# Service-Learning in Community-Based Organizations

A Practical Guide to Starting and Sustaining High-Quality Programs

Service-Learning in Community-Based Organizations: A Practical Guide to Starting and Sustaining High-Quality Programs

CONTENTS

LIST OF WORKSHEETS

1. Investigate

2. Prepare

3. Act

4. Reflect

5. Demonstrate and Celebrate

6. Sustain

Introduction

STARTING ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Imagine, for a moment, an East Coast community-based youth group sponsoring a conference—keynoted by a high schooler—on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among teenagers.

Now picture youth in a congregation in the southwest working with technology professionals to refurbish used computers donated by area businesses and provide them to nonprofits.

Finally, think of a young man who caps his years of scouting by coordinating an intergenerational project that raises awareness of water-quality issues in his city, including marking more than 500 street drains with "Do not dump—Drains to creek."

There are thousands of stories like these of teenagers making a difference through service. Many of us don't have to look beyond our own neighborhoods to find them. But two unique characteristics of these tales show that there was more to them than doing a good deed.

1. All three projects were intentionally designed service-learning. The congregation youth, for example, are developing technical skills that can be applied in work settings. The substance abuse prevention group is learning about community activism, public health, collaboration, and public speaking. And the Eagle Scout water-quality project involved intensive background research and preparation, including dealing with city leaders for permission and guidance on how to mark the drains and publicize the effort.

2. All three projects took place in and through community-based organizations (CBOs). Although service-learning as a specific practice has been associated primarily with schools, many CBOs—youth-serving, faith-based, family-serving, social services, and other organizations—find that service-learning is a great way to achieve their mission, engage youth, and serve their communities.

Community-based organizations have long benefited from people's generosity and commitment to community. They engage volunteers to meet important human and community needs, or to address critical social issues. Sometimes they provide the service experience for school-based service-learning programs. At the same time, community-based organizations have a lot to gain by using service-learning principles and practices as a core part of their own programming.

At a Glance

> Community-based organizations have a lot to gain by using service-learning principles and practices in their programming. This guide shows you how, drawing on what's known about high-quality service-learning programs and practices.

> Service-learning intentionally integrates and emphasizes both service and learning. Youth engaged in service-learning not only provide direct service to the community, but also learn and grow in their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

> Effective service-learning has benefits for young people, sponsoring organizations, communities, and society.

> The guide introduces six phases of service-learning: (1) Investigate; (2) Prepare; (3) Act; (4) Reflect; (5) Demonstrate and Celebrate; and (6) Sustain. These basic steps provide the structure for this guide.

> Recent research identifies quality standards for service-learning that are supported by the field and by existing research. The eight standards address issues of youth voice, meaningful service, links to curriculum, reflection, diversity, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity. These standards are addressed throughout the guide.

What's in this Guide?

Whether you're new to service-learning or have been doing it for years, this guide gives you and your organization the tips, tools, and techniques you need to start making a positive difference in many people's lives by providing high-quality opportunities for youth to *serve and learn*. Here are some of the questions it addresses:

- What is service-learning? First, the guide introduces the concept of service-learning and how and why it is useful and appropriate in community-based organizations (pp. 7–9).

- What is effective? The whole guide is built on what's known about quality service-learning, based on a major consensus-building process in the field in 2008 (Billig & Weah, 2008). These quality standards are introduced at the beginning of the guide (p. 10). They are then used throughout as touchpoints for reflecting on the quality and impact of your program through all phases of the service-learning process. Each phase of the process includes a checklist for how each of the standards can be applied to that aspect of service-learning.

- How do I do it?—which leads back to investigation for a continuous cycle. In each of these phases, you'll find:

An at-a-glance overview of the phase, which gives you basic information about what it is and what to do.

An explanation for each phase of *what it is* and *why it matters*.

How to do it, including practical tips and guidelines, based on experiences of many practitioners in community-based organizations.

Suggestions for doing the phase *on the web* (including using social media). For more background information on Web 2.0, read "Marketing 101: Using Social Media/Web 2.0 to Highlight Your Program."[1]

Real-life examples that help illustrate how community-based organizations have tackled that phase of service-learning.

Several ready-to-go *worksheets* to help implement each phase of service-learning.

- What other tools are available? The guide ends with a collection of available references and resources. In addition, we've included web links to additional references and tools when they are available.

How to Use this Guide

In addition to using this guide to improve your own service-learning practice, consider these options for expanding the network of people who are working to implement quality service-learning in community-based organizations:

- Keep the guide handy as a reference as you launch, plan, and implement your service-learning efforts. Use relevant worksheets and ideas during your planning meetings.

- When you're encountering challenges in your program, review the relevant section to see if it offers insights into other strategies to consider.

- Read and discuss the guide in a study group with other service-learning practitioners or your planning team for service-learning. Focus on one of the six phases in each session.

- Use a section or worksheet as a way to start staff meetings or as part of staff development.

