center's mission will be a commitment to foster mutual respect between neighbors and generations, and to create a safe and inclusive community that enables personal and civic enrichment.

Who We Will Serve

The student union will be open to 7th-12th-grade students living in Lexington and/or attending school in Lexington.

Facility

The First Church of Christ Scientist on Forest St., currently on the market for \$1.6 million, offers an unique opportunity to create a student union in Lexington. Conversations with youth proponents in neighboring communities confirm our assessment that this property, with its overall size, interior space and central location, possesses highly sought after attributes. And while it precludes some uses, this building could supply an important piece of the services that Lexington youth need. Hayden offers a gymnasium and weight room. The new Skate Park, when completed, will provide another recreational spot. With the creation of the Belfry Center, students will have a “place of their own.”

The construction of the present church structure began in the summer of 1917 and was completed for the first service on Sunday March 18, 1918. The building architecture is an example of new-classical beaux arts style, a style popular in that day for public buildings like the Boston Public Library. Willard Brown was the architect in collaboration with Robert Andrews of Boston. Brown was the architect of record for many of Lexington's significant architectural gems, notably the Public Library, the Hunt Block in the center of town, and numerous homes on Meriam Hill.

The renovations necessary to transform the church into a student union are decidedly modest. Having toured expensive ground-up projects and weighed the complexities of buildings needing to be gutted and retrofitted, we feel fortunate to have such a ready property at hand.

The church is comprised of a large foyer 30' x 20', a coat space 10' x 10', a sanctuary 40' x 40', an office 16.6' x 22', a dozen smaller rooms of various sizes, 6 toilet closets with 7 toilets, and a large meeting room 33' x 49'. The total square footage of the building is 9,600 sq. ft. situated on a lot of 37,635 sq. ft.

A few initial renovations are necessary to equip the building for the proposed usage and will need to be completed prior to occupation. These are:

- New air conditioning and heating system installed
- New kitchen installed (pending special permit)
- Existing bathroom facilities renovated
- Fire sprinkler system installed
- Handicap accessible entrances
- New walkway installed from back room door
- Lighting and electrical work
- Extension of “stage” apron in sanctuary

With no parking lot, parking space would need to be located for staff. All students would either walk from the high school, use Lexpress from the middle schools, or be dropped off by parents. With the permission from the school department, attendees of after-school, evening and weekend events could be directed to use the LHS parking lot, located just 170 paces (a two-minute walk) behind the facility.

In an attempt to mitigate any traffic and parking impact on the surrounding neighborhood, the possibility of eliminating on-street parking around the facility and utilizing the Lexington High School parking areas will be explored. LHS affords one of the largest parking lots in Lexington. Since the student union would only be open during non-school hours, the use of this parking lot would present few space conflicts. Furthermore, a large U-shaped drive with access from Park Drive is presently situated on LHS property, across the street from the building. This U-drive has both sidewalks and street lamps, and could be utilized for the purpose of dropping off and picking up non-driving students. Park Drive has no homes that face onto it, and visitors to the center could be encouraged to use this entry to the parking and drop-off zones. (see map in back)

Programs

All youth need positive relationships, opportunities for growth, skills, and values to navigate the path to adulthood. Youth need to be surrounded with networks of individuals and institutions that provide them with support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. We must nurture in them the commitments, values, competencies and positive identity they need to grow up healthy and competent.

The programs to be developed and offered at the Student Union will be designed to meet the needs of a diverse audience; by age, gender, special interests and needs. No schedule of programs will suit all of the students all of the time—such a goal is unrealistic and ultimately overwhelming. Rather, our aim is to ultimately offer every student an avenue into the community within the Belfry Center. The specifics of these programs will be developed in cooperation with the management of the student union and the Student Advisory Board, but are described in general terms below.

The programs will generally fall within at least one of four categories, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

1. Social Life
2. Performing and Visual Arts
3. Youth Development
4. Professional activities

Social Life

These activities are primarily aimed at enhancing the inviting and relaxed meeting place that a Student Union should be. The list below reflects those activities that are popular at the centers we visited. We intend for Lexington students to plan, develop, and implement activities of their own choosing.

