

Service-Learning Guide for Educators

WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning is a teaching methodology that connects academic instruction with service activities and critical reflective thinking to address real issues in the community.

The National Youth Leadership Council (see Service-Learning Resources) uses the following example to illustrate the concept of service-learning:

- Picking up trash by a riverbank is service.
- Studying water samples under a microscope is learning.
- When students collect and analyze water samples and the local pollution control agency uses the findings to clean up a river ... that is service-learning.

Benefits of Service-Learning

Research shows that service-learning positively impacts students, schools and communities. Learning in Deed (see Service-Learning Resources) has more information on the positive impacts of service learning in the K-12 arena.

What is Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement—getting involved in the community to affect policy—is a way to connect service with sustainable change. Youth Service America (see Service-Learning Resources) notes, “While volunteer service is one way to create healthy and dynamic communities, volunteers need to question—and act on—the relationship between their community and long-term sustainable change . . . Civic engagement activities include not just voting, but also advocating for solutions, influencing the decision-making process by organizing debates, forums, etc., and writing letters to elected officials to express opinions.”

Service-Learning Components

Service-learning is being used in both formal (e.g., school) and informal (e.g., youth group) educational settings with participants ranging from elementary students through adult learners. In a K–16 context, service-learning involves:

- Incorporating student leadership (“youth voice”) and community partnerships;
- Connecting specific learning objectives of the curriculum to genuine community needs; and
- Thinking critically and reflectively about how academic knowledge can be applied to real-life situations, and understanding issues in broader social, political, economic, and environmental contexts.

Service-Learning Stages

Key activity stages of service-learning include:

- Preparation
- Action
- Reflection/evaluation
- Celebration/recognition

Effective service-learning is a reciprocal process benefiting or changing the perspectives of both service-providers (the students) and service-recipients (the community). The National Youth Leadership Council (see Service-Learning Resources) points out that service-learning is a cyclical, transformative process. Discussing three questions—*What? So What? Now What?*—throughout each step “helps everyone understand what they’ve accomplished, learned, and need to do next.”

Types of Service-Learning Projects

The Peace Corps: Coverdell World Wise Schools program (see Service-Learning Resources) identifies three types of projects in which students can engage:

- Direct: students interact with the population they are serving (e.g., volunteer to help immigrants in the community practice their English)
- Indirect: students perform service without in-person contact with the population served (e.g., organize a fund-raiser for the Sudanese relief effort)
- Advocacy: students educate the public about a particular issue (e.g., organize a campaign to educate community members about the crisis in Sudan)

How Can We Get Started?

Project Plan-It!—an online project planning tool from Youth Service America (see Service-Learning Resources)—uses an interactive series of questions and templates that guide the user through the project planning process, and allows them to print out their plan, timeline, budget, funding proposal, press release, service-learning reflection plan, and other helpful resources. Registration is required to use the tool, and children under age 13 need a parent’s permission to register; the teacher may wish to register for the class. Project Plan-It! steps include:

1. Contact Information
2. What’s Your Issue: Defining Your Community Needs & The Challenge
3. What Can We Use: Identifying Our Resources, Skills, and Assets
4. The Path to Change: What Do You Want to Achieve - Defining your Mission, Vision, and Goals
5. Build It - Establishing Your Objectives and Tasks
6. Location of Proposed Project
7. Bus Talk: The Summary
8. What do We Need: Creating your Budget
9. Who Will Support us: Developing your Fundraising Campaign
10. Roles and Responsibilities: Creating your Coordinating Committee and Advisory Committee
11. Generating Publicity/Buzz: Create Your Press Release and/or Media Story
12. Mobilizing Community Support: Now We Have to Get People Involved in the Actual Project Event.
13. Are We Making a Difference: Evaluating your Impact
14. Reflecting on What We Did
15. Celebrating and Recognizing Our Efforts

SERVICE-LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning In Deed

<http://www.learningindeed.org/tools/glance.html>

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

<http://www.servicelearning.org/>

National Youth Leadership Council

<http://www.nylc.org>

Peace Corps: Coverdell World Wise Schools: Service Learning

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/servicelearning/>

Peace Corps: Coverdell World Wise Schools: Service Learning Ideas

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/servicelearning/ideas/index.cfm>

University of Texas at Austin College of Education: Learn, Serve & Surf Resource Kit

<http://www.edb.utexas.edu/servicelearning/resource.html>

Youth Service America (YSA)

<http://www.ysa.org/>

Youth Service America: National & Global Youth Service Day

<http://www.ysa.org/nysd/>

Youth Service America: Project Plan-It!

<http://www.ysa.org/planit>

Youth Service America: Tip Sheet: Benefits of Service Learning (PDF)

http://www.ysa.org/pdffiles/sl/Benefits_of_Service_Learning.pdf

Youth Service America: Tip Sheet: What Is Service Learning? (PDF)

http://www.ysa.org/pdffiles/sl/What_is_Service_Learning.pdf

Youth Service America: Tip Sheet: Youth Voice Definitions (PDF)

http://www.ysa.org/pdffiles/yv/Youth_Voice_Definition.pdf