

Section Four

Understanding Service-Learning

Young people can gain satisfaction and benefit from excellent learning opportunities through planning and participating in community service. In recognition of this fact, schools around the country have integrated the concept of service-learning into their curriculum, connecting service activities to academic subjects. But learning can also be combined with service outside the school day, with or without an academic focus. Service-learning can offer young people opportunities to learn about and develop many important skills and character traits.

Service-learning helps young people to develop:

- leadership
- responsibility
- compassion
- citizenship
- social skills
- project planning and management skills
- understanding of important social issues

Out-of-school time programs can be an ideal setting for service that is connected to both academic and nonacademic learning objectives. Integrating service-learning can help an out-of-school program enhance all aspects of quality (as explained in section 2):

- Human relationships are strengthened as young people work with each other and with staff members and other adults to plan and execute projects.
- Programming is diversified and enhanced by integrating service-learning. Young people generally respond best to activities that are tangible, hands-on, project-focused, and meaningful. Service-learning activities involve all of these elements.
- A program's environment is enhanced by the caring, kindness, and focus on community that is promoted by involvement in service-learning projects.
- Partnerships with young people, families, schools, and communities can be greatly enhanced as all stakeholders help plan and/or benefit from service-learning projects. Many OST programs involve parents in generating ideas and resources for service-learning. Many programs partner with schools that do service-learning, building on themes and projects going on during school during out-of-school time. A strong sense of community partnership is developed as young people search out the needs of the community and work with some community agencies to meet the needs of other community agencies.
- Staff and administration benefit from the positive public relations that are build with important stakeholders through service-learning.

Clearly, integrating service-learning helps boost overall OST program quality.

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This section, written by National Service Fellow Sandra Naughton, offers research on the concept of service-learning and information on how service-learning can be successfully incorporated into community-based out-of-school time settings.ⁱ

Defining Service-Learning

Service-learning has been present in our society for decades, but it has taken several forms and been called various names. “Experiential education,” “youth service,” “youth development,” and “volunteerism” overlap in many ways with “service-learning.”

A universal, all-encompassing definition for service-learning has not been collectively agreed upon. Through an analysis of eight widely-used definitions of service-learning, three elements appear to be necessary to describe an activity as service-learning: meeting real community needs, developing intentional learning objectives, and offering structured opportunities for reflectionⁱⁱ. Many other elements such as youth voice and leadership, fostering civic responsibility, evaluation, partnerships with other organizations, celebration of achievements, and professional development are often incorporated in service-learning programs to maximize the benefits to participants.

The Corporation for National Service and its grantees use the following definition from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993.

Service-Learning Definition

From the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993

Service-learning is defined as an educational method:

- under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
- which is coordinated within an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program [including out-of-school time programs], and with the community;
- which helps foster civic responsibility;
- which is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the program in which the participant is enrolled; and
- which provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

(some clarifications added in brackets)

Service-Learning Versus Community Service and Volunteerism

Although many people speak of service-learning and community service in the same breath, these two terms are not interchangeable. The concepts these words represent are related, but as in most family trees, there are several roots and branches distinguishing one from the other. Some of the basic differences between the two involve *personal engagement*, *intentionality of learning*, and *reciprocity*.

Personal Engagement: In service-learning, participants develop a sense of personal involvement and an ongoing interest in those they serve. The “servers” and the “served” come together on a regular basis in structured settings and this fosters meaningful interaction. Community service, on the other hand, often involves one-time projects that focus on the service work, providing meaningful but short-term participation in the lives of those being served.

Intentionality of Learning: Service-learning emphasizes the learning that is inherently involved in service through identified learning objectives and structured reflection so “youth can be empowered to go beyond pity, fear, or misunderstanding of others and begin to understand the social problems that create such situations and how they can work toward better solutions.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Reciprocity: Service-learning attempts to place equal emphasis on what the “giver” and the “receiver” can gain from the service. Both parties can learn a great deal from their association with each other.

Community-Based Versus School-Based Service-Learning

Many researchers, practitioners, and scholars agree on one thing about service-learning: there are two species, school-based and community-based. Both types of service-learning encompass the core elements of service-learning; however, the motivation for and implementation of community-based and school-based service-learning typically differ. Although there are many similarities, some differences between school-based and community-based service-learning are:

- School-based service-learning is typically tied to academic learning, and community-based programs focus on the type of learning most closely related to their mission (such as youth development, civic responsibility, character development, or health awareness).
- Community-based service-learning usually does not have the captive audience that school-based service learning has. This usually means that community-based service-learning programs often need to place more emphasis on recruitment, compete with other activities in non-school hours, and deal with retention and consistent attendance problems.

