

# Hear Every Voice

## Case Study: City of Hampton, Virginia, Youth Engagement Efforts



Engaging youth in policy and decision-making processes.

Hampton, Virginia

City of Hampton Planning Department, Alternatives, Inc., Hampton Coalition for Youth

**Context:** In 1980s the City of Hampton, Virginia, was at a crossroads, dealing with financially challenging times and stagnating economic development. As the City considered how to address these challenges, some staff members recognized their own hierarchical structure might be part of the problem. As a response, City staff decided to evaluate their internal culture and reinvent government initiatives. “[The City] expanded employee participation, encouraged an entrepreneurial culture, and demanded collaboration across agencies” (Sirianni 2005, 3). As City government went through this game-changing process, it also reconsidered how it engaged the community in the planning process.

**Public Involvement:** In part, the challenges of the 1980s led to innovative ideas to engage youth in the planning and policy-making process for the City of Hampton. Another key factor was a youth-focused organization in the area, Alternatives, Inc. This organization originally focused on youth who may be at risk for things like drug use, abuse, and running away, but as it evolved in the 1990s the mission shifted from “treating” or “fixing” youth to providing what the youth said they wanted, “. . . to be challenged and provided opportunities to make real contributions to the community” (Sirianni 2005, 4). With these two essential ingredients, a partnership between the City and youth was cultivated and has resulted in numerous successful efforts and an ongoing level of engagement by youth in the community.

### Project Details

### Location

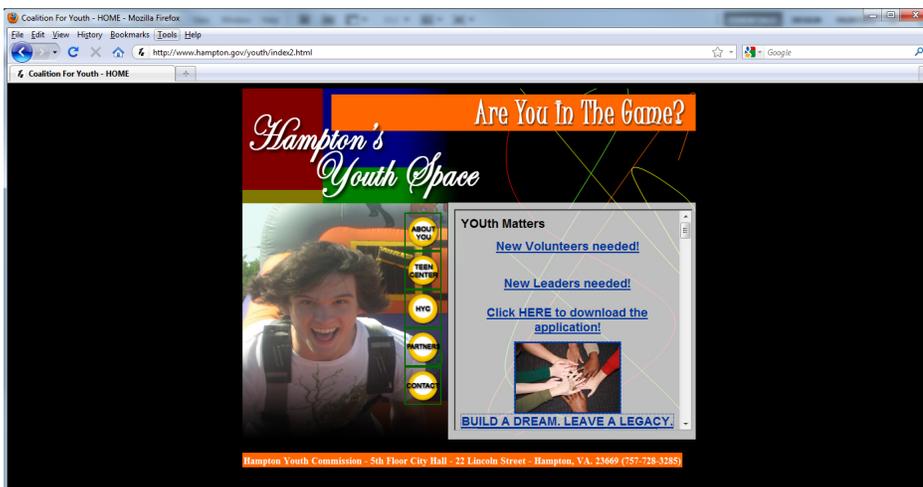
### Organizations

### Case Summary

Visualization

Internet

Meeting Activity



One example is the establishment of the Hampton Youth Commission. Established in 1997, high school students from local schools can apply to be on the Commission and are appointed to serve two-year terms. The City allocates a budget for the Youth Commission's operational and training needs, and members receive meeting attendance stipends of five dollars. Additional funds are allocated for youth/adult partnership projects that are awarded through a competitive process (Sirianni 2005, 8). The Youth Commission is well supported by adults who are appointed as "staff team," and a senior planning staff member serves as a commission liaison. The Youth Commission has tackled complex issues such as developing joint strategies with the Citizens Unity Commission to support diversity in Hampton, creating the Youth Component of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, and creating a teen center.

Because the Youth Commission has been so successful in increasing the voice of youth in local planning efforts and improving the end result of local projects, the City of Hampton further formalized the program by creating two part-time positions for teens in the City planning department. Youth planners work 15 hours per week and serve two-year staggered terms. Some work additional hours on a volunteer basis because the work is so interesting and their role is so significant (Sirianni 2005, 9). Six youth planners had a role in crafting the Youth Component of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan over a three-year time frame. Subsequent youth planners focused on implementation of the comprehensive plan's youth component. In the early 2000s, youth planners prioritized key issues affecting young people such as youth-friendly spaces and businesses, transportation, employment, and caring youth-adult relationships. These priorities have been helpful in guiding their efforts.

**Youth Teen Center Model**

Developed by Intern (and former Youth Commissioner) Ryan Cerone



source: [http://www.hampton.gov/giftcatalog/photo\\_gallery.aspx](http://www.hampton.gov/giftcatalog/photo_gallery.aspx)

**Former Youth Commissioners**

Youth Commissioners who were vital to development and design of the teen center



source: [http://www.hampton.gov/giftcatalog/photo\\_gallery.aspx](http://www.hampton.gov/giftcatalog/photo_gallery.aspx)

So far, the youth planners have:

- *Developed a handbook (at the request of the City Council) to help business owners and officials become more "youth friendly"*
- *Worked with the local transit agency to reach transportation options for teenagers, gathering input from young people on a new light rail system and other initiatives, including transit costs and access for teens*
- *Consulted regularly with the parks/recreation department providing information, ideas for events, or acting as a partner in park events*
- *Gathered information from peers through monthly public meetings with the Hampton Youth Commission where the planners often facilitate brainstorming activities and surveys*

(California Center for Civic Participation 2004)

Youth planners make monthly presentations to the City Council. Student engagement in the civic issues is important for the City of Hampton, and for the development of the next generation of young leaders.

Sirianni, C. 2005. Youth civic engagement: Systems change and culture change in Hampton, Virginia. Retrieved from [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

California Center for Civic Participation. 2004. Youth voices in community design. Retrieved from <http://californiacenter.org/resources/#publications>.

## References

**1. Hampton Youth Commission:** <http://www.hampton.gov/youth/>

**2. California Center for Civic Participation:** <http://californiacenter.org>

## Resources

Hear Every Voice Contact Information

**Vanessa Levingston, MPA**

Minnesota Department of Transportation: 395 John Ireland Blvd St. Paul, MN 55155

Phone: 651-366-3177 E-mail: [Vanessa.Levingston@state.mn.us](mailto:Vanessa.Levingston@state.mn.us)

Project website: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/publicinvolvement/index.html>



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Case Studies Developed by:

Carissa Schively Slotterback, PhD, AICP, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota

Cindy Zerger, ASLA, APA, Center for Changing Landscapes, University of Minnesota

in partnership with the Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota