

GEAR UP UP

VIRGINIA



GEAR UP VIRGINIA ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT





GEAR UP YOUR ENGAGEMENT!

The amazing work of all GEAR UP Virginia schools deserve to be shared with the world, right? That's definitely a no-brainer. The tricky part is figuring out the most effective way to introduce GEAR UP Virginia to the uninformed. We have developed a toolkit of resources to help you share the GEAR UP Virginia story with any potential audience you may encounter.

- Elevator pitch script (for when you've just got a minute to convey the message of GEAR UP with potential partner)
- Follow-up script (to help the final push for support from a potential volunteer or partner)
- What is Gear Up Virginia Info Sheet (suitable for most audiences you encounter)
- Top 10 Ways to Engage Families
- Student Survey

These resources, along with fully customizable PowerPoint templates for a variety of audiences, are available on [a Google Drive!](#) Scan the QR code below to access the drive:



These materials are designed to help you educate parents, teachers, school administrators, community members, potential partners, and even students about the goals and successes of your GEAR UP Virginia grant. We encourage you to customize and tailor all the resources to meet your specific needs. If there's any specific tool not included in the toolkit that might enhance your outreach efforts, please don't hesitate to let us know so that we can consider it for future updates.

****Documents in this toolkit were modeled after the NC Appalachian Partnership, Texas GEAR UP & Tennessee GEAR UP Programs****

ELEVATOR PITCH SCRIPT FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS



GEAR UP Virginia uplifts underserved students by equipping them with the tools essential for success in college, career, and life. Through federal grant funds, the program supports the same students from 7th grade to their first year of college, implementing early interventions to foster college awareness and readiness. This awareness includes trade schools, community college, and/or a four-year college/university.

GEAR UP Virginia provides the following services:

- Academic planning
- Counseling
- Tutoring
- Social Emotional Learning support
- STEM activities
- College tours
- College summer camps
- Financial aid information
- Family engagement
- College application support
- FAFSA support

GEAR UP Virginia helps create a comprehensive college-going culture by engaging families and community members in supporting students. GEAR UP Virginia helps build stronger communities by building a stronger generation of students. Lives are being changed for the better—and futures are being made brighter for everyone.

And we would love your help! Whether as a guest speaker, a volunteer for college tours, a donor of goods, or a provider of job-shadowing opportunities, your involvement ensures these students are well-prepared for the future. YOU can play a pivotal role in positively shaping their lives. YOU can help mold their life in a positive way.

FOLLOW UP SCRIPT



Thank you for taking the time to learn about the many ways GEAR UP Virginia is supporting and inspiring students in your community- and across the state. People like you are the backbone of our success.

As we talked about..... (*NOTE: Provide a quick, high-level recap and reinforcement of the key GEAR UP Virginia points discussed during your initial contact with this person. Tailor it to the specifics of your previous conversation to create maximum impact*).

“We look forward to your involvement in empowering GEAR UP Virginia students by channeling your enthusiasm into our efforts. (*NOTE: Include your direct call-to-action or request for the person you’re interacting with. What would you most like them to do? What’s the first step to get started? Provide contact information if needed.*) Your support is crucial in shaping a brighter future for these students, and we are excited to have you on board.

LEVEL UP VIRGINIA/GEAR UP VIRGINIA: WEBSITE TOUR



Lesson Plan

Grade: 7-12

Objectives:

To raise awareness among middle school and high school students about the GEAR UP Virginia (GUV) program and the Level Up Virginia (LUV) website.

- To define what GUV is and does, and explain why students should make the most of it.
- To review the main features of the LUV website and ensure that students know how to use it effectively.
- To introduce students to their GUV School-based Team and encourage them to meet with their School Counselor to learn more about college and career readiness and how the GEAR UP Virginia Program can continue to assist them.
- To educate students about the GUV Scholarship.
- To collect feedback about the activity, the website, and what other activities/features the students would like to see from GUV in the future

Resources/Materials:

- Computer (with the PPT file loaded on it)
- Projector, projection screen, and appropriate A/V cables
- Copies of the Student Survey Form
- Pens/pencils

Preparation:

- Allow yourself at least 10 minutes to set up the room before the session. This assumes you have already reviewed the lesson plan and are familiar with the basic flow and how to facilitate the interactions.

