

## **BUILT FOR SUCCESS**

### ***Good Practice in Volunteer Tutor Programs***

#### **About the video**

This video provides a 30-minute documentary tour of four national service tutoring programs working with elementary schools. Tutors featured are from AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps\*VISTA, Learn and Serve America, and National Senior Service Corps.

#### **Goals of the video are to:**

- Present “live” examples of good practice
- Stimulate discussion and program development around the key characteristics of effective tutoring programs.

#### **Video content**

Video portraits highlight characteristics of program success, identified through existing research and supported by professional wisdom from practitioners. These characteristics are grouped into five main categories:

- Community connections
- Training and supervision
- Access to school resources
- Regular and structured sessions
- Performance measurement

#### **Possible uses for the video**

Consider sharing this video with multiple audiences to help inform good practice. You may find it useful to:

- Train new project managers, staff, and volunteers
- Suggest program models to advisory groups or potential partners
- Provide collaboration models to school partners
- Inform community stakeholders about national service roles in tutoring programs

#### **Viewing recommendations**

When viewing this video with a group (especially to stimulate ideas for your own program), we recommend pausing after each school portrait to discuss it separately, about every 5 to 6 minutes.

A title frame for each school — listing key characteristics of success — separates each of the portraits and provides a good pause cue.

If you are viewing the video on your own (to consider your own program’s characteristics or see what others are doing), you may also pause after each portrait to review additional information in these written descriptions. Take some time to record your individual responses to relevant questions and create your own action plan.

## Support materials

The following documents provide support to facilitators of group discussions and planning sessions around effective tutoring practice (but an individual viewer might also use them):

- Introductory Remarks, for viewing orientation
- Viewer's Guides, for background and to prompt discussion after viewing the video
- Viewer's Worksheets, for noting observations and questions as you view the video

If you are facilitating a group viewing, consider your meeting goals and the interests of the stakeholders attending. Watch the video and read the *Viewer's Guide* in advance, selecting those questions that will prompt the best discussion for your purpose. Not all groups will benefit from watching all four portraits; you may want to select one or two that most relate to your program.

## Introductory remarks

The following general points will help to prepare your viewers:

- The video is 30 minutes long and provides four portraits of volunteer tutoring programs, showing how national service members and volunteers from AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, Learn and Serve America, and the National Senior Service Corps collaborate and support tutoring efforts in partnership with schools.
- The purpose of the video is to stimulate discussion and planning around the key characteristics of effective tutoring programs. Look for interactions and interviews with project participants that illustrate good practice.
- Each portrait, less than seven minutes long, provides an overview of how the program is managed within the school setting. Ask viewers to think of themselves as site evaluators as they watch, using the worksheets to note questions they would ask to develop a more complete picture of each program.
- In addition to this introduction, refer to sets of four *Viewer's Guides* and four *Viewer's Worksheets*, each labeled for a particular school site.

## Viewer's Guide

### SITE # 1: Mirror Lake Elementary Federal Way School District, Washington

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#### Overall program design

A defining characteristic of the tutoring project at Mirror Lake Elementary is the reading room — a vibrant space dedicated entirely to tutoring. Six tutoring stations, tutoring resources, and record-keeping systems (computers and student files) are housed in this room, serving students, referred by teachers in grades K – 4. At full capacity, the room can host about 30 tutoring sessions daily, or 150 per week.

It takes a strong core team to successfully manage a large tutoring operation. At Mirror Lake, the team consists of a volunteer coordinator (for overall management), a reading specialist (for ongoing training and expertise), one AmeriCorps member (for daily operational support), and one AmeriCorps\* VISTA member (for capacity building).

#### Success factors at Mirror Lake Elementary

##### Community connections

Mirror Lake relies on a VISTA member who recruits volunteers for the program. She distributes fliers, make presentations, and holds meetings with local schools, libraries, senior volunteer programs, and businesses to achieve a base of about 80 tutors. The VISTA member also seeks donations of money and/or resources to the program. One local corporation provides both financial support and volunteers, who tutor during their lunch break. The school district office also provides tutors to the program.

##### Questions about community connections

1. Where do your volunteers come from? How well do they reflect your community?
2. How can you capitalize on national service volunteers to build your program's capacity?
3. What systems make it easier to recruit and retain volunteers?
4. What are other sources of community support (for materials and resources)?