- Food and drinks
- Games -- Foosball, billiards, table tennis, air hockey
- Movie nights
- Music nights
- Dancing

Food and Drinks

The availability of food and drinks, offered in a welcoming and comfortable venue, is the service that is most universally requested. We plan to offer a simple menu of beverages and snacks and are exploring the best way to deliver it. Ideas include:

- A cooperative with Minuteman Regional High School's Culinary Arts program. Students majoring in this field currently operate a public restaurant, public bakery, school cafeteria and a fast food restaurant at MRHS.
- Contracting out to a third party provider.
- Operating it directly as a program of the Student Union.

This service will be designed as a profit center, with the profits reinvested in the Student Union.

Performing and Visual Arts

The church property has a sanctuary that is well suited for the purpose of providing an intimate stage setting for student performances. Presently, the sanctuary seats 220 people. Extending the apron of the "stage" would likely eliminate a row of seating, resulting in seating for 200. This building has ample attic and storage space that will be made available for costumes, sets and other materials attendant to the performing arts.

Lexington has many talented musicians and actors, particularly among its student population. The creation of an additional community stage would enrich many of the student union's programs and outreach activities. Performing arts is one of the most natural and successful cross-generational venues. While the stage would not be the exclusive domain of any single group, we hope it will be home to many. With careful planning, some of the space problems facing our town's performing artists can be alleviated.

- Theater
- Poetry nights
- Comedy nights
- Talent shows/ mini-concerts
- Art Studio
- Exhibit space for student artwork

Art Studio

One of the programs we envision for the Student Center is a drop-in Art Studio. Students often have schoolwork that involves creative projects, as well as their own ideas for things they would like to build. However, they frequently lack the workspace, tools, equipment, supplies, and expert advice needed to be able to successfully implement their ideas. We envision the Art Studio as a place where kids can bring their ideas and get the support they need to implement them. It will also be a place where kids can simply socialize and watch as their peers, or the resident adult expert, work on projects – this kind of “watching” is an important learning experience as they discover what is possible and begin to germinate ideas of their own. Ideally, the art space will offer, just by virtue of the equipment, tools, projects, and creative people in it, an invitation to partake in the creative process.

The Art Studio will be staffed by at least one adult volunteer artist or craftsperson from the community, and will be open when staffing is available. Ideally, the Center would provide basic hand tools (screw drivers, hand saws, drills, bits, files, clay tools, jewelry making tools, etc.) and some basic expendable items (sketching paper, screws, nails, paints, glue, wood scraps, etc). Since a computer now supports much creative work, the Student Center will seek to have one internet-connected computer and printer, to be used for both idea generation and project execution. [Given the high cost of printing paper and ink cartridges, use of the printer would have to be supported by a fee per printout.]

Although equipment and space may be limited at times, observing others work while waiting one’s turn is an important part of the experience, providing another opportunity for social interaction and the exchange of ideas and information. The adult resident artist will supervise the use of equipment and ensure that appropriate rules of use are observed. More importantly, the adult volunteer will be available to offer advice and suggestions when requested, to serve as a sounding board for kids wishing to discuss their project ideas, and to act as an expertise broker with other artists in the community.

The Art Studio will help fulfill the mission of the Student Union by providing a relaxed environment that encourages participation in creative work, learning from others, and the strengthening of supportive relationships in the community.

Youth Development

All young people need to develop a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise. These activities involve increasing the opportunities, skills, and rewards that promote such growth:

- Student Union Advisory Board
- Peer mentoring programs
- Formal and informal forums regarding adolescent issues
- Meeting space for Alateen
- Quiet room for group homework sessions

Peer Mentoring

National studies show that peer mentoring and peer education programs are the model for teaching life skills that seem to have the most positive and lasting effect on participants. Peer mentors provide advice and support and serve as role models for younger people who need help. A peer mentor can also simply be someone for a younger student to hang out with.