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- Community-based organizations usually have more flexible structures and policies than schools have. Without curriculum standards and fixed schedules to comply with, community-based programs can often be more creative and devote longer periods of time to planning, completing, and reflecting on activities.

The Benefits of Service-Learning

Service-learning has been supported by teachers, youth leaders, and researchers as a powerful tool to engage youth in mutually beneficial service and learning activities.

Through participation in service-learning, youth can:

- Become more interested in the life-long learning process
- Further understand civic responsibility
- Use skills and knowledge gained at school in practical ways
- Develop stronger social and communication skills
- Gain experience in leadership and teamwork

Community-based organizations or programs benefit from the ideas and energy of youth, new partnerships with other groups and individuals, and the fostering of a service ethic in the youth and adults involved in the organization or program. Communities benefit from the increased engagement and commitment of community members and the active participation in identifying and addressing community needs. In addition to the plethora of personal accounts and success stories about service-learning that exist in documents, conversations, and people's hearts, research data also demonstrates its benefits.^{iv}

Understanding and Applying Important Elements of Service-Learning

This section offers further explanation and implementation tips on each of the three necessary elements of service-learning: meeting real community needs, developing intentional learning objectives, and offering structured opportunities for reflection. Information and tips are also included on three additional elements that can help improve program impacts. These additional elements are: encouraging youth voice and leadership, fostering civic responsibility, and evaluating your program.

Meeting Real Community Needs

All service ideally meets real community needs. But what is a "community"? Some people define "community" in terms of the neighborhood and its residents, to others it can mean the children who attend a certain school or the people who share a certain ethnicity, and still others would insist that "community" includes the entire planet. How community needs are defined or identified also varies among communities. Some

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people use surveys, focus groups, interviews with community leaders, and town hall meetings to determine community needs, while others depend on observations, the media, or research done by other organizations to identify needs. Due to the unique nature of each community and varying definitions of communities, no one method works in every situation. There are all sorts of communities and all sorts of ways to assess community needs. Perhaps the first step is defining what “community” you will be serving and then finding out about the needs of your chosen community.

Tips for ensuring that service meets real community needs:

- Define what community your group's service will address. Youth can discuss what community they feel a part of, draw pictures or create collages representing their community, or write a description of their community. Projects can focus on the youths' immediate community (i.e., a club, a school) or chose to focus on the larger community (i.e., the neighborhood, the city, the state, the country, or the world).
- To identify needs of the community, ask other organizations about existing community mapping or needs assessment documents. Youth can also lead their own community mapping process in a number of ways. They can administer surveys in neighborhoods, talk to local organizations such as the United Way, walk around a neighborhood looking for needs (a park that needs to be cleaned up, a fence that needs painting, etc.), or sift through newspaper articles or city council meeting minutes to identify community needs. One service-learning program organizes a city-wide youth election every year that identifies through voting the issues that concern youth the most. They use the results to plan the next year's service-learning activities.
- Continually assess changing needs in the community. You may want to conduct surveys and interviews on a regular basis to gauge new needs. Some programs use youth advisory boards or youth-adult task forces that met quarterly to address and identify emerging community needs.

Developing Intentional Learning Objectives

Identifying learning objectives and fostering participants' learning about certain topics related to the service experience makes community service a more mutually beneficial experience. Intentional learning objectives, whether defined as understanding a community better or knowing how exotic plant species affect a native habitat, serve as guides and goals for the service-learning experience. When identifying and meeting learning objectives, the following three steps should be followed: develop a balance between service and learning, identify the types of learning that will take place through the service, and decide how learning will be assessed.

1. Develop a balance between service and learning

Robert Sigmon used the typology in the text box below to illustrate the balance needed between learning objectives and service outcomes^v. When the balance is lost and more emphasis is placed on service, the activity becomes more like community service, and if more emphasis is placed on the learning it becomes more

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like experiential education. It is important to think about how to balance tangible service outcomes with meaningful learning outcomes.