##### Performance measurement

Teachers initiate the tutorial relationship at Mirror Lake by recommending students to the program. They begin the process by providing information about student strengths, skills that need improvement, and special concerns related to the individual. This document is stapled inside the student's tracking log folder for tutor reference. Tutors are given time to record their activities, note fluency rates, and provide comments about student work at the close of each session. These logs then serve as a resource for the management team as they discuss individual student progress and plan what comes next. Success of the program is established through student performance on regularly administered classroom reading assessments.

##### Questions about performance measurement

1. How does your program incorporate teacher expertise and recommendations into the tutoring process?
2. What systems and records do you have in place to track student work in each tutoring session?

#### Overall Questions

■ Is a pull-out room a possibility in the schools you serve? If not, how does/can your program create a focused space for tutoring?

■ What does your management team look like? Are all roles appropriately defined, assigned, and understood?

■ Regular record-keeping is easy if it is accomplished consistently at the tutor's departure and reviewed/ updated by a program team before the next visit. What systems for record-keeping are in place in your program? What can you do to make it easy for volunteers?

3. What challenges do you encounter in maintaining performance-based record-keeping?
4. Does the Mirror Lake model suggest any new approaches?

### **Coordination with school resources**

The school provides a critical resource that contributes to the success of the Mirror Lake program: a dedicated space for tutoring. The program coordinator facilitates regular communication between the many tutors, the national service members, teachers, parents, students, and school administration. This coordinator position, originally funded through outside sources, is now absorbed into the school budget. The program has also assembled, with the school's guidance, a rich collection of leveled resources for tutors: books, games, manipulatives, and word activities organized according to the appropriate reading level and clearly marked. Both students and tutors know where to find appropriate materials for their sessions.

### **Questions about coordination with school resources**

1. If you are running a large school-based volunteer program, how do you provide smooth communication and coordination between all participants? If you rely on a coordinator position, what qualifications and qualities would you seek in this person?)
2. Where do your tutoring materials come from? Have they been organized and reviewed by someone with professional expertise?
3. How do your tutoring materials — books, magazines, pictures, flash cards, word games, wall displays, etc. — address the needs of students you serve? Do they provide for developmental, learning style, and cultural differences?
4. What additional resources would you like to develop for your program?

### **Access to instructional expertise**

Mirror Lake builds high quality tutoring skills through the participation of a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) who has several years' experience in diagnostic reading programs. The TOSA provides initial training for all volunteer tutors; she also visits the program once a week to provide additional skills, support, and professional advice. If a tutor is having difficulty with a student, she will observe a session and make recommendations, often demonstrating appropriate strategies.

### **Questions about access to instructional expertise**

1. Who provides professional expertise to your program? What type of experience, qualifications, and ongoing availability do they provide?
2. What systematic review and expertise do you provide for ongoing support, beyond initial tutor training?

**Viewer's Guide**  
**SITE # 2: Joseph Gale Elementary**  
**Forest Grove, Oregon**

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**Overall program design**

The tutoring program at Forest Grove features a single, flexible AmeriCorps member in an intern style role, who accepts a range of tutoring assignments under the direction of a mentor teacher. Partnerships for Student Achievement (PSA), an AmeriCorps\*State program operated by the Forest Grove School District, seeks AmeriCorps members who want to become educators, and places each to serve full time in an area school that provides the best match. This way, work assignments are individually tailored to suit both the needs of the school and the member.

This portrait tracks AmeriCorps member Jeff Scott as he tutors reading in the classroom, provides math tutoring after school, and carries out an evening family literacy event. He serves about 20 students on a daily basis at Joseph Gale.

**Success factors at Joseph Gale Elementary**

**Training, supervision, and feedback**

In this program, members receive advance training in tutoring strategies, child development, behavior management, and program operations from the school district. At Joseph Gale, the member watches mentor teachers conduct student assessments to reveal “what they are looking for.” As tutoring begins, mentor teachers meet regularly with the AmeriCorps member to review plans for students and provide suggestions. In addition, PSA members attend weekly team meetings which provide opportunities for reflection with peers who serve in different schools. An additional training opportunity is the yearlong graduate level class, Issues in Education, provided by program partner Pacific University.

**Questions about training, supervision, and feedback**

1. What training opportunities are available to the AmeriCorps member in the video?
2. How does your program engage community expertise to develop your members and volunteers?
3. In what skill areas do you provide training?
4. What are some strategies for creating a balance in training opportunities between providing instruction and resources, improving practice, networking, trouble shooting, and reflecting?