Peer mentoring programs:

- foster productive relationships between youth, adults and their community
- develop leadership skills for student mentors
- create role models for younger students
- propagate drug and violence resistance skills
- promote the concept of volunteerism
- provide on-going opportunities for middle school and high school students to work together

The success and popularity of peer mentoring is evident from the number of people who have recommended such a program for the Belfry Center. Mentoring programs, when carefully designed and well run, provide positive influences for younger people who may need a little extra attention. There is a vast amount of excellent literature about peer mentoring, but given the complexities of organizing such a program, we feel it would be advisable to build on the existing RePlace project of this nature or to, perhaps, consult with the Lexington Guidance Office.

Professional Activities

These activities enable students to develop life skills, build competencies, explore career options, contribute to their communities, and prepare them for a positive and successful place in society. Students will spend time, with each other and adult volunteers, learning new skills and developing hidden talents. The students and adults in these programs will be those who are willing to invest their time, energy, and resources to lead projects and

provide educational experiences for youth in their community. Possible training topics might include self-awareness, career mapping, diversity, communication, event planning, promotion, time management, interviewing, or conflict resolution.

- Bulletin board for local postings, such as employment offers, community service requests, SAT prep services, etc.
- Tutoring activities
- Peer leadership programs
- College preparation
- Community service

Peer Leadership

Peer leadership programs take many forms. Most all that we investigated use senior high school students as peer leaders and provide some sort of training course or to prepare students for their responsibilities. We liked the program in place at the Winchester Youth Center. Senior students not only participate in regular meetings but are obliged to work a number of hours per month as assistants in the youth center.

In most cases, peer leadership is both a life skills course and a service oriented program. A select few twelfth grade students are accepted into the course as leaders based on previous leadership and citizenship in the community. These students attend a weekly meeting where they learn the necessary listening and analytical skills to lead weekly discussion groups. Typical topics for discussion groups are “What I Learned About Applying for College” or “My Best Summer Job.” Peer leadership provides senior leaders the opportunity to utilize skills learned in their course as mediators and mentors in real life situations.

Peer leadership also provides a forum for various social issue discussions. Students realize they are not alone in many of their feelings because they have a time and place to air concerns and ask questions. In many instances, the peer group is instrumental in helping an individual solve a particular problem or simply see another side of an issue.

Peer leadership programs utilized one of our most important resources – the students themselves. Realizing that peer influence predominates during the teen years, such programs encourage students to reach out and care about one another. The concept of "youth helping youth" is one that benefits the leaders by developing their self-esteem and confidence, and the new students by providing them support and the opportunity to trust and care about one another.

Programming Schedule

Most of the programs will be age/grade segregated. It is likely that the Student Union will phase in these programs on a schedule to be determined in conjunction with the management of the Student Union and the Student Advisory Board. It is the intention to phase these programs in over a three-year period.

Year 1

The majority of emphasis will be placed on developing the *Social Life* aspect of the Student Union. *Performing and Visual Arts* events will be introduced but limited in order to evaluate space impact. This time period will also be used for introducing some *Youth Development* and *Professional activities*.

Year 2

The *Social Life* programs will be operated, fine-tuned, and enhanced. A major emphasis will be on developing and implementing a variety of *Youth Development* activities. Evaluation and possible expansion of *Performing and Visual Arts* programs during this year. In addition, there will be more introductions and testing of *Professional activities*.

Year 3

The *Social Life*, *Performing and Visual Arts* and *Youth Development* programs will be operated, updated, fine-tuned, and enhanced. A major emphasis will be on developing *Professional activities*.

IV. Operations and Finances

Management and Organization

Staffing

The Student Union will be managed by:

- Director – one full-time position with overall responsibility for the management and development of the Student Union and supervision of the youth. This person will have a background and experience in teen development, and report to the Board of Directors.
- Program Coordinators – one full-time and one part-time position with responsibility for program development, youth supervision and support, and volunteer coordination. These positions will report to the Director.
- College Intern – one part-time, unpaid position with responsibility for youth support and supervision. This position will report to the Director.
- Peer Leaders– A program will be developed to train a pool of part-time, occasional student employees who will assist with youth supervision and support during programmed activities.
- Volunteers – It is recognized that volunteers are necessary, but this program will not be built on their backs. They will undergo special training (to be developed by the Student Union management) to help them be most effective in supervising students.

