



DPI VISTA Monthly

December 2008



"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Albert Schweitzer

Jane Grinde
Project Director

Betsy Prueter
Education/Grants Specialist

Ruth Anne Landsverk
Family Partnership Coordinator

Casey Gauthier
Newsletter Editor

Enhancing Organizational Capacity

By Betsy Prueter

In a recent teleconference sponsored by Public Allies, the issues of building capacity and organizational performance became hot topics. Based on the research of Phil Bartle of the Uganda Community Management Program, they have identified 16 essential components to increasing capacity in your organization (or school! or agency!). Given how relevant this is to VISTA work, I've selected nine to discuss below.

1. ALTRUISM

Individuals should be allowed and encouraged to use their gifts to benefit the organization. Is there something special you (or a parent) really likes to do? Can it fit into your program of partnerships?

2. COMMON VALUES

Members need to share, or at least understand each others' values and attitudes to make a strong organization. Do you feel well connected to your site? Are you working to develop strong relationships?

3. COMMUNICATION

This doesn't just mean speaking to the families and school staff you work with (though that's important!). But utilize a variety of tools- email, newsletters, radio, internet, etc. And communication with your site staff is just as critical. Do they know about the work you're doing? Do they know how to get involved?

6. ORGANIZATION

Each member of an organization needs to have a role in that organization. They should know what that role is and see how it fits in the "bigger vision." Do YOU know how your work fits into your site's "bigger vision"?

7. SKILLS

Basically, this means use your assets!
And the assets of those you work with.
Find out what people are good at and
utilize those skills for the benefit of your
site. Think back to your asset mapping-
what special talents or skills do your
staff have at your site?

8. TRUST

This is where team building comes in.
Trust in each other and in the
organization is essential to a strong
agency. VISTAs should be building trust
with those they work with in an effort to
do their work more effective! This also
helps develop sustainable practice.

9. UNITY

Establishing a culture of tolerance in the
workplace will increase capacity. You
should be celebrating the differences
and similarities you share with those you
work with as well as those your site
serves. How might this be a theme to
your next partnership event?

Welcome New VISTAs!

In early December, three new VISTAs
are joining our project. Please help DPI
in welcoming them to the team.

Nicole Stachurski will serve at Grove
Elementary School in Wisconsin Rapids.

Brittany Williams will serve with WEOP
(Wisconsin Educational Opportunity
Program) at DPI.

Dustin Young will serve with the Dane
County Transition High School and the
South Madison Health and Family
Center in Madison.

Save the Dates!

December 4-5

Building the Heart of Successful
Schools Conference
WI Dells

December 11th

10am-11am, 1st Semester
Supervisor Check-In
Teleconference

December 19th

11am-12pm, 1st Semester VISTA
Check-In
Webinar

January 14th

New Wisconsin Promise Conference
Madison

January 15th

Quarterly Reports due

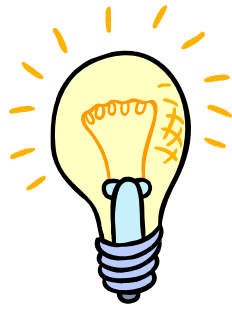
February 12th

Service Learning Conference
Madison

February 12th

Governor's Service Awards Dinner
Madison

“Hey! That’s a Good Idea!”



1. **Chris Briggs**, serving in Wausau, holds monthly “Parents Night Out” events for parents in the district’s early childhood program. These events are often fun and educational and provide valuable networking and relationship building among and between parents. Childcare is always provided so parents can feel relaxed and enjoy each others’ company!
[Parenting]
2. **Michelle Traxel**, VISTA with the Spooner Middle School, planned a very successful Family Movie Night in collaboration with the PTA. Due in part to effective promotion and communication over 230 participants attended! Michelle took advantage of several avenues of outreach- including flyers, radio spots and newspaper blurbs. Remember, most people need to hear a message seven different times in seven different ways!
[Communicating]
3. **Robyn Krimke** is working hard to bring parent voice into Grant School in Milwaukee. Parents are able to have input in the School Advisory Council, the Action Team for Partnerships, the PTA, AND monthly parent buzz sessions- which brings parents together to discuss relevant and important topics at their school including available community resources.
[Decision-Making]
4. **Kelly Martyka**, working with both her site (The South Madison Health and Family Center) as well as the local library, has developed a successful after school program staffed with student and community volunteers. Volunteer recruitment is a key to sustainability!
[Volunteering]
5. **Penny Bruskin**, who serves with the Milwaukee Public Library system, has focused her efforts on two local branches in an effort to develop localized action teams. These action teams will help to enhance the homework help program, evaluate current programming, create a sustainable mentoring opportunity for students, and form solid partnerships with other community agencies and organizations. An EXCELLENT model for the action team!
[Collaborating with the Community]

