

# Yale University President's Public Service Fellowship

## Proposal for Fellowship Placement • Summer 2017

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- Organization: Common Ground/New Haven Ecology Project
- Full street address of organization: 358 Springside Ave, New Haven, CT 06515
- Website: [www.commongroundct.org](http://www.commongroundct.org)
- Name and title of the Direct Supervisor: Rebecca Holcombe, Director of Community Programs
- Phone number and e-mail address of Direct Supervisor: 203-389-4333 x 1213, [rholcombe@commongroundct.org](mailto:rholcombe@commongroundct.org)
- Placement dates: May 30 - August 11, 2017.
- Are placement dates flexible? If so, please describe:  
Somewhat: June 26 – August 11 are required, as these are the dates for staff training and the Summer Camp program. Fellows are welcome and encouraged to start anytime before June 26. Earlier weeks will be spent observing environmental education programs and helping on the farm. Fellows who can start by June 5 will have a special project (from June 5 – June 23) of working to increase access to camp for low income families by serving as a dedicated camp registrar for families in need of financial assistance. Speaking fluent Spanish is an asset in this role, but not required.
- Hours of the program: Monday – Friday, 8 AM – 4 PM (hours before June 26 are more flexible).

### Placement Description

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- Organization description:

Common Ground's mission is to cultivate habits of healthy living and sustainable environmental practice among a diverse community of children, families, and adults.

Common Ground is a charter high school, urban farm, and environmental learning center. It is a place where all members of the community – young and elementary-aged children, middle and high school students, the general public, and environmental

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practitioners – can find connections to the local environment, each other, and opportunities for learning and engagement.

Common Ground connects farm, forest, and city. Our working farm includes production and educational gardens, and a variety of animals. Located at the base of West Rock Ridge, our site includes 20 acres of forest with hiking trails, wildlife, and diverse natural habitats.

We serve the greater New Haven community, and have a deep commitment to making our site, programs, and practices inclusive of and accessible to all people.

- Please write a 1-2 sentence summary of the work that the Fellow would be conducting:

The Fellow will work as an educator in our farm and nature based camp for children ages 4 – 13. Some camps have a special theme (animals, outdoor skills, cooking from the farm). The weeks before June 26 are primarily farm work (planting, weeding, greenhouse care, helping with animal care, etc).

- Please write a complete description of the specific project you propose and list the duties/outcomes expected of the Fellow.

Common Ground's summer camp provides a diverse group of children with a fun, safe summer experience, emphasizing building friendships and developing an appreciation for the natural world. Campers experience nature as an exciting place to explore, and discover how people, food, and the environment are interconnected. The campers come together on "common ground" as they discover that we all have the responsibility and opportunity to help protect the Earth. Over the years, the camp has evolved from a small group of campers and staff to an energetic community of almost 300 children and adults.

Making camp financially accessible to low income families is essential to our mission. We provide over \$10,000 in scholarship money each summer for campers, and we work hard to get the word out to underserved New Haven neighborhoods and schools. **New for summer 2017:** Fellows who are able to join us no later than June 5 will have a special project (from start date through June 23) of working as a dedicated registrar for low income families who are seeking financial assistance to enroll in camp. Historically, many low income families start to inquire about camp in June, when our current staff capacity does not allow as much attention and follow up on these applications as may be needed to see the process through to enrollment. A camp registrar who is dedicated to the needs of low income families in the month of June could help us significantly increase

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the total number of children from low income families that are able to enroll in Common Ground summer camp.

Campers participate in both structured and unstructured activities on the farm and in the forest. Depending on personal interests and skills, a Fellow might lead farm animal care, take campers on a nature hike, lead a group in cooking a snack from the garden, be creative with recycled or natural materials, lead games that foster friendship and cooperation, explore the stream and catch crawdads, or coach a child on how to hold a chicken! Each day is different, but Fellows will always have some assigned stations or activities and will also offer daily activities for small groups based on their interests and experience. Daily work involves being an integral part of this community, teaching, playing, mentoring, getting dirty, eating strawberries, rounding up chickens, bandaging knees, and making memories.

Many campers come back year after year and some eventually return as camp counselors to share what they have learned over many summers at Common Ground. Several parents have reported back to the camp that their child's college decisions were influenced by their time at Camp, as they looked for colleges with a strong environmental program where they could turn their love of nature and the environment into academic studies and eventually, a career.

