YOUTH GREEN CORPS | TEACHER GUIDE
YOUTH HELP RECLAIM PITTSBURGH: MODULE 1

Youth Green Corps is based on a partnership between Community Works and GTECH Strategies. This program gives 20 high school males the opportunity to lead and participate in environmental initiatives in Pittsburgh’s Hilltop neighborhoods. Lessons will be applied through hands-on learning as the students work to reclaim one of the Hilltop’s vacant lots.

Vacant land causes a long list of issues, including a decreased tax-base for the surrounding neighborhood, public health concerns, social isolation, and environmental hazards. In particular, vacant land has become a legacy of Pittsburgh’s economic shift that places a great deal of burden on the City. Within the City, vacant land is not only an economic challenge, but also a geographical one. These properties are highly dispersed, vary in size, and differ in title status. As such, the challenge facing the City of Pittsburgh and its residents often rests in finding viable interim uses, preserving future opportunities, and crafting long-term solutions all while streamlining these processes for interested individuals and groups.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

- **3 modules, one school year each**
- **24 sessions per module, 2 hrs each**
- **2 Community Events**

Youth Green Corps gives students the opportunity to experience the process of reclaiming a vacant lot first hand. The program will begin with a technical analysis of vacant land, followed by an investigation into the community and history of the neighborhood. The students will work with professional designers to create a space that responds to the needs and interest of residents and incorporates what was learned in their analysis of the land itself. They will have opportunities to have in-depth conversations with professionals in related careers, and representatives of higher education. The students will practice public speaking and have an opportunity to present their idea to the community. Finally, the students will build out their idea on a vacant lot and plan for a celebration of the transformation. This program entrusts the students with creativity and gives them the tools to be thoughtful and innovative in their approach.

MODULES

- **Module 1: Community Engagement**
- **Module 2: Stormwater Management**
- **Module 3: Food Security**

The Youth Green Corps curriculum contains three distinct modules covering topics relevant to land reclamation, including community engagement, stormwater management, and food security. This module focuses on the community’s involvement in the process of reclaiming land.

If people are products of their environment, then changing an unjust environment requires equipping and empowering people. Empowerment generates energy. Energy enables action. Action begets action. Fusing tangible, incremental actions with an inclusive process that connects people to opportunity fuels an upward spiral of community health. Experts can bring technical know-how to a community project, but real change only happens when power is distributed to the community. This module will challenge students to step up and take action for their community while developing their own personal and professional abilities within it.
SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT
SESSION 2: VACANT LOT ASSESSMENT
SESSION 3: SOIL TESTING
SESSION 4: FOR THE COMMUNITY
SESSION 5: INTRODUCTION TO PLANNING
SESSION 6: DESIGN YOUR LOT
SESSION 7: DESIGN CHARETTE
SESSION 8: PUBLIC PRESENTATION 101
SESSION 9: PROFESSIONAL CAREER DAY
SESSION 10: FIELD TRIP
SESSION 11: PREPARE PERSONAL PRESENTATIONS
SESSION 12: PERSONAL PRESENTATIONS
SESSION 13: PREPARE PRESENTATION TO COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY PRESENTATION
SESSION 14: UNIVERSITY DAY
SESSION 15: VOLUNTEER COORDINATION AND TOOL SAFETY
SESSION 16: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 17: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 18: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 19: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 20: PLAN A CELEBRATION
SESSION 21: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 22: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 23: IMPLEMENTATION
SESSION 24: IMPLEMENTATION

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION
SESSION STRUCTURE

PREPARATION
Read through the curriculum, particularly the presentation and materials sections, before beginning the program. Most sessions will require preparation several weeks in advance because many involve inviting external guest speakers.

MATERIALS
This section will list all materials that will be required for the program. All paper materials and presentations can be found in the project folder. Several classes will require additional materials or tools.

TEACHER RESOURCES
This section will supply helpful articles or websites to visit to learn more about the session topic. If you are unable to access a link, or need additional information, contact GTECH Strategies.
412-361-2099
info@gtechstrategies.org

PRESENTATION
This section displays information about each slide in the presentation. If no information is given except for the slide title, the content should be self-explanatory. If additional information is given, this is a cue for you to ask the students a question or expand beyond the content on the screen.

If you are not able to answer a question from the students, you can request that the students spend some time doing research. This will also give you an opportunity to look into the question on your own.

ACTIVITY
The activities range from panel discussions with guest speakers to hands-on vacant lot analysis. Activities may require more in-depth and in-advance planning from leaders.

Though not mentioned in each session page, every session can begin with the Mini Marketplace or New & Good. The Mini Marketplace is an opportunity for the students to view the Youth Green Corps as a micro-community. During this time, students may make an offering or an ask of the class. For example, one student may be wanting to learn how to cook, while another student would like to give away a pair of shoes that they don’t want anymore. Each student gets to share one or two things, to which any other student could reply. This exchange demonstrates the collaborative sharing of a strong community. New & Good is an opportunity for the students to talk briefly about one thing that is new and good in their lives. This encourages the students to get to know each other and celebrate the positive in their lives together. Mini Marketplace and New & Good can be used interchangeably to kick off each session.
SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

PREPARATION

- Review resources
- Review slides and activity
- Prepare materials
- Get chaperones for scavenger hunt if needed

MATERIALS

- Presentation: Youth Green Corps Session 1
- Scavenger Hunt Checklist (5 copies)

TEACHER RESOURCES

Background information on vacant land: www.lotstolove.org/about/
Explore www.lotstolove.org to get a sense for the process of reclaiming vacant land.

PRESENTATION

Slide 1: Title
Slide 2: What are we doing
Slide 3: What’s the issue
  Give introduction to the issue of vacant land. Ask students to discuss what they think about vacant land and their experiences with it.
Slide 4: Why are we doing this?
  Ask students to discuss benefits and issues that could come out of reclaiming vacant land. Ask them to think about the word “reclaim” and what it means for them.
Slide 5: What will you learn?
  Ask students what part they are most interested in learning about.
Slide 6: What do we expect of you?
Slide 7: Schedule of courses
  Run through schedule and ask students if they have questions.
Slide 8: Scavenger Hunt
  Count off 4 groups. Explain rules (5 points for being the first group back. 1 point for each item found. Students must write the address or street name where each item was found). Make sure each student has an emergency phone number to contact if they get lost and a time to return by. Hand out the scavenger hunt form.

ACTIVITY

Scavenger hunt: The students will go on a scavenger hunt of the neighborhood. The goal is to get the students to notice the details of their neighborhood. It’s a chance for them to notice both the good and the bad, and to practice good observation skills. If safety is a concern, send a chaperon with each group, or have the students stay within a certain distance of home base.
To access the full curriculum, please contact us.
This curriculum was created by GTECH Strategies for Community Works of Pittsburgh’s Hilltop neighborhoods.

GTECH’s mission is to cultivate the unrealized potential of people and places to improve the economic, social, and environmental health of our communities.