Front Line Staff Involve Families in Meaningful, Often Unseen, Ways

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

It's no coincidence that VISTA volunteers often feel as if they are on the "front lines" of involving families in schools and children's learning. In fact, the report, *Partnerships by Design*, from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL) identifies VISTAs as part of the "front-line staff" of those who are the first to see and greet visitors to schools.

VISTAs, along with school receptionists, school bus drivers, cafeteria and maintenance workers, playground monitors, school social workers and school nurses, often get to know families in ways that teachers never see, the report states. The importance of these people to children and youth, who see them every day, and to families, who may infrequently visit the school, cannot be overstated. The reception that front-line staff give may determine if some families - especially those uncomfortable with coming to school - ever set foot in the building again.

How does your Partnership Action Team connect its goals, plans, and activities to the front-line staff? Do they know of the Action Team and its family involvement efforts? Do they feel an important part of the school's mission to help all children experience school success?

Here's an idea to get such a conversation started among action team members. Go around the table and ask members to share a memory or story about how a front-line staff member influenced their or their children's lives. I

was once part of a meeting where this activity was conducted and was startled at my own memory that surfaced. I remember crying inconsolably at school in First Grade one day and being sent to spend some time with the school janitor to calm down. Yes, this was long ago when poor Mr. Schultz was probably the only "support" staff member available to comfort crying children. He told me some stories and I remember going back to class feeling much better. Since then, school janitors have always held a special place in my heart.

Here are a few ideas from the NREL report to help your Action Team consider and strengthen its front-line staff's connections with partnerships:

1. Include front-line staff in staff trainings to strengthen family-school-community partnerships.
2. Invite front-line staff to serve as members of the Partnership Action Team
3. In the One-Year Action Plan, spell out exactly how front-line staff connect to improving student achievement and to improving partnerships with families.
4. Develop a whole-school plan as to how front-line staff will work with families and community members.
5. Equip front-line staff with the knowledge of how to work with and assist families and community members.
6. Make it school protocol for front office staff to greet families warmly and to promptly assist them.
7. Survey front-line staff about how they interact with families, where staff could use more support, and about their

perceptions of families' questions, needs, and strengths.

8. Recognize and celebrate at school events and events for families the contributions of front-line staff members.



9. This December, ask your Partnership Action Team to take time to ponder the gifts that each of these individuals offers children, young people, and families. Then, use them!

Penny Answers Kelly's Questions

Penny is serving with Parents Plus in Milwaukee, WI.



Kelly: How did you end up as a VISTA for Milwaukee Public Libraries?

Penny: Well, I actually started off taking a position at the MPS Central Office when I originally became a VISTA. However, when that position fell through, I jumped at the idea of working out of Central Library. After learning a bit about DPI's VISTA project, I became excited about the potential for neighborhood libraries to serve the role of safe, publicly-funded

community centers in various inner-city neighborhoods. Now that I've begun working with two neighborhood libraries, I'm even more convinced that libraries can be incredibly effective tools for fighting poverty from within communities.

Kelly: What has been your favorite part of your VISTA assignment so far?

Penny: I've really been enjoying all the networking that goes into creating an Action Team. I've lived in Milwaukee for about 18 years, and I had no idea about all the wonderful organizations that exist in this city. In fact, talking with various people and organizations has really helped me stay optimistic about fighting poverty and creating sustainable change.

Kelly: What is one thing you have learned from your VISTA service thus far?

Penny: I have learned that patience and flexibility are necessary tools when working with many organizations/institutions. Not only have these traits **helped** me manage my own stress, but my ability to adapt has also helped me connect with other people. Instead of becoming upset when plans change or fall through, I have tried to expand my own ideas about how things can best be done. By allowing myself this type of flexibility, I am also taking a step back from independently running any sort of agenda.

Kelly: When you think forward to the end of your VISTA service, what is one thing you hope to leave (what would you like your legacy to be so to speak)?