This guide is a first effort to apply the 2008 quality standards for service-learning in a practical guide for community-based organizations. As you use it, you will likely have ideas of other ways to do things, or you may have stories and examples of what happened based on your efforts. Please share your insights and experiences with Learn and Serve America's National

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[1] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/marketing_101/index.php

Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org). We'll share your stories with others, and we'll use your feedback to update and develop more resources to support leaders in communities across the United States as they engage young people in effective service-learning.

What Do We Mean by Service-Learning?

Service-learning. It sounds like something for schools, right? Actually, not necessarily. Though much service-learning does happen in schools, a lot also happens in youth organizations, social service agencies, hospitals, faith-based organizations, and other community settings.

But isn't that really just community service or volunteering? Again, not necessarily. It depends on whether and how you use service experiences to deepen learning and growth. In fact, some of the best service-learning can happen in community-based settings where youth have the flexibility and support needed to engage deeply in both service *and* learning. The feature that distinguishes service-learning from volunteering or community service is that *both learning and service are intentionally emphasized.*

Youth engaged in service-learning not only provide direct service to the community, but also learn about the context in which the service is provided, the connection between the service and their own learning and development objectives, and their roles as citizens.

Sometimes it's helpful to think of the relationship shown in the adjacent diagram (adapted from Geiger, 2001). The goal is to create programs and activities that are strong on both service and learning. If you are already doing projects that are strong in one or the other, this guide will help you build on these efforts to move into the upper-right quadrant.
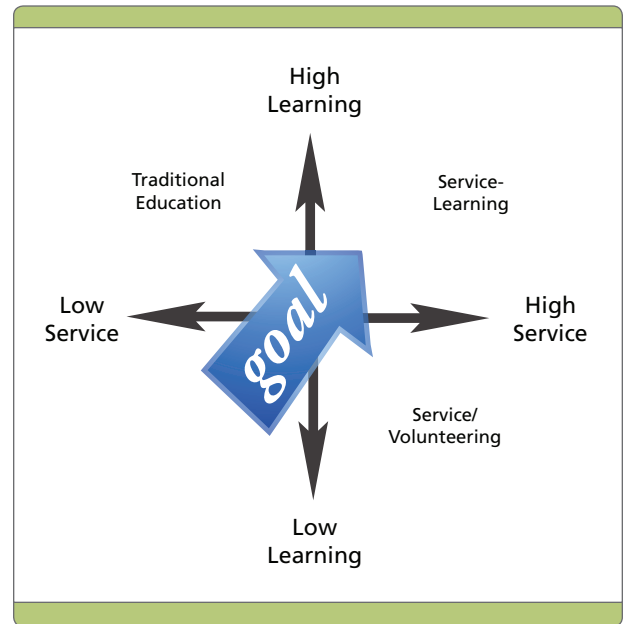
The Corporation for National and Community Service's Definition of Service-Learning

The National and Community Service Act of 1990[2] defines service-learning as a method—

(A)   under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that—

  (i)   is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;

  (ii)   is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and

  (iii)   helps foster civic responsibility; and

(B)   that—

  (i)   is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and

  (ii)   provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

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  [2] www.learnandserve.gov/pdf/cncs_statute.pdf

What Do We Mean by Community-Based Organizations?

Community-based organizations with potential to engage in service-learning are active in virtually every U. S. county, reservation, town, and city. They include:

- Community-based youth development organizations and after-school programs—places where youth spend their out-of-school time—that include service or service-learning as part of their programming;

- Social service, health care, and other nonprofit providers or associations that engage youth (and perhaps adults as well) as volunteers; and

- Faith-based organizations that provide services and offer service experiences as part of their programming.

Some CBOs are very large. Others are very small. But all have the potential and opportunity to meaningfully engage youth in ways that benefit the organization and its mission, the youth, and the broader community.

What Are the Benefits of Community-Based Service-Learning?

When done well, service-learning leads to positive outcomes for youth, the sponsoring organizations, the service beneficiaries, and the broader society. A fact sheet from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse highlights some of the benefits (Roehlkepartain, 2007a[3]). Here is a sampling:

Benefits for youth participants
- Increased access to the range of supports and opportunities they need.
- Increased self-efficacy as they learn that they can impact real social challenges.
- Enhanced problem-solving skills, ability to work in teams, and planning abilities.
- Enhanced civic engagement attitudes, skills, and behaviors.

Benefits for youth development organizations (after-school programs, youth development organizations, faith-based organizations, etc.)
- Sustained youth engagement as teenagers find they are valued and can contribute.
- Meet organizational goals for teenagers' learning and personal development.
- Cultivate connections with schools, higher education, and other community groups.
- Increase staff and volunteers' level of engagement, leadership, and work satisfaction.

Benefits to other sponsoring organizations (social services, hospitals, cause-related organizations, etc.)
- Expand mission, reach, and impact without substantially increasing costs.
- Access teenagers' energy, ideas, enthusiasm, and skills.
- Increase public support and visibility in the community.
- New partnerships and resources.
- A new generation of volunteers for their own organization or cause.