Time Block	Lesson Sequence	Teaching Strategies
7-10 Minutes	Introduction/Small Talk	
	Introduce yourself to the class and introduce the LUV/GUV website.	
	Engage the students in Small Talk, using the following questions: •What is a job someone in your family does that you find interesting? •Have you thought about what you want to do when you grow up? •How difficult do you think it will be to get your dream job? •Will you need to attend college for your dream job?	Break the class up into groups of 5, no more than 6 students to discuss the questions.

LEVEL UP VIRGINIA/GEAR UP VIRGINIA: WEBSITE TOUR



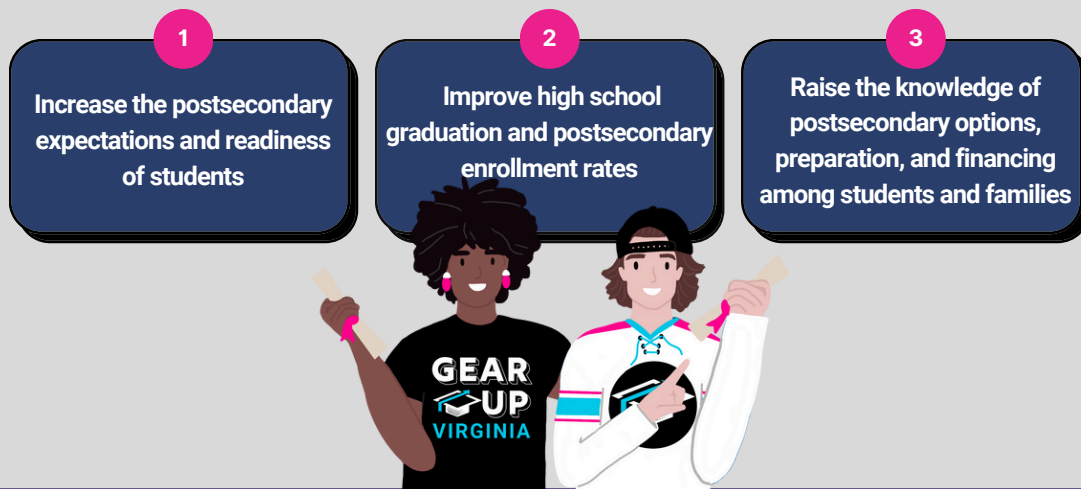
10 minutes	Career and Skills	
	<p>Conduct a quick classroom discussion by calling on 2-3 students to ask them about specific careers or interests.</p> <p>Then use the https://www.virginiastudentloanhelp.org website and click When I'm in High School, Calculators and then click Career Explorer for information and videos on various careers.</p>	<p>Utilize the 2 slides covering Skills & Interests and the Careers & Jobs listing, to gauge if the class has thought about any of these careers.</p> <p>Encourage students to bookmark this website for future use!</p>
10 minutes	Website Tour	
	<p>Highlight a few sections of the GUV/LUV website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The GUV home page (gearupva.org) and the Scholarship Page. Explain the GUV scholarship. • Prepare: Highlight the grade level specific checklists, and Students with Disabilities, Undocumented Students, English Language Learners, First Generation Students and Students Experiencing Homelessness resources. • Explore: Within this section, highlight the different types of colleges and programs. • Apply: Within this section, highlight Admission Rates and Requirements. • Finance: Discuss the FAFSA, Loans and Scholarship Opportunities • Decide: Information within this section may be more useful for juniors or seniors. 	
		<p>Provide students actionable steps of things they can do with the information they received during today's classroom lesson.</p>
	<p>Closing/ Feedback</p>	<p>Printed surveys should be passed out for students to complete.</p>
	<p>Encourage students to complete the student survey as honestly as possible, as their feedback will help GUV upgrade activities and events related to what they want to see. Also, use this time to highlight any upcoming GUV activities you have scheduled.</p>	

WHAT IS GEAR UP VIRGINIA?

Part of the federal GEAR UP initiative designed to increase the number of underserved students prepared to enter and excel in postsecondary education, GEAR UP Virginia focuses on building a complete college-going culture that inspires students, families, and community members across the state.

GEAR UP Virginia provides targeted services to two specific groups of students. The Cohort comprises students who are in the class of 2027 in 12 school divisions. This Cohort began receiving services in the 7th grade and will continue receiving services through their first year of postsecondary education. The Priority Population of students includes those in Grade 11-12 attending three of the division's high schools starting the second year of the grant (i.e., from school years 2022 to 2028). GEAR UP Virginia also extends statewide initiatives to schools with at least 50% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, ensuring all students have access to the tools needed for post-secondary access and success.