Penny: I would like to show DPI that non-school sites are great placements for future VISTA's. In addition, I would love to have used my term to show libraries just

how accessible they can be for public use and for the betterment of the community in which they exist.

Kelly: At the end of a hectic day or week, is there something you do to recharge?

Penny: It really depends on the day. If it is a hectic day during the week, I usually stop by the media room at the library to get a DVD/music for the next few days. Every time I step into that room at Central Library, I'm amazed at how incredible the selection is there. It's seriously better than blockbuster...and it's totally free. I'll also unwind by taking my puppy for a walk around the city. I know it can have a bad reputation, but Milwaukee can seriously take my breath away with its beauty.

Kelly: If you could change one thing about the world (other than eliminating poverty, because that is what VISTAs do!) what would it be?

Penny: I would want the basic necessities of life to be provided to every single person in the world. This includes livable housing, nutritional food, clean water, quality education, and full preventative health coverage. Without these things, poverty will continue to exist and increase as disparity grows among various groups of people in America.

Kelly: What is your favorite day of the year and why?

Penny: I'm not sure that I have a favorite day of the year. I guess my favorite day of the year is when I realize that summer is

turning into fall. When the summer breeze turns brisk and just a bit of color is appearing on the tips of leaves, I'm usually well aware of just how connected I feel to my surroundings.

Kelly: If you had your own theme music, what would your theme music be and why?

Penny: Okay, so this one is easy. The Parents Plus team already knows this, but my theme music is definitely "Love Today" by Mika. It's got a pretty positive message and a beat that dares you to shake your "tuchas" with the best of 'em.

Kelly: If you could be awarded free meals for life at one restaurant, what would it be?

Penny: Well, I'm kind of obsessed with food...so this is a pretty difficult question to answer. I think I'd pick either Monty's Blue Plate Diner or Lazy Jane's in Madison. Both places have incredible coffee, veggie/vegan dishes, and desserts that make my stomach grumble after I'm way past full. And just for the record, the Laotian place across from Monty's comes in as a close third.

Kelly: What's the best advice anyone has ever given you?

Penny: The best advice I've ever received is to always remember how connected we all are to each other and our environment. Whether I'm reminded through lyrics or memories of a past conversation with a perfect stranger, this mentality will get me through anything with a positive outlook and the will to progress in whatever I'm doing.

Kelly Answers Penny's Questions

Kelly is serving is serving at the Howe Neighborhood Family Resource Center in Green Bay, WI.



Penny: What made becoming a VISTA at your specific site appealing to you?

Kelly: I'm originally from Green Bay and I guess I saw this as a chance to give back to the city I was raised in. My site allowed me the opportunity to get involved with parents, children, community organizing, and really put my interests and education to use as well.

Penny: Where are you originally from?

Kelly: Green Bay!

Penny: What were you doing before you became a VISTA?

Kelly: I recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Madison with a degree in Family Studies and Human Development. And over the summer I had an exciting job working in an office mailroom. My VISTA position is WAY better than that.

Penny: What is something about your site that makes it unique?

Kelly: Well, my site is sort of hybrid. It's a community site, not a school, but it is right next to Howe Elementary School. The Resource Center is actually on

property owned by the Green Bay School District and yet, it is a privately funded, grant and donation-based, nonprofit organization. The school is actually one of the partners of the center instead of being the host site.

Penny: What makes you excited about going to work as a VISTA?

Kelly: I love what I get to do! Each day is different and challenging. Some people go to work and they think - this is what I'm going to do today. I never think that because I never know. When I get to work I check my e-mail, look at what I did yesterday, what's coming up, and then decide where to go from there. No two days are the same and most days, I honestly do not know at 8am what I will be doing at 4pm. It's GREAT!

Penny: What is one goal that you have for this VISTA term?

Kelly: I guess I just want my site to be better off than before while placing them in a place where they can continue what is better and different without me.

Penny: Do you have any ideas about what you'll do after you serve your term?



Kelly: Maybe. I have a few different ideas I'm toying with. One is actually just getting a different job. The other is going to graduate school. I know that I will go back at some point; it's just a matter of deciding when. I really want to go into Family Counseling and I know that they won't let me do that with a B.S. Plus, I'm actually a big dork and I have always liked school so going back actually excites me.

Penny: If you could exist as a character in any book, what would it be?