Benefits for service recipients, communities, and society
- Meet real needs and priorities for individuals and communities.
- Build positive relationships with youth.
- See youth in a different way—as resources, not problems.
- Cultivate a new generation of caring and experienced citizens, activists, and volunteers.

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[3] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/benefits_cbosl/

Basic Components of Effective Service-Learning

People often get involved in service-learning—particularly in community-based organizations—because they care so much about the action, the community needs met, or the issues addressed. The assumption is that if youth do good things, they'll learn from them. But that's not always true. As service-learning pioneers Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin wrote in 1987: "It's true that we learn from experience [such as a service project]. We may also learn nothing. Or we may, like Mark Twain's cat who learned from sitting on a hot stove lid never to sit again, learn the wrong lesson" (p. 39).

Quality service-learning includes the following six components, each of which builds on and integrates the others. Attending to all of them is key to having the kind of impact you hope for. These are described in more detail in the pages that follow:

1. Investigate
2. Prepare
3. Act
4. Reflect
5. Demonstrate & Celebrate
6. Sustain
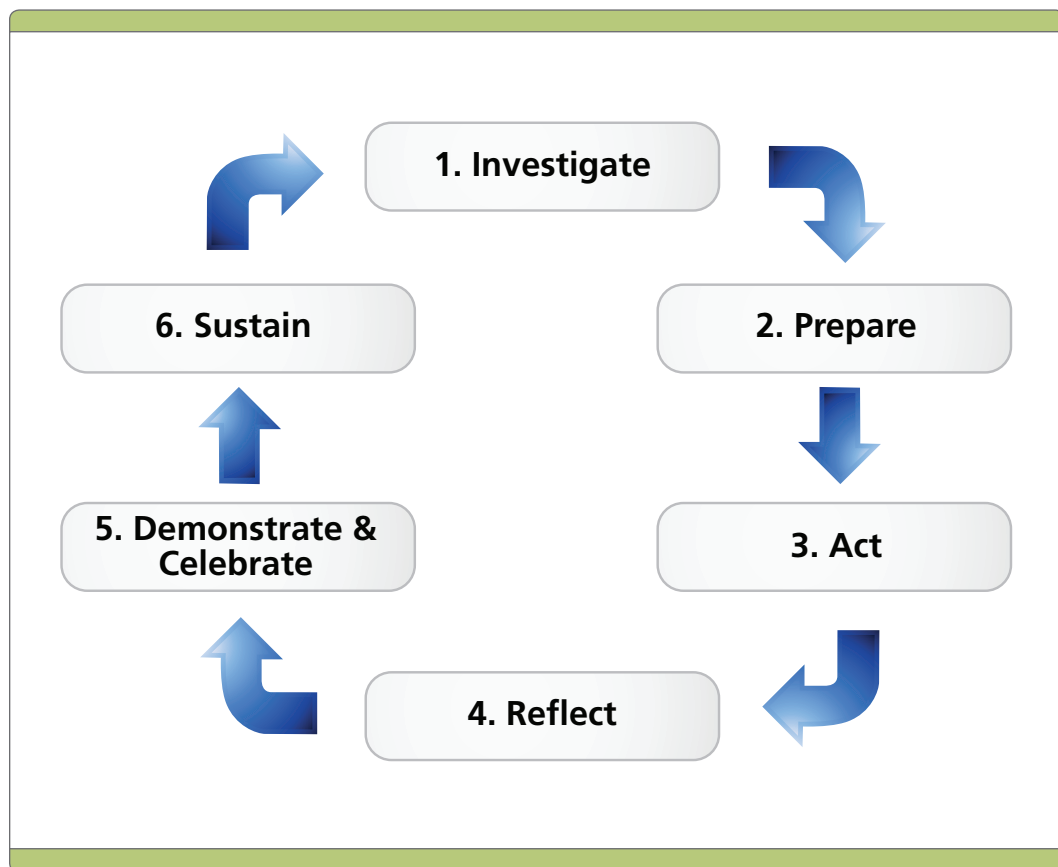
Quality Makes a Difference

Just calling something "service-learning" does not guarantee that a project will realize its potential impact. Offering all the components of high-quality service-learning is critical.

In 2008, the National Youth Leadership Council and RMC Research completed an extensive review and field consensus-building process to identify standards of quality supported by research that shows the standards do, in fact, improve outcomes (Billig & Weah, 2008). Though developed primarily for K–12 educational settings, the standards offer important insight into what effective service-learning looks like in any setting.

Here are the eight quality standards, focused on community-based organizations:

1. **Youth Voice**—Effective service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences, with guidance from adults. This strong youth voice not only ensures that the experiences will be meaningful and relevant for them, but it also teaches them leadership, planning, decision-making, and civic engagement skills that will last a lifetime. (See Points of Light Foundation, 2008[4]; and RMC Research, 2007b[5].)

2. **Meaningful Service**—Effective service-learning is purposeful, connected, relevant, and useful. It engages participants in activities that are age- and ability-appropriate, personally relevant, as well as interesting, and the outcomes of the service are visible, attainable, and valuable to both the youth and those being served.