All adult leadership will undergo appropriate background checks.

Hours of Operation

Absent the results of our student survey and broader community input, it is very difficult to determine exactly when the Student Union will be open. If we look to national surveys to inform us, we can expect hours of operation something like the following:

Day	Time	Which Students
Monday-Thursday	2:00-5:00 pm	All students
Monday-Thursday	5:00-8:00 pm	High school students only
Friday	2:00-7:00 pm	All students
Friday	7:00-10:00 pm	High school students only
Saturday	3:00-7:00 pm	All students
Saturday	7:00-10:00 pm	High school students only

It is the intention to phase in hours of operation over a three-year period, as was done with the programs offered. Weekday hours will be offered first, with weekend day and evening hours to follow. The possibility exists that special events/programs will require changes to this schedule from time to time (closings or extended openings).

Student Advisory Board

Teens respond enthusiastically to programs and activities that reflect their needs and desires, and avoid programming developed exclusively by adults. With a central role in the decision-making process, students will be empowered to develop programming, help to plan events, discuss issues, share ideas and offer solutions. The Student Advisory Board will be comprised of student representatives from each grade level who will raise questions, ideas and concerns regarding their Student Union.

Participants in student advisory groups learn how to positively affect their communities through early civic involvement. The Board will provide a framework for participants to begin questioning how to make their community a better place to live with a focus on the activities of the Belfry Center. Students will be advocates for Lexington's youth, and ambassadors of the Student Union to the student population. With increasing levels responsibility and understanding, students and their newfound network of community leaders will encourage involvement in town government.

Rules and Regulations

The rules and regulations of the Belfry Center will be developed in cooperation with the Student Advisory Board and the Student Union staff, and approved by the Board of Directors. We anticipate the use of a membership card and an accompanying "Code of Conduct" agreement to be signed by students and responsible adults. Incorporated into this agreement will be clear directives concerning traffic and parking. The Code will be founded on principles of:

- Fairness
- Respect
- Safety

Measurement of Success

The students, program staff, and community will determine the success of these programs. Most likely, each of these entities will have a different set of criteria by which to measure the achievements of the Student Union. (See Appendix I.) It will be the Board of Directors' job to identify relevant criteria, by constituency, and determine what type of data to collect and share with the community. This should be the backbone of an "Annual Report of Effectiveness," to be compiled by the Board and presented to interested town bodies.

Measurement factors will most likely include, but not be limited to:

- Attendee data
- Quality of facilities, programs, and staff
- Collecting program impact data
- Calculating cost per student served

Indicators of perceptions of staff and youth will also be measured:

- Effectiveness as positive alternative for youth
- Student sense of ownership
- Atmosphere of facility
- Safety of environment
- Community appreciation

Operational Costs

Staffing

<u>Position</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Director FTE	\$50,000/year	\$50,000
Program Coordinator FTE	\$31,000/year	\$31,000
Program Coordinator PT	\$15.50/hour (20 hours)	\$16,120
<u>Benefits</u>		<u>\$16,000</u>
TOTAL		\$113,120
Peer Leaders	\$7/hour x 6 hours/day x TBD staff	TBD

Operating Expenditures

Description	Costs
Utilities	\$20,000
Custodial Services	\$14,350
Property Maintenance	\$10,509
Insurance	TBD
Office supplies	\$7,000
Equipment	\$4,000
Equipment maintenance	\$1,000
Program development	\$6,000
TOTAL	\$62,859

Capital Investment

Cost of Property	\$1,600,000
Renovate bathrooms	\$27,000
Upgrade fire alarms	\$18,000
Handicap accessible entrances	\$18,000
Kitchen installed	\$35,000
Lighting & electrical	\$5,000
Handicap access between floors	\$25,000
Upgrade HVAC	\$35,000
Furniture, fixtures & equipment	\$25,000
Extension of stage apron in sanctuary	TBD
TOTAL	\$188,000
allowance for price increase (3%)	\$5,640
10% for unexpected expenses	\$18,800
TOTAL capital expenditure required	<u>\$1,812,440</u>