Kelly: I read a lot of present-centered non-fiction so that's a difficult question. I think if I had to choose though, I'd pick a book from my childhood. Maybe Winnie the Pooh (which I really liked) or I would love to exist as an eight-year-old in the books *Sideways Stories from Wayside School!*

Penny: Do you have any hobbies that that most people you work with don't know about?

Kelly: I'm not sure. I really like to cook. I don't know if they know that or not.

Penny: Are there any particular sayings or people that molded the way that you live your life?

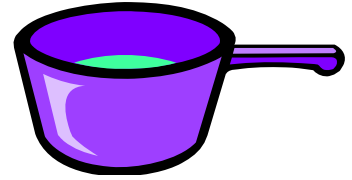
Kelly: "Always do what you are afraid to do." – Ralph Waldo Emerson. I love this because it's so true for me. The experiences I've had that scared me the most – going to college, spending a summer away from home to be a counselor for a summer camp for at-risk youth, studying in London for a semester – have also been some of the most rewarding and life-changing. So now, when I'm afraid to do something I know would be an incredible experience, I really try and keep that in mind.

Recipe of the Month

Ruth Anne shares a recipe with us this month: "Welcome the cold weather with a fragrant bowl of steaming chili. This is a quick-and-healthy comfort food that uses lots of at-hand veggies and economical ground turkey. It's great eaten with tortilla chips or crackers."

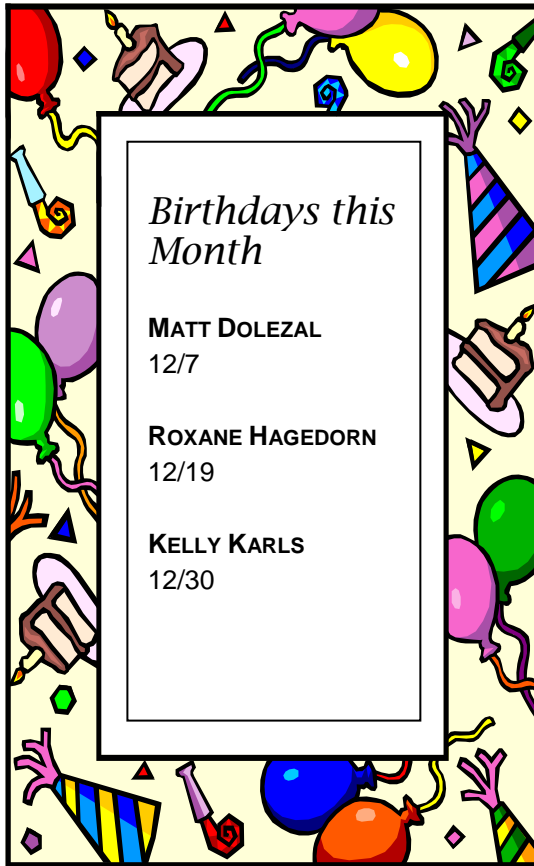
Spicy Black Bean Turkey Chili

- 1 lb. of lean ground turkey
- 1 cup coarsely chopped onion
- 1 medium green or red bell pepper, cut into 1/4-inch cubes
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 (16-ounce) can of diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (16-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 8 ounce tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped (optional)
- 4 tablespoons low fat shredded Cheddar cheese



In a large stockpot, combine turkey, onion, pepper, garlic, chili powder, cumin, oregano, red pepper flakes, and cinnamon. Cook mixture over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until turkey is no longer pink. Stir in tomatoes and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 5 minutes. Stir in beans, corn, and (if using) cilantro. Continue cooking for an additional 5 minutes. Serve topped with cheese.

Serves 4-5.



Participants were able to receive screenings, important health advice and interact with many community service providers.

Brother-To-Brother Social

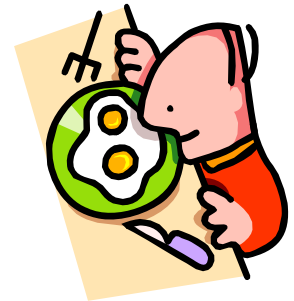
Submitted by Asbury Park Intermediate School, Asbury Park, New Jersey

The goal of this event was to bring together boys and young men of the Intermediate and Alternative Middle Schools and positive role models from their family and the community together. Many of the boys face a growing gang presence and this event highlighted better choices. The participants received dinner and listened to a positive message from a community speaker.