3. **Link to Curriculum**—Effective service-learning is intentionally and specifically designed to tie to the educational and developmental goals or curriculum standards of the sponsoring organization. These goals should be clearly articulated, and activities reviewed in light of these goals. Particular attention needs to be paid to ensuring that participants learn how to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another.

4. **Reflection**—Effective service-learning incorporates multiple challenging and engaging reflection activities that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself, one's relationship to society, and complex community challenges. Reflection involves a variety of verbal, written, artistic, and nonverbal activities during and after service experiences. (See RMC Research, 2007a[6].)

5. **Diversity**—Effective service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants, including both those offering and receiving service. It helps participants identify and analyze different points of view, overcome stereotypes, and value diverse backgrounds and perspectives. It seeks to include a wide range of youth offering service to others. (See Roehlkepartain, 2007b[7].)

6. **Partnerships**—Effective service-learning forms partnerships with youth, educators, families, community members, community-based organizations, and/or businesses that are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community priorities. Partners see each other as resources and collaborate to establish a shared vision, set goals, and implement plans. (See Roehlkepartain & Bailis, 2007[8].)

7. **Progress Monitoring**—Effective service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified learning, service, and growth goals. It uses evidence from multiple sources for improvement and sustainability.

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[4] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/youth_voice/

[5] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/k-12_facts/support_youth-voice/index.php

[6] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/k-12_facts/reflection/index.php

[7] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/disadvantaged_youth/

[8] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/developing_partnerships/

8. **Duration and Intensity**—For service-learning to have a real and lasting impact, it needs to have sufficient duration and intensity to complete all the core components—investigate, prepare, act, reflect, demonstrate and celebrate, and sustain. Only then are all the elements in place to address identified community priorities and achieve the learning outcomes. This typically takes concentrated blocks of time across several weeks or months.

These eight standards serve as important touchstones for quality in service-learning. For quality to be achieved, you need to pay attention to them throughout the service-learning process. To help see each standard's relevance throughout the service-learning process, we have included a "Quality Check-Up" that asks pertinent questions during each component of service-learning.

Whether you are just getting started or you've been doing this for a while, being intentional in addressing each of these standards will help you grow and strengthen your efforts. As with any process, your goal ought not to be perfection, but steady progress and continual improvement.

Digging into the Quality Standards

> Download the complete K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice: www.nylc.org/standards

> Download the supporting research summary: www.nylc.org/objects/publications/StandardsResearch.pdf

1. INVESTIGATE
Explore Community Priorities and Needs

What It Is?

Investigating community priorities and needs is a systematic process through which service-learners obtain and analyze information from the community to determine what kinds of service projects they might undertake that would be valued by the community.

Typically these community assessments focus on identifying "needs" to be met. A growing number of people argue, however, that it is as or more effective to focus on identifying strengths, resources, hopes, and opportunities for partnering in the community (Roehlkepartain, 2008[9]).

There are many ways to investigate community needs and priorities. On the simple side, they may involve library or online research, interviews with a few key community leaders, or a tour of the community. More complex methods include surveys, extensive interviews, geo-mapping technologies, and other complex processes. The goal is to match the level of community investigation with the level of experience and scope of your service-learning program.

At a Glance

> This first phase, Investigate, focuses on identifying community priorities for service-learning. This step ensures that the service provided is meaningful to both the participants as well as those being served. It also teaches youth research and analysis skills.

> There are many different ways to investigate community priorities, including community walks, examining public documents, conducting surveys, and interviewing key leaders.

> Program participants interpret the findings from their investigation to identify their learning, service, and growth goals for their service-learning project, working with community partners to ensure that the project is appropriate and meaningful for everyone.

> Particular attention should be paid to developing learning goals and objectives, since community-based organizations too often neglect the learning in service-learning.

Why It Matters

Investigating community priorities or needs is an important foundational step in service-learning, for a number of reasons:

- It helps ensure that the service-learning projects address community priorities and engage the broader community as partners, not just recipients.

- It introduces participants to basic research skills and techniques.

- Youth and adults become more invested in their projects when they understand the issues at stake, know people who would benefit, and have confidence that their efforts will meet genuine community priorities.

- Agencies and sponsoring organizations benefit from being seen as true resources and collaborators in building community and meeting community needs.

- Shared priorities tend to be sustained more than efforts that matter only to one or another of the partners.

- In the long term, people who develop the practices of listening and learning will become more effective citizens, leaders, and change agents.

Too many service projects are developed without meaningful engagement with the broader community in planning and shaping the project. The result is often that the people providing the service "impose their ideas on another group, with

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[9] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/beyond_needs_assess/

little or no consideration [for] that group's traditions, beliefs, and needs" (Simmons & Toole, 2003). When this happens the value of teenagers' service is lessened, and, in worst-case scenarios, community residents interpret the service as intrusive and exploitive.