Revenue

Demographics

Eligible population

High School	1,776
Middle school	1,057
Other	<u>100</u>
	2,933

Membership Rate @ 33% 968

Daily Attendance rate @ 1/6 of membership 161

Membership Fees	\$33,880	Membership fees of \$35/year
Concessions	\$14,720	5% profit on average daily expenditure of \$5/student
Special events	\$10,000	10 special events per yr; 200 attending at \$5 charge
Grants	<u>\$50,000</u>	Assumes 5-10 grants from various sources
TOTAL	\$108,600	

Funding Efforts

The Belfry Center Organizing Committee is forming a 501.c.3, an educational non-profit organization for the purpose of raising and accepting donations for the benefit of the Student Union. The relationship of this organization to the town is as yet undetermined but it is hoped that Lexington will embrace the goals of this project and enter into the public-private partnership that is common to such endeavors in other communities.

Nationally, most centers of this nature are involved with town recreation or social service departments. Half are supported by some combination of community organizations and businesses that assist with the provision of money, programming, facilities and/or volunteers. Revenues will be generated from fees charged to participants, concessions, partnerships, and donations. The Belfry Center Organizing Committee has established a fundraising subcommittee to explore grants and foundations along with soliciting private donations.

V. Other Teen Centers Reviewed

Summary

Members of the Belfry Center Organizing Group have visited and talked with representatives from a number of other towns about their youth activities. These discussions and visits have proved invaluable in helping to form the basis for this business plan. A brief summary of a few of these programs is below. Our key findings are:

1. The quality of supervision is critical; the students must be able to relate to those overseeing the student union's operations. In many cases, the staff serve as mentors.
2. The quality and type of programs are critical to attracting high school students.
3. Food and drinks can be a good source of revenue.
4. It is imperative the kids are actively involved in the development of the activities and programs.
5. The degree and quality of community support will be a critical factor in the success of the program.

Cohasset

The Garage is a semi-monthly social activity center for middle and high school students. It is a 3,000 square foot former garage, open the first and third Friday (4-10 pm) and Saturday (5-10 pm) of the month. The second and fourth Fridays and Saturdays are held for rentals of the facility (they have 60-70 rentals per year). They offer: arcade games, pinball, pool table, 4 Nintendos, and a small café.

They have a staff of two: a coordinator and a supervisor. These are college-aged kids who are both on the premises when *The Garage* is open. They are paid from the town Recreation Department budget.

They typically have 80-90 kids on Fridays and 30 on Saturdays unless there is a dance or concert at which time they will have up to 180 kids. They feel they are too successful and could use more space.

Hingham

The Rec, a recreation center attached to the Town Hall, is primarily a drop-in center for middle school kids. While high school kids are allowed, there are no age appropriate activities and programs for them, so they do not come. The facility includes a large room (with arcade games, ping pong, foosball, etc.) and a gymnasium for basketball, dodgeball, and other gym activities. They also run monthly middle school dances.

The recreation department has also established a full exercise facility for adults and older students. This has a full-range of exercise equipment from Nautilus machines, to treadmills, stair climbers, etc. The revenue from this venue funds most of the costs of *The Rec*. Additional funding sources are rental of *The Rec* on afternoons and weekends for birthday parties and an annual road race fundraiser. The Recreation Department has two full-time employees, a director and a program manager.

Wellesley

The Wellesley Youth Commission, working with local teens, runs *The Place*, a hangout for high school students about once a month during the school year. *The Place* features varied entertainment and refreshment. Students on the “Executive Committee” are paid a \$10 fee to help organize and staff events. In the past, entertainment has included college and high school bands, professional comedy, movies, a teen improv troupe, and karaoke.