Saturday School

Submitted by Ames Elementary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Any student scoring below 50% on the state test was eligible for Saturday school, held from October through May. The day began with breakfast. After eating and exercising together, students attended math, reading and science sessions and parents and other family members were able to work on resumes, job searches on the computer or observe classroom instruction. Community members and students from area universities provided tutoring and mentoring services to the students.



A Few Promising Partnerships Practices from Around the Country

Community Health Fair

Submitted by Parkway Elementary, Virginia Beach, VA



An estimated 150 community members attended the Saturday activity to share information that focused on an important array of health issues important to the over 225 parents and 400 students present. The Parkway Community is demographically diverse and many parents find it difficult to obtain resources that aid in the health care of their families.

'Tis the season of giving! Many events and drives take place in December. Take some time to read these tips to help make what you do sustainable!

Five Tips for Making Events or Drives Sustainable

1. Create manuals, guides and other materials to guide staff and volunteers through the planning and implementation process. These will be used in future years.
2. Recruit and train a group of volunteers to run every aspect of the event and/or drive. Once VISTAs are no longer at the organization, the event will continue through volunteer leadership.
3. Partner with other organizations, businesses, schools, etc. Remember to recognize and send "Thank You's" to all partners when the event is over. Fond memories will make them want to participate in the future.
4. Articulate how the event or drive fits into the overall mission of the organization. This is useful in recruiting volunteers, interacting with the media and ensuring that the event stays focused.
5. Evaluate the event or drive and document successes and areas for improvement for next year's staff and volunteers to reference.

Think about who will be doing this next year. In all likelihood, it will be someone

other than you, so be sure what you are doing can be replicated! Also, think about ways that your efforts in event planning can boost your VISTA assignment and increase overall capacity in the organization's fight against poverty.

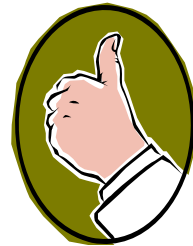
For more information, visit the event planning section on the VISTA Campus: <http://vistacampus.org/mod/book/view.php?id=525>

Acquiring Donations

By Christina Briggs

In my short time as a VISTA with Wausau School District, I have had the opportunity to secure a variety of donations for multiple projects. I would like to say that it has just been luck alone, but to some degree I believe that there is an art to getting people and businesses to give you what you want.

The first and foremost aspect has to be your **positive** belief in the project that you are working on and the fact that you want the potential donor to develop the same belief. You need to make them realize the importance of the project and the number of people that it will benefit. Helping five people is less appealing than helping fifty. I never feel guilty about asking the community for their support. These projects are helping their consumers, their children, and overall bettering the community that there business is operating in! You may need to sell what you are doing and make sure that you have all of necessary information



to answer any questions that they may have.

Second, you need to ask for things that they have readily available and can donate without it being a huge hit to their business. Home Depot for example does building events for families for free one Saturday a month at their stores. I requested that they give me some of their left over kits that would be otherwise thrown away or donated elsewhere. They give them away anyway, so their cost was nothing! Businesses also like to be identified as sponsors so if you are able to tell them that their donations will be recognized they appreciate the free advertising so they are more likely to give!

Another consideration has to be made for local businesses verse corporations. Local businesses often have a higher stake in their community interests and more flexibility to give things away. Large corporations often have extensive procedures and charities that they support exclusively!

Finally, just ask, if you don't ask for it you can't get it and the worst anyone has ever said to me is "no!" If they can't donate fully ask for a discounted or "at cost" rate. I have never had a business say no to that! Again it is not costing them anything to give you the item at the price they paid for it! This works great for grocery stores and department stores that you would otherwise have to go through their corporate office. Even if they can only give you a 10 or 15 percent discount it does add up and in my mind is better than nothing!

Supervisors, Give Thanks to Your VISTAs

For many of you, your VISTA members are nearing the halfway point in their service. Below are some tips to prevent the six month slump and recognize your VISTAs for the great work they are doing:

- Write an article about your VISTAs and the work they are doing for the local newspaper.
- Call or email your VISTAs just to say Thank you.
- Prepare a Thanksgiving food basket for your VISTA members
- Plan a graduation ceremony for VISTA members as they end their service
- Write a letter of recommendation for your members
- Have a potluck in honor of your VISTA members
- Send a letter to your VISTAs' parents or guardians letting them know what a great job they are doing
- Work with local businesses to get "Freebies" for VISTAs (i.e. gym membership, coffee gift cards).