A SERVICE AND LEARNING TYPOLOGY

service-LEARNING:	learning goals primary, service outcomes secondary
SERVICE-learning:	service outcomes primary, learning goals secondary
service learning:	service and learning goals completely separate
SERVICE-LEARNING:	service and learning goals of equal weight and each enhances the other for all participants

2. Identify the learning that will take place through the service

Most educational endeavors, from school to self-directed learning, contain some form of intentional learning objectives within their curriculum, standards, or goals. These learning objectives can be specific and linked to academic subjects (such as learning the chemistry of creek water samples) or broad and focused on social skills (such as learning how to work cooperatively with others). Both academic learning and nonacademic learning are valuable, and service-learning in out-of-school time can provide excellent opportunities for both types of learning. Learning objectives can encompass one, several, or all of the basic areas of learning, as outlined in the following text box.

Types of Learning

(adapted from materials produced by Youth Outreach at the Points of Light Foundation)

- **Citizenship:** civic responsibility, individuals' role in community, government systems
- **Social Skills:** team work, leadership, communication, diversity awareness
- **Intellectual :** critical thinking skills, problem solving, decision-making, knowledge about social issues, academic subjects, organizing and planning
- **Personal:** values clarification, personal ability to contribute to community, self-esteem
- **Work/Career Exposure:** work ethic, job skills, exposure to career possibilities

Many practitioners view the process of identifying learning objectives as more problematic for community-based programs. As Cynthia Scherer of Points of Light Foundation states, "Schools don't have to think about learning objectives because they already have them--they fit into their existing framework or standards set by the state or other governing body. Community-based organizations don't already have them, or at least not in the form of a learning objective, although many have program goals that can be the basis for learning objectives."^{vi} Out-of-school programs engaged in service-learning can create their own learning objectives and/or link their learning objectives to the curriculum of the schools that participants attend.

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Most community-based service-learning draws on the service experience to determine learning objectives. For example, if the service activity is to provide nutrition information to homeless people, learning objectives could include understanding factors that contribute to homelessness, researching healthy nutrition practices, and practicing typing, editing, and formatting skills involved in creating a brochure. Specific skills, competencies, or understandings related to a project can be identified as goals to guide the learning process.

When working with young people to brainstorm potential service-learning projects, have them also brainstorm learning outcomes that could accompany each project idea. Use the basic categories included in the “Types of Learning” listed above to help youth think about the different types of learning that can be fostered by the activities they identified.

3. Develop a plan for assessing the learning that takes place

If learning is a goal for participants involved in service-learning, measuring the success of the program must include assessing the learning as well as the results of the service that occurs. Assessment of learning can be done using such methods as:

- surveys of youth, parents, schoolteachers and community members
- one-on-one interviews with youth
- youth presentations
- reviewing the journal entries of participants
- talking about and recording the observations of program leaders and staff

Due to the nature of service-learning and the unlimited variables associated with learning in a community setting versus a controlled classroom setting, unexpected and unplanned learning often occurs^{vii}. In this regard, several assessment tools with flexible applications are typically used to assess the learning that occurs through service-learning.

Tips for developing and assessing learning objectives:

- Engage youth in developing their own measures of success; ask them to identify specific outcomes that demonstrate that learning objectives have been met.
- Try to balance the emphasis on service and on learning, so that each informs and strengthens the other. Help youth to focus on the process involved in planning and executing a project as well as the intended results of the project. Help youth to see what they are learning from every step of the project.
- Examine the different types of learning that can occur from the process of planning, executing, and reflecting on the service. Make a list of all the activities that youth will be engaged in and link each activity to possible learning outcomes. Think about learning objectives in these basic categories – personal (goal setting, building positive character traits), social (teamwork, communication), intellectual (issue areas, academics), career/work related (marketable skills, work ethic), civic-oriented (active citizenship).

*Written by Sandra Naughton, National Service Fellow 1999 - 2000
in partnership with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time*

ã National Institute on Out-of-School Time at Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 2000

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- Figure out how to capture the learning that occurs. Possible assessment tools are pre- and post-surveys asking youth about their attitudes and understanding, reflection journals, and group discussions.