The Place is hosted at different locations each month. The Wellesley Youth Commission does not have a dedicated space in which to host social events for teens. However, the Youth Commission is fortunate to have the support of the Interfaith Community for Action in Wellesley (ICAW). ICAW member organizations rotate hosting *The Place* at different church locations. This space sharing solution keeps costs low but creates some difficulties for organizers.

Attendance at *The Place* has reached 110, but draws, on average, 60 students. The town would like to attract more students but cites the “moving target” location as a problem. The program also struggles against the perception that events at churches and synagogues are not faith-based and proclaims the non-denominational status of events on all literature and advertisements. They have been offered a room at a church but preferred to search for a stand-alone facility.

The Youth Commission’s primary source of funding is the Town of Wellesley. There is a full-time Youth Director and adults are hired on a per-diem basis to staff events and to assist the Youth Director in running programs and services.

Winchester Youth Center

The Winchester Youth Center is located in the McCall Middle School and operates every weekday afternoon and a few evenings per week. It primarily serves the middle school population, although some evening programs are targeted exclusively at high school students. The Youth Center provides a supervised setting where students can socialize, play games, or do homework. Outside activities are permitted when school facilities are open.

Day to day operations are managed by an Executive Director, whose position is funded through the Town recreation department, and a part-time staff of “peer leaders” who are drawn from the local high school senior class. The program is funded with \$60,000 from the town of Winchester. Additional revenue comes from special events (coffeehouses, dances), concessions, donations and a grant from the Governor’s Alliance Against Drugs. The program does not charge a membership fee.

The program serves between 100 and 125 students per day and estimates that 1/3 of the middle school population participates at one time or another. The program has started efforts to find a new location where it can operate more independently of the school system.

North Andover Youth Center (Joseph N. Hermann Youth Center)

We’ve included a detailed overview of the North Andover Youth Center because it serves as a showcase for what is possible when a community dedicates itself to the creation of robust youth programming and space.

The town of North Andover (pop. 27,202) established the North Andover Youth Services program in 1988. This program serves over 2,500 middle-school and high-school aged young people. NAYS is a vital part of the town, a true multi-service agency, coordinating a variety of services to reach all youth in the community. These services range from recreations, sports, and outdoor adventure to counseling, tracking and crisis intervention with young people and their families. NYS works closely with the North Andover school systems, the courts, and the police to ensure that, to the extent possible, youth in need of services receive them.

During the summer of 2000 NAYS opened the Joseph N. Hermann Youth Center; an 18,000 square foot building now home-base to NAYS staff and the services provided. The JNHYC provides a multipurpose center for the youth of North Andover community.

The Joseph N. Hermann Youth Center houses a regulation gymnasium, game room, rock climbing wall, weight room, kitchen, lounge, multipurpose room, computer room, outdoor basketball court, skate area, outside gathering areas, and counseling and administrative offices.

The parcel of land upon which the Youth Center was built (with a value of \$400,000) was donated by the Community Center, Inc. The total cost of construction and furnishing the Youth Center was \$2,454,000. The town voted \$975,000 of funds to be devoted to this project. The Hermann Youth Center Board raised the additional money in donations and pledges from individuals, foundations, corporations and special event fundraisers.

Mission

The mission of the Joseph N. Hermann Youth Center board of Directors is to provide the community of North Andover with the premier facilities and resources dedicated to the positive development of the town's youth.

Operating Guidelines

The goals of empowerment and building self-esteem are central to the mission of the North Andover Youth Services and therefore will be the cornerstone to any JNHYC action. The goal is for 100% participation of all town youth, grades six through twelve, regardless of race, gender, religion, origin or economic background.

A long range plan and annual budget is prepared in concert with the NAYS Executive Director in order to identify the specific resources required to deliver state of the art facilities, programs and staffing over and above town funding.

They endeavor to provide the resources necessary to preserve the maintenance, improvements and equipment at the JNHYC. The town government of North Andover, to include Youth Services, is a partner in this effort.

Revenues are actively solicited from private and public donations, grants and general fundraising. They strive to involve all residents and businesses in their activities and inform potential donors of their specific needs.