How to Do It

Using Appropriate Methods to Investigate Community Priorities—There are dozens of ways to investigate community priorities. Here are a few basic ideas:

- Conduct a community walk. Have participants walk through your selected area with flipcams or cameras in hand. (Be sure to include neighborhoods where participants don't usually venture to widen their perspective and experience.) They might notice lots of parks and green spaces where people gather. Or perhaps your community is home to many small businesses. What are youth doing? Use Worksheet 1 to note what you see and experience.

- Examine publicly available documents, like United Way or city/county government needs assessments.

- Survey other youth or community members through an online poll. Conducting an online poll could also help recruit other youth who care about the effort or the issues.

- Have participants identify key leaders in the community (or experts who focus on the issue your group seeks to address). Next have participants prepare and interview these leaders in order to understand their perspectives on the issue and its impact. Participants will learn interview skills while also building a relationship with a key community leader. Use Worksheet 2 as a starting point for questions that focus either on needs or strengths.

Interpreting the Information You Gather—Once you've gathered your information, it's time to reflect on what the participants saw, analyze it in light of current social issues, and determine how your group might respond. You might use these questions to guide your discussion:

- What needs or priorities stood out? What underlying issues are at stake?

- What could be done to respond to what we've seen or heard?

- What other questions do we need to investigate before taking action?

- Which service options might fit our group, its skills, interests, and experience?

- Which ones would fit our goals for service, learning, and growth?

- What could we do that is attainable within the time and resources we have?

- In what ways might we partner with other people, organizations, or agencies in the community to reach these goals?

- How will we share what we've learned with other stakeholders—particularly those who would benefit—to ensure that what we do will really be valued?

Setting Goals Based on the Investigation—Out of the investigation should come clear, specific, and attainable goals and indicators for learning, service, and participants' growth:

- **Service**—Set service goals that are age- and ability-appropriate, personally relevant, interesting, and engaging for participants. Just as important, the service goals should be visible, attainable, and valuable to both the participants and the community they are serving. Setting these goals can be challenging, particularly with diverse groups of participants. But the effort to work through priorities is important to the process.

- **Learning**—Many community-based organizations have trouble thinking through learning goals in service-learning, presuming that the learning emphasis is for schools. However, most community-based organizations have mission priorities around learning that may be related to an issue, developing skills, or shaping participants' character. (See Worksheet 7 in the "Prepare" section.) Learning objectives for service-learning work best when they:
  - Are shaped jointly by the program leaders, participants, and partners;
  - Align with the service objectives;
  - Progress from concrete, measurable actions to more complex analysis, application, synthesis, and critique, depending on participants' age and experience;
  - Contribute to the sustainability of the service-learning program; and
  - Are shared with participants, partners, parents, and other stakeholders (adapted from Seifer & Conners, 2007[10]).

  Worksheet 3 offers examples of learning goals for different projects in different types of CBOs. Consider these steps when setting your own learning objectives for your service-learning program or project (adapted from Seifer & Conners, 2007):
  - Review your organization's goals for youth programming and any other competencies or knowledge bases that are in place to guide your program.
  - Engage program participants, parents, other leaders in your organization, and community partners about their expectations for or insights into learning outcomes. What knowledge, skills, and competencies are important for participants to obtain?
  - Establish learning objectives for the program, focusing on what participants must do to achieve a specific competency, including the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they will learn. Objectives should be measurable and observable.
  - Identify what the student must learn in order to complete the project. For example, if the students are expected to plan a community-based research project, they will need information about survey design, data collection, or the ethics of community-based research as part of their preparation.
  - Determine how learning will be demonstrated or measured. Many different methods could be used, including those described in the Reflection section as well as the Demonstration and Celebration section in this guide.
  - Identify how you will stimulate learning and introduce new materials. This could include content-based sessions, guest presentations, research projects, and other methods.

- **Growth**—Many CBOs use the Developmental Assets—a framework of key elements of healthy youth development—to help set their goals for participants' growth and development. (See "Developmental Assets: A Framework for Enriching Service-Learning" Roehlkepartain & Scales, 2007[11].) The asset-building approach focuses on ensuring that youth have the experiences, opportunities, and relationships they need in life to grow up successfully. By reviewing the asset framework, CBOs can identify specific ways their service-learning programs can nurture teens with support, boundaries and expectations, positive values, social competencies, and other categories of assets.

  Worksheet 4 can help with recording service, learning, and growth goals and indicators.

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[10]   www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/HE_ toolkit_with_worksheets.pdf

[11]   www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/developmental_assets/index.php

On the Web

The Internet and social media (Web 2.0) can be valuable tools for the investigation phase of service-learning. Here are some possibilities:

- Find potential project ideas and curriculum on the Service-Learning Ideas and Curriculum Examples (SLICE) database on Learn and Serve America's National Service Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC).[12] Then contribute your own examples for others to use.

- Have youth gather data from the web on local issues and identify potential partners and interviewees for their investigation project. They can also access extensive information on various methods for investigating community changes, priorities, resources, and needs. Useful Web sites may include those for local newspapers, TV/radio station, city council, and the school board as well as state and federal government sites that collect data on all communities and school districts, such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the U. S. Department of Education.