Offering Structured Opportunities for Reflection

Participating in a service-learning activity does not guarantee a beneficial learning experience. Service-learning can expose participants to new concepts, procedures, events, people, experiences, and places, but without processing the experience, no learning will occur. James and Pamela Toole, directors of the Compass Institute in Minnesota, state, “If students are going to learn from service, it will not be instant or effortless. They will be required to organize and construct their own understanding from the rich content embedded within these experiences.”^{viii} In order to help youth process and internalize what they are learning from the service, reflection should be more than looking back and recounting an experience. By incorporating critical analysis of social issues or other contexts of service, reflection can help increase participants’ self-awareness, sense of empowerment to create change, and connection to others. Such reflection can also prevent youth from using their unprocessed experiences to affirm and rationalize their prejudices or judgments^{ix}.

Tips for effective reflection:

- Include reflection in all aspects of project planning, implementation, and evaluation. Reflection can be much more than a discussion or writing assignment about what everyone learned that occurs at the end of the project.
- Include youth in the planning of reflection activities. Youth can plan the types of reflection activities to use at various stages of the project, as well as what aspects to reflect on. Ask youth: What are we planning to learn? How can we share what we are learning? How will we be able to tell when we’ve succeeded with our project?
- Use reflection activities that suit the particular interests of the youth involved and be creative. Reflection can involve students interviewing each other, creating photo collages, drawing, writing in journals, creating poetry, and youth-led discussions.
- Engage participants in reflection before, during and after the service experience. Before the experience participants can take inventory of their existing attitudes toward a particular project, so it has a personal frame of reference. By reflecting during the experience, participants can ask questions, tackle problems, and discuss ideas to clarify their learning from the service. After a service experience, participants need to evaluate, assess and contextualize their experiences.^x
- Reflection should appeal to the different ways people learn, based on Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences which states that people learn in different ways based on their different natural areas of intelligence^{xi}. Some people express themselves best and learn best through writing, others through speaking, others through art, etc. Reflection can take various forms such as writing exercises, discussions, art projects, dramatic performances, public presentations, or multi-media endeavors. Participants will excel if allowed to choose a form of reflection that builds on their individual strengths and communication styles.

Encouraging Youth Voice and Leadership

A Chinese proverb effectively explains the importance of active youth participation in service-learning: “Tell me and I will forget; show me and I will remember; involve me and I will understand.” Young people are far more receptive, enthusiastic, and cooperative when they feel their voice is heard and their opinions and ideas are incorporated. Research indicates that the most effective way to engage youth is to give them ownership, choice, and responsibility. Young people are capable of brainstorming projects, researching community needs, creating action plans, dividing up responsibilities, asking for donations, recruiting volunteers, and doing many other tasks related to conducting effective projects. Their active involvement not only helps assure their “buy-in,” it also helps assure that they will learn from the experience. Young people can gain new skills and confidence through taking on leadership roles and project responsibilities. To assure such youth voice and leadership experiences are beneficial for youth, tasks should be age-appropriate and supported by adult guidance.

Tips for developing youth voice and leadership:

- Involve youth in every step of the planning, implementation, and reflection process. Tell them that this project is “theirs” and that the adults involved are there simply to support their efforts. Have youth design and conduct a community needs assessment, brainstorm ideas for projects, research possibilities, make connections with possible community partners, delegate responsibilities, write letters asking for donated materials, and plan their own reflection activities.
- Provide youth with the information and skills necessary to participate in leadership roles. If youth want to use a survey to find out what high school students perceive as community needs, invite a professional researcher or social science student to come in and explain how to design an effective survey.
- Clarify expectations and roles with youth and adults. Before responsibilities and tasks are delegated, be sure participants understand the group's expectations, including time commitments, independent and/or team tasks, accountability and other considerations.
- Create a safe and comfortable environment for youth to participate in, with support and flexibility. A friendly, caring climate may help youth take risks to extend themselves in new and positive ways. Structure and order helps teams work together effectively and inclusively. Ask youth to establish their group norms and consequences early in the process and help them enforce those guidelines.