**Collaboration with teachers**

At Joseph Gale, the AmeriCorps member is assigned to a mentor who is the school's Title I teacher. The two meet regularly to review lesson plans; she also participates in regular performance reviews with the member, the principal (who acts as site coordinator), and the AmeriCorps Project Director.

**Overall Questions**

- What evidence do you see that the needs/aspirations of the AmeriCorps member are addressed?
- How does your program consider volunteer needs when creating good placements?

### **Questions about collaboration with teachers**

1. What evidence of teacher collaboration do you see in the video?
2. How does your program connect and collaborate with teachers around student needs and the specific reading skills teachers look for?

### **Frequent and structured sessions**

In her interview, the mentor teacher stresses the importance of daily instruction (at the same time each day). Available research establishes that the effectiveness of tutoring is enhanced by scheduling frequency and session structure. This may be easily achieved within the regularity of the school day, but may be more challenging in an out-of-school time setting.

### **Question about frequent and structured sessions**

1. What do scheduling frequency and session structure look like in your tutoring sessions?
2. Have you ever altered your session schedules or structure to achieve better results? What did you learn from the changes you made?

### **Family involvement**

Partnerships for Student Achievement works with all its AmeriCorps members to promote family literacy in host schools that request this support. The members team up to provide these events, allowing them to interact extensively with families and each others' schools. The family literacy event in the video provides families the opportunity to visit four stations, each providing strategies to help early readers draw meaning from text.

### **Questions about family involvement**

1. What evidence do you see in the video that this family event is good for students?
2. How can a one-time event like this one provide the groundwork for more sustained collaboration with families?

**Viewer's Guide**  
**SITE # 3: Mount View Elementary**  
**Seattle, WA**

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**Overall program design**

The Mount View tutoring program features the work of three AmeriCorps members in conjunction with a high school cross-age tutoring program (Learn and Serve America model). The program serves a diverse elementary student population that speaks 24 home languages. The full-time AmeriCorps members meet with designated English language learners to provide one-on-one or small-group tutoring; they also act as mentors to a large group of high school students who tutor in first-grade classrooms four days per week, supplementing regular reading instruction. As the high school tutors work with small groups, they are observed and supported by the AmeriCorps members; the classroom teacher is then free to work closely with the most challenged readers.

**Success factors at Mount View Elementary**

**Service learning**

An effective service-learning program: 1) engages students in responsible, challenging actions; 2) articulates clear service and learning goals; 3) expects genuine, sustained commitment; 4) includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, and recognition; and 5) encourages participation with diverse cultures. At Evergreen High School, students register for a credit class in tutoring. As part of that class, they receive initial training and tutor four days per week, with the fifth day reserved for additional instruction, planning, and reflection.

**Questions about service learning**

1. What evidence do you see in the video that the high school students are learning from their service?
2. What aspects of effective service-learning programs are most apparent at this site?
3. What process does your program provide for volunteers to learn through and reflect on their service?

**Training, supervision, and feedback**

The Mount View AmeriCorps members receive preparatory training through two annual institutes, sponsored by the Washington Service Corps; this training is supplemented by ongoing training and coaching from the teaching staff at Mount View. The high school tutors have two sources of training and support — the high school teacher and the AmeriCorps members. You can also see the AmeriCorps members providing on-site supervision of high school tutors in the classroom. All tutors benefit from observation and feedback throughout their service.

**Questions about training, supervision, and feedback**

1. What advantages can you see to training the AmeriCorps members as mentors and monitors of the high school students?
2. How does your program provide mentoring, observation, and feedback for tutors?

**Overall Questions**

- If your program is school-based, where does tutoring take place? Is this the best location for the students and the program type?
- What do you see in the Mount View classrooms that supports effective tutoring?
- In this program, the classroom teachers participated in the program design, one which frees them to work with the most struggling students, while still providing small-group practice to all the other students. What other models are you aware of for tutor/teacher collaboration inside the classroom?
- Availability of bus transportation for the high school students is a key factor in this program's success. Does your program have transportation needs? If so, how do you address them?