- Use Wikis or other collaborative creation tools (e.g., writeboards or Google docs) to design investigation tools, allowing youth to design the questions, methods, and strategies even when they are not able to meet in person.

- Demonstrate the results from your investigation by having participants post videos, blogs, or other user-generated content on the Web, then encourage local organizations to link to the postings as a way to share learning about the community.

Real-Life Example

Fourth and fifth graders involved in a program called Meth-Free Tennessee Youth Edition addressed a unique aspect of the growing methamphetamine problem in their community. A member of the group had been put into Children's Services after her parents were arrested on meth-related charges. Due to the dangerous chemicals, she was forced to give up everything, including her clothes and stuffed animals. After the group heard her story, they decided to create backpacks that hold basic items that meth-endangered youth would want to have with them: toothbrushes, change of clothes, a stuffed animal. After the bags were created, the group worked with a person who helped them investigate how they could ensure that every First Responder in the community would have one with them at all times.

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[12] www.servicelearning.org/slice/index.php?ep_action=share

Notes from Our Service-Learning Community Walk

Strengths and Resources in Our Community	Concerns We Have About Our Community	Service Opportunities We See in Our Community

Web 2.0 Idea: Map your walk in Google Maps or another similar program. This will give the youth a visual reference for their work.

Sample Interview Questions for Key Community Leaders

Needs-Based Interview Questions

Describe your organization. What needs is it trying to meet? What problems is it trying to solve? How is it trying to solve them?

What are the biggest challenges or problems facing your organization at this time?

What will it take to fix those problems?

What could we do together to address these challenges?

Strength-Based Interview Questions

Describe your organization. What is its vision? What does it seek to accomplish?

What are the strengths of your organization? Where are you making a difference?

If you could have three wishes for the future of your organization's work, what would they be?

How might we partner with you to fulfill your dreams for the future?

Sample Learning Emphases in Different Settings

Service Project	Examples of Possible Learning Emphases in . . .		
	Youth-Serving Organizations	Faith-Based Organizations	Social Service Organizations
Organizing a food drive for a food shelf	Job skills such as keeping inventory Leadership skills in planning the drive	How their tradition asks them to address poverty in the world	Social conditions in the community that contribute to poverty
Tutoring younger children	Educational enrichment Social skills (talking with younger children, problem solving, etc.)	Developing spiritual qualities such as patience, listening, and caring	The role of education in healthy development
Studying and cleaning up a river or lake	Appreciating nature Responsibility for the environment	Faith perspectives on the environment and stewardship	Sustainable neighborhoods
Building a home for a low-income family	Planning and organizing skills Understanding different people	Social and economic justice from a faith perspective	Project planning and implementation Home maintenance skills
Participating in a voter registration drive	Civic responsibility Commitment to the community	The responsibility of people of faith to participate in the political process	Neighborhood organizing Civic participation
Developing a presentation about racism	Community organizing skills Appreciating differences in society	Faith perspectives on racial justice and reconciliation	Community history with civil rights

Setting Service-Learning Goals and Indicators

	Goals: What Will We Accomplish?	Indicators: How Will We Know?
Service	**What will participants accomplish that will meet real community priorities?** 1. 2.	**How will you know when these efforts enhance community life?** 1. 2.
Learning	**What skills, knowledge, or attitudes will participants learn?** 1. 2.	**How will you know when this learning has occurred?** 1. 2.
Growth	**How will this service-learning activity help participants grow and develop?** 1. 2.	**What evidence will you see that participants are growing?** 1. 2.

When you're developing goals, try to make them SMART:

S   pecific
M   easurable
A   ttainable
R   ealistic
T   imely

Quality Check-Up: Investigate

Use the following questions—based on eight standards for quality service-learning—to shape your exploration of community priorities.

Meaningful Service	*Are the potential opportunities for service . . .* ▪ Appropriate to participant ages and abilities? ▪ Personally relevant to participants? ▪ Likely to lead to outcomes that are valued by those being served?
Link to Curriculum	▪ Would the potential opportunities for service contribute to programmatic learning goals for participants?
Reflection	*Would the potential opportunities for service . . .* ▪ Lead participants to think deeply about complex issues and solutions? ▪ Encourage participants to examine their preconceptions?
Diversity	*How will the investigation process facilitate . . .* ▪ Identifying and analyzing different points of view? ▪ Developing skills in conflict resolution and group decision making? ▪ Understanding and valuing the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those offering and receiving service? ▪ Recognizing and overcoming stereotypes?
Youth Voice	▪ Are participants actively engaged in the investigation process? ▪ Do participants have decision-making roles in selecting the service opportunity? ▪ Are participants acquiring knowledge and skills in the investigation process? ▪ Do you have plans in place to cultivate youth-adult partnerships?
Partnerships	▪ Have partners collaborated to establish a shared vision and set common goals to address community priorities? ▪ Do partners know about the contributions others offer to the project? ▪ Are there any missing partners or others who should be a part of this program?
Monitoring Progress	▪ How will participants begin to identify the evidence they will need to show progress toward meeting goals for service, learning, and growth? ▪ Will the plan foster youth's ability to examine their project with a view to evaluating progress, continual improvement, and impact?
Duration and Intensity	▪ Have you focused enough time on investigating priorities so that you have confidence that the service you provide will be meaningful and have the desired impact?

