

naeyc[®] Affiliate Successes

TEAM VAEYC Energizes and Strengthens Affiliate Volunteerism

Robin L. Ploof

Robin L. Ploof, MEd, is president of Vermont's state Affiliate, VAEYC. She is owner/director of Stepping Stones, an NAEYC-Accredited program for young children. Robin teaches undergraduate- and graduate-level courses in early childhood at Champlain College, in Burlington. She is nearing completion of a PhD in education.

NAEYC Affiliate Successes, published in the January, May, and September issues of *Young Children*, shares inspiring projects and strategies that other NAEYC Affiliates might learn from and replicate. If your Affiliate has a project or strategy to share, contact Amy Shillady at ashillady@naeyc.org.

This column is available online at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.

The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VAEYC) developed an exciting new initiative, TEAM VAEYC, to help grow early childhood leadership in the association and the state. The idea started percolating in Dallas, after the NAEYC 2009 Leadership Day, with session leader Cynthia D'Amour. Cynthia works with association leaders. She speaks and writes on topics related to leadership and membership: getting members involved, working with volunteers, networking, and building relationships. Cynthia's daylong presentation about engaging members got me thinking about new ways to encourage member participation and nurture leaders in Vermont.

Cynthia suggests that an Affiliate start by listing the endless number of little tasks that crop up—jobs that keep the organization running, such as updating mailing lists, affixing mailing labels, editing the newsletter, and picking up copies from the printer. She recommends organizing the jobs by estimated commitment of time: one-hour, two-hour, or one-day jobs. To recruit volunteers, the Affiliate e-mails the updated job lists to members as tasks arise. Members understand that volunteering to undertake a task is a one-time commitment. In addition to inviting more member participation, the system relieves the Affiliate's board members of the responsibility for doing all the work themselves.

I loved this idea. However, I know that in any organization, it is usually the same few people who volunteer for everything. I thought that in order to attract others to join that core group of volunteers, why not be intentional and make the group official? So we decided to create a small pool of volunteers, and we called them TEAM VAEYC. We would turn to them to perform those small but important jobs. TEAM VAEYC members could accept or decline a task, depending on their individual interests and availability.

The VAEYC board enthusiastically supported and approved this idea. It still took some time for the idea to come to fruition. There were decisions about who would head up and organize the team. What really helped was the interest of the Affiliate's past president and a former board president just leaving the board. The two worked together to coordinate TEAM VAEYC.

The first year, we reached out to three or four people to form the team. We

hand-picked members who we knew had a strong desire to be more involved in the organization. They were people who had volunteered for jobs in the past—members who were very interested in being on the board but could not commit to the time needed for serving.

We involved these first team members sporadically, when needed. They performed services like staffing the registration table at VAEYC's Annual Fall Conference, stuffing conference packets, putting together name badges, and helping vendors and presenters find their locations. It worked beautifully, and several more Affiliate members joined the team. Before long, the board realized that this group was willing and able to do higher-level, more complex tasks.

The following year, we involved TEAM VAEYC more frequently and consistently. There were now a dozen very motivated members. They did support jobs for the Spring Speaker Series. A professional development opportunity designed to reach a slightly different membership demographic from that of the Annual Fall Conference, the series is more affordable and accessible for many members. Past speakers include Louise Derman-Sparks and Diane Levin. The afternoon session is geared to professionals and the evening session to families. Team VAEYC members helped with registration, sold publications, collected tickets, and helped organize the evening meal.

At the 2011 Annual Fall Conference, we wanted to show our appreciation for TEAM VAEYC. We identified the members with special badges similar to those worn by VAEYC board members. We recognized them and introduced them to conference participants during the opening remarks. TEAM VAEYC volunteers were so enthusiastic and visible during the two-day conference that two more Affiliate members asked to join the team.

These volunteers continue to do jobs that support the Annual Fall Conference and Spring Speaker Series, but they assist with projects that go beyond those. They engage in several activities that support the Affiliate and its governing board, strengthening the organization as a whole. For example, TEAM VAEYC members organized and ran a raffle to benefit VAEYC's Chuck Bayles Scholarship Fund. The fund honors a tireless champion of early care and education in Vermont. The raffle proceeds also support VAEYC

members who want to attend the Annual Conference but cannot afford to.

TEAM VAEYC members also helped enter data into a database of presenters for the Annual Fall Conference—information that organizes the various tracks of the conference and is used in planning future conferences. Team members sold publications at events. They served as hosts in workshop sessions, introducing the presenters and handing out and collecting evaluations. They were liaisons for keynote speakers, making them feel welcome and making sure their needs were met.

TEAM VAEYC comprises a wonderful mix of experience and talent. It has become a vehicle to grow and mentor leaders. There are three former board members serving on the team. One of them, a former VAEYC president, coordinates TEAM VAEYC activities with the current past president.

These leaders are terrific role models and mentors for the less experienced recruits on the team. One TEAM VAEYC member is considering stepping into a role on the VAEYC Governing Board.

Start Your Own Affiliate TEAM!

- List about a dozen jobs that Affiliate leaders feel comfortable letting go of. (This is important! You really do have to give up control.) Add to the list as the team grows and you become more aware of volunteers' special talents and the amount of time they can offer.
- Identify a board member to serve as the team leader/organizer. (As the team gets bigger, this role can evolve into a board position.)
- Start small. Invite just a few people who you feel sure will say yes to joining the team (the people who always turn up at events, meetings, and Affiliate gatherings and who frequently offer to help).
- Show your appreciation and gratitude. People love to be recognized. At the year's end, TEAM VAEYC members received personal, handwritten, thank-you notes for their service.
- Make it fun! Pizza and cold beverages make mundane tasks like stuffing conference packets fly by.

This is due in part to working closely with the past president on the team, whom she identifies as a mentor. It is fair to say that service on TEAM VAEYC has kindled her ambition to do more and make a greater difference in the field.

Many members want to be more involved in and engaged with their Affiliate but cannot commit to the time entailed in joining the board or serving on a board committee. Forming a group like TEAM VAEYC is a recruitment strategy that

offers volunteers flexibility and leadership opportunities. I now look at TEAM VAEYC as a kind of access and exit ramp for governing board members. And even if volunteers do not serve on the board, they gain valuable experience toward becoming future leaders and engaged members of the early care and education field.

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“The best part of being a member of NAEYC is the opportunity to network with other early childhood professionals locally and nationally.”

Nick Pettit

—Nick Pettit
NAEYC member

“Being a member of NAEYC has great benefits, such as access to *Young Children* and *Teaching Young Children*, online forums to connect with early childhood professionals nationally, and information on ways to advocate for early childhood issues.

NAEYC publications keep me informed of the new trends and practices used in today's early childhood classrooms. Working at a native Spanish-speaking charter school,

I've found that NAEYC publications dedicated to anti-bias curriculum and guidance on how to create a bias-free classroom have proven to be essential tools.

I would recommend any early childhood education provider become a member of NAEYC to connect with their local NAEYC Affiliates and fellow early childhood professionals, and grow as a childhood educator.”

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