GEAR UP HAS THREE MAIN GOALS:



HOW DOES IT HELP?

Focusing on school divisions with low college-going rates, GEAR UP Virginia serves the same students from 7th grade to the first year of postsecondary education, following a single cohort to build college readiness and awareness through early intervention. Each GEAR UP Virginia school offers unique programs and services tailored to the needs of its students. Services often include academic planning, mentoring, counseling, tutoring, visits to college campuses, financial aid information, college application support, and family engagement. All GEAR UP Virginia efforts focus on sustainability, enabling support for future classes of students after the GEAR UP cohort has moved on, leading to long-term changes at school and district levels.

The Priority Population students received support through a partnership with the Virginia College Advising Corps. The Virginia College Advising Corps (VCAC) model is a targeted approach that integrates recent college graduates into the secondary school to address non-academic barriers to post-secondary matriculation. All GEAR UP Virginia students have the opportunity to be eligible for a \$2,500 scholarship.

WHO ELSE DOES IT HELP?

Parents

By providing hands-on information about college choices, college preparation, and financing options so that families are prepared and empowered to support their students on their path to postsecondary education.

Educators

By offering professional development training focused on the college access and readiness needs of students, as well as providing curriculum and classroom tools.

Administrators

By introducing new ideas and programming, increasing the on-time promotion rate, providing professional development, and effectively engaging parents.

Local Businesses

By laying the foundation for increased student success, leading to a stronger local workforce (businesses can offer support via partnerships with their local GEAR UP).

Communities

By investing in student success and helping to build community-wide college-going cultures through innovative efforts that benefit far more than one group of students.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Reach out to GEAR UP Virginia!

Let them know you would like to offer your support. They will be more than happy to share how you can help empower GEAR UP Virginia students. We are all working together to change lives for the better and make futures even brighter for our students, families and communities.



Visit the GEAR UP Virginia Website for contact information for the team!

TOP 10 WAYS TO ENGAGE FAMILIES



Go TO the families!

1

Rather than waiting for them to come to you. Recognize that not everyone may feel comfortable or able to visit the school. Consider home visits, hosting events at high-traffic venues like popular restaurants, having a booth at county fairs or libraries, or making personal phone calls to invite families to GEAR UP events.

Make it fun!

2

Incorporate lively elements such as loud music, good food, and festive atmospheres. Share college and financial aid knowledge through creative avenues like potlucks, college Jeopardy games, or artistic activities.

Create a Family Ambassador Group

3

Task this group with spreading the message about the significance of pursuing college education and participating in GEAR UP services. Include members from the GEAR UP committee and other influential bodies in the school and community to motivate and empower parents.

Use Your Local College Financial Aid Representatives for financial aid workshops

4

These representatives are trained professionals who are very familiar and experienced with sharing up-to-date financial aid information with families.

Be Creative with the College/Career-Going Message

5

Organize a college-themed trivia contest during sports event halftimes, with businesses contributing incentives for winners. Invite someone who has been impacted by GEAR UP or has gone to college to share their story with the audience and use the opportunity to promote upcoming GEAR UP programs.

Always invite families to college visits

6

Family members can attend either as volunteers or participants. Be sure that you adhere to district policies regarding family volunteers and transportation. Require parents or guardians attending college visits to participate in an informational workshop covering college options, matching, and financial aid.

Acknowledge and incorporate diverse cultures into events.

7

Reach out to your school's ELL Department or Family Engagement Specialists for additional support. It is also helpful to have materials translated into Spanish and have someone you can reach out to if you need a Spanish interpretation.

Create a family newsletter

8

Showcase "family voices" by sharing their GEAR UP experiences and insights into a college-going culture. Feature voices from various backgrounds, including those who did not attend college but aspire to provide this opportunity for their children. Send the newsletter through print, electronic means, or blog posts shared on social media. Include GEAR UP events on school or district calendars and websites.

Tailor college knowledge and financial aid information to suit your audience

9

Provide both standardized information, aligned with grant objectives and research, and unique perspectives. Address key topics such as the benefits of attending college, supporting students in choosing a suitable college, applying to college, paying for college, and academic preparation for college.

Use your GEAR UP Virginia community and resources

10

The best way to increase engagement is to constantly adapt and grow your programs. Reach out to the GEAR UP community for assistance and ideas!