Remember, you are allowed to give VISTA members recognition gifts, as long as it is not cash and you do the same thing for all VISTA members.

Grant Opportunities

Knowles Science Teaching Foundation Fellowships

Knowles Science Teaching Foundation fellowships are awarded to qualified young men and women committed to teaching high school science and/or mathematics in American schools. Maximum award: five years of professional and financial support, valued at \$150,000. Eligibility: individuals who have earned at least a bachelor's degree in a biological science, physical science, mathematics, or engineering before the fellowship begins in June 2009.

Deadline: Jan. 14, 2009.

http://www.kstf.org/teaching_fellowships_home.aspx

Astronauts Memorial Foundation: Technology in Education Award

The Astronauts Memorial Foundation's Alan Shepard Technology in Education Award recognizes excellence in the development and delivery of technology programs in the classroom or in the professional development of teachers. Maximum award: \$500 and recognition at the 25th National Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, CO, March 30-April 2, 2009. Eligibility: K-12 educators and district-level personnel in the field of educational technology.

Deadline: Jan. 16, 2009.

http://www.amfcse.org/Alan%20Shepard%20Award/alan_shepard_award.htm



Scholastic/Lexus: Environmental Challenge

The Scholastic/Lexus Environmental Challenge seeks to encourage middle- and high-school students to develop and implement environmental programs for their communities. Maximum award: \$10,000. Eligibility: students grades 6-12 and their teachers.

Deadline: varies.

<http://www.scholastic.com/lexus/>

Toshiba/National Science Teachers Association: ExploraVision Awards

The Toshiba/National Science Teachers Association ExploraVision Awards Program encourages kids in all grades to create and explore a vision of future technology by combining their imaginations with the tools of science. Maximum award: \$10,000 U.S. Series EE Savings Bond; all-expenses-paid trip with families, mentor, and coach to Washington, DC, for a gala awards weekend in June 2009. Eligibility: K-12 students.

Deadline: Jan. 28, 2009.

<http://www.exploravision.org/about/>

Horace Mann: College Course Scholarships for Educators

The Horace Mann Scholarship Program for Educators is offering scholarships for educators in public and private schools to take college courses. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: Educators must be employed by a U.S. public or private school district or U.S. public or private college/university at the time of application and at the time the scholarship is

awarded, and must have at least two years of teaching experience; not open to residents of Hawaii, New Jersey, or New York.

Deadline: March 12, 2009.

<https://www.horacemann.com/resources/scholarships/default.aspx>

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation: J-Lab Institute for Interactive Journalism

The Institute for Interactive Journalism and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation New Voices grants provide funds to seed innovative community news ventures in the United States. Maximum award: \$25,000. Eligibility: 501(c) 3 organizations and education institutions, including civic groups, community organizations, public broadcasters, schools, colleges and universities; some preference will be given to projects from former Knight Newspaper communities.

Deadline: February 12, 2009.

<http://www.j-newvoices.org/site/story/2009rfp/>

The American Historical Association: Beveridge Family Teaching Prize

The American Historical Association Beveridge Family Teaching Prize recognizes excellence and innovation in elementary, middle school, and secondary history teaching, including career contributions and specific initiatives. Maximum award: \$1,500, plus travel expenses for group leader to travel to annual meeting in January 2010 to accept award. Eligibility: K-12 teachers in groups.

Deadline: March 16, 2009.

<http://www.historians.org/teaching/Beveridge.htm>

Lemelson-MIT InvenTeams: High School Invention Grants

Lemelson-MIT InvenTeams grants foster inventiveness among high school students. InvenTeams composed of high school students, teachers and mentors are asked to collaboratively identify a problem that they want to solve, research the problem, and then develop a prototype invention as an in-class or extracurricular project. Maximum award: \$10,000.

Eligibility: High school science, mathematics and technology teachers--or teams of teachers--at public, private and vocational schools; intra- and inter-school collaborations are welcome.

Deadline: April 24, 2009.

<http://web.mit.edu/inventeams/about.html>

Captain Planet Foundation: Grants for the Environment

The Captain Planet Foundation funds hands-on environmental projects to encourage youth around the world to work individually and collectively to solve environmental problems in their neighborhoods and communities.

Maximum award: \$2,500. Eligibility: schools and nonprofits.

Deadline: Dec. 31, 2008.

<http://www.captainplanetfdn.org/grants.html>