### **Frequent and structured sessions**

At Mount View, tutoring sessions are daily events. AmeriCorps members work daily with specified groups of English language learners, under supervision of the Title I teacher in consultation with the classroom teachers. The high school service-learning class comes to the first-grade classrooms for four 30-minute periods each week during the high school term. The team of classroom teachers, Title I teacher, and high school teacher determines the structure and content for the high school tutors.

### **Questions about frequent and structured sessions**

1. The regularity of classroom schedules can help define a tutoring program with frequent and regular sessions. How does your program partner with schools to create a stable scheduling structure for tutoring sessions?
2. If your program is not school-based, how do you maintain frequent and regular sessions?
3. Small-group tutoring is featured at Mount View. What important characteristics related to small-group work do you observe in the video?
4. What experience does your program have with small-group work?

### **Performance measurement**

One performance measure at Mount View is the reading achievement of the first-graders. Progress in first-grade reading is established through regular classroom assessments. Another performance measure is the tutoring performance of the high school students. In the video, we see that ongoing assessment takes place through observation, and adjustments are made to improve program operation based on these observations. Ongoing monitoring for program improvement, called formative evaluation, establishes a repetitive cycle of planning activities, carrying them out, reflecting on results, and improving the plans.

### **Questions about performance measurement**

1. What evidence of ongoing, formative evaluation do you observe in the video?
2. How do you use record-keeping to assist in program evaluation?
3. How do you establish outcomes and conduct your program evaluation?

**Viewer's Guide**  
**SITE # 4: Woodlawn Elementary**  
**Portland, OR**

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**Overall program design**

Woodlawn Elementary works with two volunteer tutoring programs that recruit senior citizens: the Foster Grandparents Program and Experience Corps, both programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Foster Grandparents work as one-on-one reading tutors in a pull-out program for first-graders. Experience Corps members provide both small-group and individual tutoring for a range of subjects, by teacher request. Tutors from both programs serve the school about 20 hours per week.

**Success Factors at Woodlawn Elementary**

**Mentoring relationships**

Key to the success of this program are caring relationships, fostered by the volunteers' roots in the community and by ongoing friendships formed through the program. The seniors work as tutors, but mentoring is a cornerstone of their service. Mentoring is described by the seniors as believing in the children, and working to build their social and emotional skills and raise their self esteem.

**Questions about mentoring relationships**

1. What activities or design features support mentoring in the video? What benefits do you observe?
2. In what ways are your volunteers bonded to the community your program serves?
3. How do you highlight and promote mentoring relationships in your own program?

**Collaboration with teachers**

At the beginning of the school year, school staff interview senior volunteers to determine what grade levels would be most appropriate for each to serve, considering both the preferences of volunteers and staff assessment of their particular skills. Classroom teachers then elect to work with the seniors, coordinating flexible tutoring support with classroom objectives. In the video, a classroom teacher talks about the importance of working with the tutor to achieve a meshing of work styles. The video portrays seniors as they tutor beginning readers, provide group instruction on special topics outside of class, tutor an individual student in math, support writing assignments inside the classroom, and operate a fluency lab.

**Questions about collaboration with teachers**

1. What are the different ways that tutors support classroom teachers at Woodlawn?
2. How can a program report tutoring outcomes in such a flexible program?
3. What are the advantages of flexible tutoring assignments? What are the challenges?
4. What various ways do you currently use or plan to use tutors in your own program?

**Overall Questions**

- What unique benefits do intergenerational relationships provide to this program?
- Are there ways that your program does/can incorporate intergenerational relationships?

### **Team development and reflection**

The school provides the senior team with its own meeting room, where team members gather to reflect on their work, provide mutual support, problem solve, and sometimes share lunch. The program director remarks that the social and emotional connections of the team become an important benefit for the seniors.

#### **Questions about team development and reflection**

1. What activities support the team concept in the video?
2. Is team structure and development a part of your program design?
3. How might you strengthen team support in your own program?
4. How do programs benefit from strong teams?

### **Community connections**

The senior team at Woodlawn organizes bowling as a group activity for students in the community. Donations include free admission from the bowling alley and transportation from Metropolitan Learning Center, the sponsoring organization for Experience Corps. Such activities strengthen relationships between school and community organizations. Most important, they provide children with opportunities to develop the social, emotional, behavioral, and language skills that support their success in school.

#### **Questions about community connections**

1. What aspects of the bowling outing look like effective programming to you?
2. What are other ways that tutoring programs can create connections with the community?
3. How does your program reach out and establish unique community partnerships, reflecting local assets and resources?