2. PREPARE
Get Ready to Serve and Learn

What It Is

Being prepared is essential for a positive service-learning experience. Preparation involves:

- *Preparing to learn*—Setting the context for the service and planning the learning opportunities and curriculum, based on the learning goals.

- *Preparing to serve*—Orienting participants to the project and providing needed skills training, ensuring that details are in place for the project, procuring supplies, and addressing other logistical issues based on the service goals.

- *Preparing to grow*—Helping participants explore the personal, social, cultural, or other issues that may arise through the project, based on the growth goals.

At a Glance

> Preparation involves getting ready for all aspects of the program, including learning, service, and personal growth. The investment in preparation pays rich dividends in the quality and impact of the program.

> Program participants should be active in leading and preparing for the projects.

> The project plan addresses both the goals of the project as well as the logistics of the project, from fundraising to safety to training of the participants to be successful.

> Establish the goals, methods, and processes for evaluation for the program before you begin.

Why It Matters

The success of service-learning programs and projects can generally be traced back to how well the group prepared for the experience. Preparation ensures that all participants are engaged in and committed to the project, as well as being ready to grow and learn. It increases the likelihood that both the participants offering the service and the community being served have positive experiences that reinforce their commitment to civic engagement, service-learning, and community impact.

How to Do It

- *Engage participants as leaders* during preparation. It will likely take longer than just doing it yourself, but in the end, it will increase their buy-in, their learning and growth, and the effectiveness of their efforts. If they don't have much leadership experience, work more collaboratively. If they do have a background in leadership roles, work more like a coach or guide. Tap participants' skills and expertise in designing and leading the project. With appropriate adult support, they can play lead roles in all the preparation elements that follow.

- *Develop a clear service project work plan,* working with any community partners and those who will benefit from the service being offered. Use the project planning as an opportunity to teach participants how to manage the logistics of a project. Be sure you have the supplies, skills, money, time, transportation, refreshments, fund-raising, and other resources needed to accomplish the service goals. Think through the timeline and schedule in coordination with other activities in the community, in your organization, or in the lives of the participants. Use Worksheet 6 to remind you of issues to address. A resource with more details on project planning is available through the National Service Resource Center, "Effective Practices: Planning a Service Event."[13]

- *Develop the curriculum for learning and growth,* based on your learning and growth goals. The goal is to create learning experiences based on the experience of service (an experiential education model), rather than a parallel

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13 www.nationalserviceresources.org/ep-planning-service

traditional, leader-centered teaching approach. Think of tools, activities, and learning processes that will prompt and guide participants to:

- o Deepen understanding of the content areas you seek to address.
- o Internalize skills, information, and perspectives from the service experiences.
- o Be challenged to think at a higher level about themselves, other people, the world, and the issues of the day.

It's often helpful to create a portfolio of learning options for students to demonstrate their learning and impact. Figuring out what these need to be as you begin the project will allow for a more complete and integrated project. Some learning and documentation methods include:

- o Keeping a journal (print, online, audio) throughout the service-learning project.
- o Giving oral presentations or demonstrations.
- o Writing essays or blogs, or creating a video about the experience.
- o Developing products to be used for the project.
- o Creating diagrams, work plans, maps, and other tools used during the project.
- o Writing research papers on background information.

Use Worksheet 7 to reflect more on intentionally integrating learning goals into your program.

- *Address safety, risk management, and liability concerns,* including parental permission, insurance, transportation, supervision, medical release forms, and similar issues. Much more information is available on the "Risk Management and Liability" fact sheet from NSLC (Points of Light Foundation, 2002[14]).

- *Orient participants to the project site, people, and underlying issues.* If possible, tour the site in advance of the service (if you didn't do so during the investigation phase). Address appropriate conduct and etiquette (including how to dress appropriately) in the setting in which participants will be serving, particularly any rules, customs, or cultural differences that may not be familiar. Provide information and practice (through presentations, role-playing, DVDs, and other strategies). Identify and address any stereotypes or preconceptions that participants may have about the communities or people they will be serving.

- *Engage and communicate regularly with partners, parents, and community members.* Enlisting their support and advice is vital to reaching your goals. Not only can community members and partners be key in planning the logistics (they may have done your selected project several times before), but they also can help orient students to the issues and challenges in the community while building their eagerness to engage in the service. Parents' support will be key in reinforcing the service, learning, and growth goals—in addition to the many ways they often will help with the project logistics and implementation.

- *Plan reflection, demonstration, and celebration activities* so that you have the baseline information and documentation you need from the whole project. (See sections 4 and 5 in this guide for discussions of these tasks.) Focus these components around the service, learning, and growth goals. Use information later in this guide to plan these activities.