Fostering Civic Responsibility

As stated by John Chandler, keynote speaker at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education in 1985, “If America is to remain viable as a unified nation and as a democracy, its young people must have a sense of civic responsibility, a sense of responsibility to and for the whole society.” Participation in service-learning can offer young people excellent opportunities to develop a sense of civic responsibility. Generally, civic responsibility in terms of service-learning refers to the correlation made

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between the service experience and active citizenship. This component can encompass different elements for participants such as:

- personal commitment to service and the community
- ability to care for others
- understanding of historical, political, social context of service
- understanding of their impact on their community
- opportunities to connect with adult role models who exhibit civic responsibility

In addition to these elements there are many perspectives on what this civic responsibility component should look like and strive to achieve. Some people draw distinctions between two types of civic responsibility: charity and change^{xii}. Charity appeals to a morality-based sense that it is necessary to give service in order to fulfill civic duty. On the other hand, change appeals to the desire to achieve social reconstruction. Still others perceive civic responsibility as developing human relationships based on a sense of universal reciprocity, or fostering understanding, acceptance and compassion for others.^{xiii}

Tips for developing civic responsibility and active citizenship

- Take the time and effort to prepare youth for service experiences, particularly the social and historical issues that influence the context of their service. For example, the Students of Promise program in North Carolina (included in the Profiles section of this manual) conducts a training about the needs, behaviors and environments of at-risk children for its high school mentors/tutors so that they can understand the context of their service and its impact on the community.
- Try to link young people's service to its impact on the community so that they can realize their unique role in addressing needs in the community. Help youth capture, describe or define their service experience in relation to the direct and indirect benefits of their service. For example, planning a native tree planting project will have long term and short term benefits for the environment (from increasing habitat for animals to preventing erosion in the rainy seasons), for those involved in the actual project (from meeting new friends to learning about native flora) and for the community (from preserved natural open space to increased camaraderie among community members).
- Bring in community members (including parents) whose lives and work exemplify civic responsibility. Have them share experiences and answer questions from the youth.

Evaluating Your Program

Most service-learning practitioners and scholars view evaluation as a necessary part of the service-learning process. Robert Shumer states that evaluation and service-learning are integrally related. "Evaluation begets learning, and vice versa," he states.^{xiv} Evaluation results can be used to help students understand the impact of their service and what they have learned from the process, help program staff determine how youth benefit from the activities, and help community members and funders understand the value of such activities.

Tips for evaluation:

- Identify the types of information your program wants and design evaluation tools based on those needs (e.g. to measure effects on youths' attitudes, behaviors, understanding of key issues use a youth survey; to measure community impact quantify service activities and interview community members).
- Consider who should be involved in the evaluation process, including those whose experiences will be evaluated and those who will take part in conducting the evaluation. Examples of those who could be involved include youth, program staff, parents, teachers, community members, service recipients, organization/agency staff, and your program's advisory committee.
- Choose evaluation methods appropriate to program needs, resources, access to information and time constraints.
- Utilize existing data or evaluation tools and methods when applicable. The Students of Promise program in North Carolina (included in the Program Profiles section of this manual) uses evaluation data from its partnering program to measure impact on service recipients as a portion of its overall program evaluation.
- Like reflection, evaluation should be an ongoing part of your planning and implementation process as well as something that happens at the close of the project. Regularly evaluate how things are going by asking young people, staff members, partners, and everyone else involved how they feel about the project and its progress.

Summary

Community-based service-learning can be mutually beneficial for the young people, adults, organizations, and communities involved in the experience. All participating entities and people can learn from service-learning efforts, while the community is strengthened through service. In this sense, service-learning can be a valuable way to integrate out-of-school time programs into the broader context of the community, while also engaging youth in positive and productive activities while they are out of school. For further discussion on the benefits, elements, and real-life examples of community-based service-learning in out-of-school time, please refer to the complete research conducted by National Service Fellow Sandra Naughton. An in-depth review of related literature, survey results from more than ninety youth programs, and more than a dozen program profiles are included in the publication which will be posted by Fall 2000 at www.nationalservice.org/jobs/fellowships.

For specific tips on planning service-learning activities and projects, please look at the service-learning section of the training materials chapter in this guide and the service-learning tip sheet in the tip sheet section. You can also contact the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at www.nisl.coled.umn.edu.

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ⁱNaughton, 2000.

ⁱⁱ Naughton, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Levison, 1990.

^{iv} Naughton, 2000.

^v Furco, 1996.

^{vi} Scherer, 2000.

^{vii} Shumer, 1995.

^{viii} Toole, 1995.

^{ix} Paul, 1990.

^x Toole, 1995.

^{xi} Gardner, 1993.

^{xii} Kahne and Westheimer, 1996.

^{xiii} Newmann and Rutter, 1983.

^{xiv} Shumer, 1998.