**Viewer's Worksheet**  
**SITE # 1: Mirror Lake Elementary**

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**Overall program design**

A defining characteristic of the tutoring project at Mirror Lake Elementary is the reading room — a vibrant space dedicated entirely to tutoring. Six tutoring stations, tutoring resources, and record-keeping systems (computers and student files) are housed in this room, serving students, referred by teachers in grades K – 4. At full capacity, the room can host about 30 tutoring sessions daily, or 150 per week.

**Community connections**

What evidence do you see of strong community connections at this site?

In what additional ways does your program connect to the community?

**Performance measurement**

How does this program provide for ongoing record-keeping of student achievement?

How does this compare with record-keeping systems in your programs?

**Coordination with school resources**

What evidence do you see of school resources incorporated into this program?

What additional support and resources are provided to your programs by schools?

**Access to instructional expertise**

Who provides instructional expertise to tutors at Mirror Lake? How does this occur in the video?

What sources of instructional expertise serve your programs?

## **Viewer's Worksheet**

### **SITE # 2: Joseph Gale Elementary**

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#### **Overall program design**

The characteristic that defines the tutoring program at Forest Grove is a single, flexible AmeriCorps member in an intern style role, who accepts a range of tutoring assignments under the direction of a mentor teacher. Partnerships for Student Achievement, an AmeriCorps\*State program operated by the Forest Grove School District, seeks AmeriCorps members who want to become educators, and places each one to serve full time in an area school that provides the best match. This way, work assignments are individually tailored to suit both the needs of the school and the member, who works full time for the school year.

#### **Training, supervision, and feedback**

What evidence do you see of a strong training and supervision program at this site?

How does your program train before and during service, and provide ongoing feedback or reflection?

#### **Collaboration with teachers**

What evidence do you see of teacher collaboration at Joseph Gale?

“What we are looking for” is a key phrase used by the Title I teacher in this section. How does your program connect with what teachers are looking for?

#### **Frequent and structured sessions**

How often do you think this member meets with his assigned students and what's your impression of how he structures his time with them?

What is the scheduling design in your program (how often, how long, how structured)?

#### **Family involvement**

What do you see at the family reading night that might help families support student success?

In what ways does your program reach out to families?

**Viewer's Worksheet**  
**SITE # 3: Mount View Elementary**

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**Overall program design**

At Mount View Elementary, three AmeriCorps members and a high school service learning class work with a diverse elementary student population that speaks 24 home languages. The full-time AmeriCorps members tutor designated English language learners daily, one-on-one or in small groups; they also mentor high school tutors in Mount View's first-grade classrooms four days each week (a supplement to regular reading instruction). The high school tutors tutor small groups, supported by the AmeriCorps members; the classroom teacher is then free to work closely with the most challenged readers.

**Service learning**

What evidence of service learning do you see at this site?

How does your program support the learning of your tutors?

**Training, supervision, and feedback**

What evidence do you see of ongoing supervision and feedback at this site?

How does your program provide for on-site observation and feedback?

**Frequent and structured sessions**

When serving small groups or individual students, frequency and structure are especially important. How does this program provide frequent scheduling and session structure?

How does your program address frequency of scheduling and session structure?

**Performance measurement**

How does Mount View measure tutor performance and work to improve effectiveness?

What systems do you have in place for improving program performance?

## **Viewer's Worksheet**

### **SITE # 4: Woodlawn Elementary**

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#### **Overall program design**

Woodlawn elementary works with two volunteer tutoring programs that recruit senior citizens: the Foster Grandparents Program and Experience Corps, both programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Foster Grandparents work as one-on-one reading tutors in a pull-out program for first-graders. Experience Corps members provide both small-group and individual tutoring for a range of subjects, by teacher request. Tutors from both programs serve the school about 20 hours per week.

#### **Mentoring relationships**

What special benefits do intergenerational programs provide to participants?

What evidence do you see of caring relationships in the video? What activities support them?

What does your program do to create and promote mentoring relationships?

#### **Collaboration with teachers**

How do the teachers and volunteers collaborate at this site?

What systems for collaboration with teachers does your program have in place?

#### **Team development and reflection**

How is tutor teamwork apparent at Woodlawn?

What does your program do to develop and support teams?

#### **Community connections**

How do the seniors connect Woodlawn students to their community?

What special activities or elements provide community connections in your program?