

Project Venture

What is the practice? (i.e., what is the practice called, brief description, frameworks or theories that are foundational to the practice or that the practice builds on)

Project Venture is an internationally recognized, experiential learning, Evidence Based program for American Indian and Alaska Native youth developed by the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP). It incorporates traditional Native wisdom, research, prevention practice and outdoor adventure to help youth reconnect with nature in a positive, strengths-based way. Project Venture emphasizes service learning, healthy risk taking, community building and a holistic approach that supports all aspects of the individual: mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, social and environmental. Through a yearlong program with in-school, afterschool and school break components, Project Venture offers youth a learning curriculum with outdoor challenges and growth opportunities such as hiking, canoeing and biking.

What outcomes does this practice produce?

Project Venture has been shown to:

- Lower youth suicide rates
 - Lower youth drug and alcohol use
 - Lower teen pregnancies
 - Lower school drop-out rates
 - Decrease bullying
 - Build bonds between participating youth and staff
 - Help youth develop healthy relationship skills
 - Increase youth's conflict management skills
 - Improve youth's emotional health
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What is the evidence for this practice?

Project Venture has over 25 years of quantitative and qualitative evaluation data proving its efficacy. An experimental research study published in 2007 used the National Youth Survey to evaluate Project Venture's impact on 397 sixth graders. This study found significantly less growth in substance use behaviors for youth enrolled in Project Venture compared to youth not enrolled in Project Venture (Carter et al., 2007).

In the 2002 National High Risk Youth Study, Project Venture was identified as the Most Effective program serving American Indian and Alaska Native youth. Project Venture is also recognized by the National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices (NREPP) and Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP).

How is this practice implemented?

In what contexts is this practice implemented (e.g., schools, clinical)?

Project Venture is most commonly offered in collaboration with schools. Youth enrolled in Project Venture participate in activities during school, after school, on weekends and during school breaks. Project Venture has also been adapted for higher risk American Indian and Alaska Native youth in substance use

treatment, juvenile detention, diversion programs, alternative schools and other settings. Project Venture also includes summer camps, which have been conducted for 38 years.

What is the dosage of this practice (e.g., one-time training, six-week curriculum)?

The dosage is cumulatively 200 hours over the course of a year. This includes one in school session per week, one after school session per week, a minimum of one weekend session per month, activities during school breaks and summer treks and camps.

How is the practice delivered (e.g., online, in-person)?

Project Venture is delivered in-person.

What infrastructure or readiness is needed to implement this practice (e.g., capacity for data analysis, individual full-time equivalent [FTE])?

Project Venture implementation requires collaboration with a school and community, a recreation space, recreation equipment and staff. When implementing Project Venture, the staff-to-youth ratio should be approximately 1:25 for classroom components and 1:7-15 for community based components.

For which population(s) can this practice be implemented?

For which population(s) is this best or promising practice (BPP) intended? Has it been adapted for diverse groups? If so, which ones?

Project Venture is intended for middle school and high school age American Indian and Alaska Native youth. However, this program is highly adaptable for different tribal communities based on language, culture, traditions, and the land they inhabit. Over the last 20 years, Project Venture has been implemented in communities across the United States and other countries, including Native and non-Native youth, African American girls in Detroit, Iraqi children in Michigan, Hispanic youth in New Mexico and other states, and gypsy populations in Hungary.

For which populations is there evidence of effectiveness (e.g., at-risk youth; clinically depressed)?

There is evidence of Project Venture's effectiveness for youth enrolled in public middle schools with a majority American Indian student population (Carter et al., 2007).

With which specific populations has this practice been successfully implemented?

Project Venture has been successfully implemented in youth populations across various school settings including public, charter, residential, Bureau of Indian Education schools, and alternative schools. The program has also been successful for youth affiliated with community health centers, residential treatment centers and juvenile probation offices.

For which populations, if any, is this practice NOT a good fit?

Project Venture can be adapted for any community.

Who can implement this practice?

What expertise is needed to implement the practice?

Project Venture should be implemented by providers with close ties to the American Indian/Alaska Native traditions and community they are working in. Providers must also demonstrate interest in outdoor recreation as well as “soft” interpersonal skills that are essential when working with youth.

What specific training or certification is required to implement the practice?

Project Venture offers a four day intensive training each year in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Project Venture is also able to travel to a provider’s community to offer the intensive training there for those unable to come to Albuquerque. This intensive training is often followed by facilitator training in the provider’s community. During the facilitator training, Project Venture trainers take key staff out for a multi-day adventure activity and offer professional recommendations on which safety certifications staff should obtain. After these trainings, Project Venture offers an ongoing mentor relationship to providers. They will work with providers 24/7 indefinitely to provide any necessary technical assistance.

What costs are associated with delivering this practice? (e.g., developer fee for materials, other program materials, staff travel to clients, incentives for clients)

All program materials are included in the Project Venture training. Other costs associated with delivering this practice include the cost of staff salaries, staff certifications for outdoor activities (e.g. lifeguard certifications), recreation equipment and recreation permits.

What costs and commitments are associated with becoming trained in this practice?

What is the cost associated with becoming trained?

The cost associated with Project Venture training varies based on need. The National Indian Youth Leadership Project often waves some of its costs associated with training providers in Project Venture or will donate time to assist communities in securing the necessary grant funding needed to implement the program. Additionally, the National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health (NNED) offers a free training on Project Venture each year to a limited number of participants.

What is the time commitment associated with completing training?

The Project Venture initial intensive training takes four days. Following this training, providers will engage with Project Venture trainers for ongoing mentorship. It often takes several years to fully and successfully implement a new Project Venture program.

Are there recognized providers of training in this practice?

Project Venture trainers currently include the National Indian Youth Leadership Project and the National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health (NNED).

To request training information from the National Youth Leadership Project, contact:

Email: info@niylp.org

Phone: 505-554-2289

Website: <https://projectventure.org/>

Does the practice have an associated fidelity assessment?

Yes, Project Venture has a fidelity assessment evaluation tool that incorporates data from interviews, observations, checklists and stakeholder feedback.

***What resources or references are useful for understanding/implementing the practice?
Where should you go for more information?***

- Project Venture Website: <https://projectventure.org/>
 - Project Venture Curriculum, Facilitator Training Guide, and Implementation Guide available
- Project Venture Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kh3VA26QYLQ>
- National Network to Eliminate Disparities In Behavioral Health (NNED) Prior Project Venture Training Opportunity: <https://nned.net/opportunities/nnedlearn/pv/>
- Video on Project Journey, a Project Venture program in Ontario, Canada: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zn3iKDKjDQk>

References

Carter, S., Straits, K., & Hall, M. (2007). Project Venture: Evaluation of a Positive, Culture-Based Approach to Substance Abuse Prevention with American Indian Youth [Technical Report]. The National Indian Youth Leadership Project.

National Indian Youth Leadership Project. (2018). Project Venture: Adventure with an Indigenous Mind. Project Venture. <https://projectventure.org/>

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