Since Summer 2001, over 8,000 campers have spent part of their summer learning about our local environment and about how we all can get involved in caring for it. As this message is spread to families, schools, and communities, then our community and our local environment also benefit. Campers have reported back to us about the changes they have made at home and at school, from starting a compost pile to bringing a paper recycling bin into their classroom. In this way, we know that by exciting and inspiring the campers, we are also effecting change for the better in our environment and in the community.

The children who participate in camp also benefit from the breaking down of barriers erected by race, class, neighborhood lines, and socioeconomic status. Common Ground Camps serve a very diverse group of campers from all over the city and surrounding towns, and when campers come together to complete a challenging hike, build a shelter from leaves and branches, and cook together from the garden, they make friends with children that they may never have met outside of camp. Many of these children keep in touch with their camp friends all year long, thus connecting neighborhoods and families and emphasizing the idea that all things (and people) are interconnected.

Yale Fellows (and our interns who come from colleges all over the country) are important role models for our high school students who work as counselors in the camp. Getting to know fellows and interns who are not too far past high school and who are having a variety of experiences in higher education helps our students think about what

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path they might be excited to follow after high school. In addition, the participation of a Yale Fellow in camp helps us keep our camp costs lower by providing funding for a staff position. This allows us to dedicate more funds towards our scholarship program, making an amazing summer at Common Ground available to a diverse group of children from across the City of New Haven.

The duties of the Fellow are as described above – participate fully as part of the staff team serving an amazing group of children who are having the summer experience of a lifetime!

- Specific skills/experience required for the project:
  - Ability to work with children in a patient, nurturing manner (staff training provided to help learn skills in this area)
  - Interest in helping children engage with the natural world
  - Willingness to get dirty and work hard in all weather
  - Ability to work on a team of adults and teenagers, including both taking and giving direction
  - Work includes being a supervisor and role-model for high school students working as assistant counselors. Some teenage counselors may be close in age to the Fellow, so the ability to work with a group of peers while maintaining appropriate boundaries is essential.
  - Ability to be physically active for most of an 8 hour day
  - Demonstrated commitment, reliability, punctuality, and responsible behavior at previous jobs
  
- Additional requirements: none – we are on the city bus line and are also accessible by bicycle from downtown New Haven.
  
- Briefly describe the work that Yale PPSF Fellows have done with your agency in the past and present.

Common Ground and the New Haven Ecology Project have been fortunate to host a Yale Fellow for many summers, and our site and our students have greatly benefited from their contributions. In summer 2007, a Fellow worked in the Camp and also put in many hours in the garden and at our Farmer's Market stand. In summer 2008, we significantly expanded our summer camp program and our Yale Fellow was instrumental in the launch of many new camp sessions. Summer 2008 also benefited from the farm and farmer's market help of an additional Yale Fellow, who labored in the garden, worked with our teenage Youth Crew, attended farmer's market, and helped us design new publicity materials for our market stand. Summer 2009 saw the start of a very popular Saturday Open Farm Day and a successful on-site market stand, both of which relied on the capable, hardworking help of our Yale Fellow. In 2010, our Fellow ran a work crew in

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the garden and helped to expand the on-site farm stand. In summer 2011, our Fellow was a Green Jobs Corps Supervisor, managing a team of teenage workers on Common Ground's campus. She developed original environmental and food justice curricula, and ran workshops for the entire Youth Crew. Summer 2012 was busy and well-staffed with two Yale Fellows in camp and an additional Fellow leading work and learning crews of high school students on the farm. Our Yale Fellow in Summer 2013 was an awesome song and story leader and much loved by the campers! Summer 2014 brought a Yale Fellow who worked with some of our youngest campers, playing in the mud kitchen, leading hikes, splashing in the stream, and spending lots of time supervising and engaging with children in the chicken yard! Our Summer 2015 Fellow joined the 6 – 8 year olds in hikes, campfires, and the building of their own "Greenville" village in the woods.

Students from Yale have also worked as tutors for Common Ground High School, as volunteers in the garden, and as mentors for students in classes doing field work and research on the farm and in the forest.



**Summer 2015 PPSF Dan rocks out on the last day of camp!**

**Lots more photos and videos here: <http://commongroundct.tumblr.com/>**



**Campfire cooking**



**Sprouts Camp goes for a hike**



**Stream Day is the best!**

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