In order to promote awareness and garner community support and involvement, strong public relations campaigns advise and inform the public of JNHYC activities and news.

Programs

In addition to the drop-in center, they operate programs crossing 7 different categories:

1. Adventure – These include a ropes challenge course, Adventure Leaders Program, mountain biking, boating, outing club, and rock climbing.
2. Support Services – High School Girls Club, Young Men's Group, Middle School Girls Groups, Parent Awareness Program, Family Mediation Services, R.A.D. (Rape Aggression Defense), Crisis Intervention, Youth Tracking & Outreach, Adventure Based Counseling, Holiday Drive, Thanksgiving Drive, and Job Bank.
3. Student-Run Programs – Give Back, Youth Council, T.A.C.K.LE. (Teens Acting to Care by Keeping Leadership Effective), and TENCO Dance Committee.

4. Social – Variety of classes (dance, weightlifting, volleyball, yoga, and more), Youth Concerts Series, Annual Carnival, TEENCO, Middle School Lip Synch, and Annual 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament.
5. Court Related – Community Service, and a Juvenile Diversion Program which is a non-criminal disposition using alternatives to the regular court process. Options might include counseling, community service, and/or restitution. Eligible juveniles are first time offenders between the ages of 7 and 17, made on the recommendation of the arresting officer, and Community Service.
6. Collaboration – Crossroads Program (presents 7th grade students and their parents with workshops concerning the issues pressuring students today), Habitat for Humanity program, and INTERSECT (provides facilities for members of the North Andover Senior Center to come learn about computers and the internet through one on one tutoring sessions with high school students).
7. Special Programs – Diversity Week, Youth Appreciation Day, Walk for Youth, Community Awards Presentation (geared towards adults who have helped to make a difference in town).

There is a membership fee of \$65 per person, with a \$130 per family maximum. In addition, many of the special programs have a participation fee.

Staff

North Andover operates their program with a full-time staff of four employees: an Executive Director and three Program Coordinators. In addition, they have 20 part-time, trained people they call upon to help supervise and run various programs. These people are paid out of the revolving fund established for the North Andover Youth Services.

Hours of Operation

Monday- Thursday:

Middle School 2:00-5:00pm

High School 5:00-8:30pm

Friday:

2:00-9:00pm (closes at 5:00pm when no dance)

Saturday:

Grade 4& 5 1:00-4:00pm

Middle School and High School 4:00-9:00pm

Measurement of Success

They do not have a formal program of measuring their success. They feel it is not needed given their track record of services and support from the community.

Appendix I

What follows are principles for youth center success offered by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, and the Project for Public Spaces.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, *A Matter of time: Risk and opportunity in the non-school hours*, (1992):

- Tailor the content and processes to the needs and interests of the target population. Listen carefully to their needs and ideas, and provide meaningful, active roles for youth through the implementation.
- Recognize, value, and respond to the diverse backgrounds and experiences that exist in the target population. Be sensitive to the differences that exist among the youth, particularly those based on race ethnicity, family income, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Work collectively and individually to extend the reach to underserved youth. Increase access to young people of lower income, keeping youth needs, rather than organizational concerns, at the center of the outreach efforts.
- Actively compete for young people's time and attention. Good programs assess their competition (from TV to youth gangs), and find ways to make their programs more attractive than passive or antisocial pursuits.
- Strengthen the quality and diversity of adult leadership. Recruit carefully and invest in staff (and volunteer) development as a regular cost of doing business. Reach out to families, schools, and other community partners in youth development. Maintain solid working relationships with parents and other community institutions on behalf of the youth.
- Enhance the role of the youth as community resources. Encourage the youth to play meaningful leadership roles within the organization. Actively ensure young people have opportunities to contribute their talents to the community at large.
- Serve as vigorous advocates for and with youths. Help ensure that the best interests of children are not ignored in decision-making forums.
- Specify and evaluate the intended outcomes. Be clear about the results you are trying to achieve. Develop reliable documentation systems and realistic assessment measures.
- Establish solid organizational structures, including energetic and committed board leadership. Good programs are generally found in well-governed and well-managed organizations.

