WLS Learning Ambassadors 2.0 - Work in a World of Ideas

2013 Program Revisions, Requirements, and Funding

In 2013, WLS will continue the Learning Ambassadors, a youth employment readiness initiative that trains and directs teens in support of library summer reading programs serving children, teens, and families. The program is designed to provide 9th and 10th grade students with opportunities to develop workforce skills, perform active community service, and enhance their experience with libraries as a dynamic center for learning. The program is library-intensive with a view toward the future: future use of information sources and media, future support of library budgets, and potential future workers in libraries and a world of ideas. The immediate result is that teens are knowledgeable ambassadors - to their families, peers, and community - for the learning and fun that happens in libraries.

Revisions

The program, which has been in place since 2007, is being updated to reflect learnings from past years, with the most significant impact on focus, timing, and training for teen Ambassadors and their library mentors. Accordingly, a focus on three outcomes will define the program, its evolution and success:

1. **enhancement of summer reading programs** by providing staff and program resources,
2. **engagement and development of local teens** through a literacy-focused youth workforce readiness program, and
3. **professional development for youth services staff** through training, collaboration, and active mentorship.

2013 will be a pilot year for this updated program - Learning Ambassadors 2.0. Key program revisions include the following:

★ As a youth employment readiness program, the opportunity to become a Learning Ambassadors will be directed toward high-potential teens from Westchester County’s under- and unserved populations. A high-potential teen is one who evidence curiosity and engagement with information, ideas, and people and is willing to take on a meaningful helping role in a public library.

★ Learning Ambassador sites will be established by early February, so outreach and recruitment can be completed by the beginning of March. A maximum of 10 libraries will be recruited through invitation to those who currently serve a high-proportion of low-income youth, are able to provide Ambassadors from our target population, and are willing to meet the requirements of participation.

★ Pre-session staff training will start in March, which will kick off a series of training sessions (2.5 to 3 full days). Training for staff will focus on program objectives, ambassador roles, skills relevant to a youth mentoring relationship, and ideation and planning of themed summer reading programs.

★ Pre-session training workshops for students will be held on Saturdays starting in April (4 five-hour sessions). Training will focus on preparing students to support summer reading in specific capacities and will include volunteer hours for program preparation and to reinforce training. Training will be reinforced through concurrent community service hours.

★ A post-session program will offer a chance for participants to reflect on this experience, consolidate learnings from the summer, and flag opportunities for the next year.

★ An evaluation program will be initiated to assess effectiveness and best practices in achieving program goals.

Elena Falcone, Office of Community Connections, January 2013
For participating libraries, WLS will:

★ Fully fund two learning ambassadors. You will not be required to make a financial contribution to cover the cost of these summer staff.

★ Provide summer reading program monies that will be used specifically for programming at learning ambassador sites.

★ Work with the local school districts, high schools, and service agencies to foster Summer Reading Program awareness among children and their families, and identify potential Learning Ambassador candidates.

★ Coordinate Ambassador selection - recruitment, interviews, and response. Note that all applicants will be encouraged to apply directly to the library. Teens will be able to serve as a Learning Ambassador twice during their time in high school.

★ Offer ongoing support for program implementation.

★ Initiate a county-wide program of Summer Reading promotion via local and social, as well as through coordinated school libraries and other outreach partnerships.

Requirements of participating libraries will include:

★ Agreement to host two ambassadors and to engage these staff consistent with the objectives of the program.

★ Agreement to work collaboratively with other participating libraries in the development of themed summer reading programs.

★ Assignment of a youth services staff person as mentor for both ambassadors. Mentors must participate in pre-session staff training workshops, as well as a pre- and post-session program review. Those assigned as Learning Ambassador mentors will be awarded 18 continuing education credits.

★ Engagement of the assigned Learning Ambassadors in at least 10 community service hours during the spring training session to prepare for Summer Reading and support current programs.

★ Participation of an administrative staff member (e.g., director, assistant director, branch manager) in a kick-off and post-session review.

★ Provision of relevant data on program participation and outcomes.

★ Willingness to explore ways to sustain the Mentor/Ambassador relationship after the summer session, e.g., as paid aides for patron support activities (e.g., Study Buddies, Computer Aides) and/or as patrons participating in library programs and activities, such as Teen Advisory Groups.

Grant Funding

Effective with the current Summer Reading effort and continuing through summer 2016, grant funds for Summer Reading will be directed toward libraries participating in the Learning Ambassador program. This change reflects: (1) the end of the Summer Reading Mini Grant Series and the beginning of the Family Literacy Summer Reading series, and (2) the mission of WLS to provide focused, effective programming that reaches the County’s under- and unserved populations, and (3) an effort to respond to the Department of Library Development requirements for measurable outcomes related to the enhancement of skills, knowledge, and behavior.

We hope to expand the program to more libraries over the next four years through additional grants and corporate support.