Project for Public Spaces:

The Project for Public Spaces is a nonprofit technical assistance, research and educational organization. PPS' mission -- to create and sustain public places that build communities -- is achieved through programs in parks, plazas and central squares; transportation; public buildings and architecture and public markets. Since its founding in 1975, the organization has worked in over 1,000 communities, within the U.S. and abroad, helping people to grow their public space into vital community places.

PPS has created a "Teens As Community Builders" program, which offers a number of lessons and observations about what makes - or breaks - a program for young people. What do teenagers value? How can they and adults work effectively together and get beyond stereotypes? Below are some PPS tips and guidelines for adults working on programs.

If you are an adult planning to launch a teen program:

1. Lay the groundwork

A common flaw in youth programs is that planners don't give enough thought beforehand to exactly how they want to partner with young people and how it will work. It's easy for adults to say they want a youth advisory council and not really give any authority to young people – or simply bring them on after most decisions have been made. Whatever the case may be, be clear with young people about what difference their advice is going to make and how it will be used. They won't keep coming back if they sense you don't make good use of their input. Many times, a board of trustees will try to represent youth by appointing two or three young people, but unless youth represent at least a quarter of the total board, they'll feel inadequate and will never become effective members. Also, staff time and commitment is a big issue - but finding an adult who really hangs in there can solve most of your other problems.

2. Find committed liaisons/point persons/staff members

You need a committed adult (or adults) who really knows and understands young people: someone who cares about them, helps train and orient them, helps them before and after meetings, clears obstacles, gives them rides to the meetings, and makes sure they show up. Often, such adults are young themselves (in their 20s or early 30s), which can help significantly in gaining the trust of participants.

3. Foster partnerships between adults and teens

Adults have much to offer young people - wisdom, experience, etc. - but the giving must not be paternalistic or patronizing, condescending, etc. It should be based on interaction between the two groups, and based chiefly around responding to what young people are saying they want. Therefore, such programs should be set up using a partnership model, where all parties learn from each other.

4. Know when to focus on people, not young people

Like anyone, teenagers need to be treated with respect, and as resources for and assets to a community, not recipients of some kind of handout. They have all kinds of interests and capabilities and can get involved in programs or organizations on a number of levels. Besides being a general participant in a program, they might help create policies, develop or manage activities or sit on a board of trustees. Don't set the bar too low - it's better to start off by giving teens more of a role in running things rather than less. Doing this also requires someone who can recognize the talents, desires and interests of particular participants and set them up with goals and challenges.

5. Expand expectations & responsibilities with age

This is kind of a corollary to the tip above. Many youth programs lose kids at about age 14, because at that point they want more say in what's going on and many adults are unwilling to give them that. These teenagers might continue to be engaged if they had an opportunity to move into leadership or decision-making roles and take on more responsibility. Again, this points to the difference between programming with teens and programming for them. Also, young people tend to be action-oriented, so programs should provide a balance between advisory or administrative roles and actual activities and projects: The younger the person, the more short-term a project should be.

Older teenagers need the chance to take action and gain leadership skills in a program, not just follow the directives of adults and receive benefits of a program put together by them. They want to actually be a part of putting together the program. They also want to gain meaningful skills and experiences - not just do "gofer" work.

6. Provide choice

As with a restaurant menu, a program will appeal to and draw more people if it offers them choices in how to be involved. However, you need to set parameters and be clear on areas and activities where help and involvement are appropriate, so that participants' input on responsibilities and activities don't go off in every direction.

7. Promote your program

Oftentimes the benefits and opportunities of community involvement are not promoted, but more young people would get involved if they knew what was available to them. In promoting your program, use the youth participants. They advertise better to other youth because they know what is most attractive and desirable about a program. So make sure you're finding out from current participants how best to attract future ones.

8. Understand teen pressures

Young people are often discouraged by their peers from getting involved in community programs. It's easier for teens to follow the crowd instead of stand apart to participate in -- or retain a commitment to -- a program that interests them. Understanding this can help you to promote your program (see above) more effectively.