- *Plan your evaluation activities,* building on your learning, service, and growth goals. Begin the evaluation planning *before* you begin your program. Worksheet 8 outlines key questions to consider in determining your evaluation approach. More information on evaluation design is available in the Evaluation and Assessment section of NSLC.[15]

- *Set up strategies to deal with inconsistent participation by youth in the program.* Because they are voluntary and take place in out-of-school times that may compete with other expectations or activities, community-based programs face particular challenges in maintaining a consistent group of youth. Service-learning program leaders have to be

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[14] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/risk_mgmt/index.php

[15] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/hot_topics/eval_assess/index.php

creative in finding ways to keep youth voice strong and to keep the process moving, even when youth are not at every meeting. Here are a few tips for addressing this issue:

- Begin each session with reflection that helps all participants get caught up with the process.
- Ask some youth to volunteer to orient those who are late in joining the project.
- Divide into smaller groups to do different projects if several youth are not interested in the selected project.

Try It!

At first, try short-term service projects that offer "early wins." For example, Meth-Free Tennessee Youth Edition subgrantees were told to start their multi-year initiatives with a Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service project. Coordinators said, "Put all your eggs into this basket. Focus on how you are going to do a quality service-learning project. *Then* [once that's under your belt] start thinking long-term." The grant manager also created a simple reporting tool that outlined each stage of the process, "so they had to say 'here is how we prepared,' 'this is how it was meaningful,' 'this is how we did it.' That way if they were using the tool, they would have to do all of those things."

On the Web

The Internet offers a number of opportunities and resources that are valuable during the preparation phase of service-learning:

- Utilize an online project-planning site (e.g. Bootcamp, ProjectsCenter, or WhoDoes) to work through the logistics of the project, inviting youth leaders and partners to have access to the site for real-time updates. Check with youth and community partners about the online tools they're using so that you don't have to introduce a new platform.

- Try the "my!TeamPlanner" tool on Facebook,[16] which allows you to share documents, create to-do lists, schedule meetings, make announcements, and facilitate discussions in a way that is integrated with participants' other social networking.

- Learn more about project planning through the online course from the National Service Resource Center. Visit the center's Online Learning Center[17] and sign up for the "Project Planning" course.

Online safety reminder: Be sure to secure photo releases from all those participating in the project. If your organization maintains an official Web site or social networking site, any picture, drawing, rendering, or other image requires the express written approval of all adults in the image and of at least one parent or guardian of any youth under the age of 18 shown before being posted on the site. If personal information is collected or disseminated (such as e-mail addresses, birth dates, addresses, or gender) from anyone under the age of 13, it must meet the requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA).[18]

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[16] http://apps.facebook.com/my-team/fb_myteam.php

[17] my.nationalservice.org/learning/

[18] www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm

 Real-Life Example

YouthWorks is a Minneapolis-based nondenominational Christian service-learning program that sets up for church groups short-term (one week) service experiences in 75 different sites around the country. Because so many personal as well as social justice issues come into play during the experiences, YouthWorks has created a preparation guide that churches work through before entering into the program. It helps them address such questions as What might the culture be like, and what can they expect from the site? What do *they* personally want to get out of the experience? What are the social issues and cultural issues at hand? In addition, each day of service begins with a reflection that raises unique questions such as "Where is the beauty in this community that I might not see?"

Service-Learning Project Planning Checklist

Goals

❏ Service

❏ Learning

❏ Growth

Who Will Participate?

❏ Youth leaders:

❏ Other youth:

❏ Adult allies/coordinators:

❏ Community partners:

❏ Parents:

❏ Others:

What We Will Do

❏ Service offered:

❏ Where:

❏ When (times and dates):

Plans for Project Logistics

❏ Tools and supplies (needed and sources of)

❏ Funding (needed and sources of)

❏ Transportation

❏ Refreshments

Safety and Risk Management Issues

❏ Site check for safety and appropriateness for youth

❏ Parental permission

❏ Insurance (needed and sources of)

❏ Transportation and driving plans

❏ Supervision plans

❏ Medical release forms

Project Orientation for Youth

❏ Orientation to the site and project

❏ Etiquette and cultural orientation

❏ Skills training for youth

❏ Background information on underlying societal issues

Partner and Parent Engagement

❏ Type and frequency of communication

❏ Clarity of expectations and roles

Plan for Reflection, Demonstration, Celebration, and Evaluation

❏ Focus, methods, and timeline for reflection

❏ Identified methods for demonstrating impact and learning

❏ Planned celebration or recognition activities

❏ Evaluation plan, including baseline data collected

Planning to Learn:
Linking to Curriculum in Community-Based Organizations

One of the greatest challenges in community-based organizations that seek to do service-learning is linking to curriculum, which is a foundational practice in high-quality service-learning (Billig & Weah, 2008). Some assume that learning happens "naturally," and others assume that curriculum connections are only relevant to schools. (Thus, a common strategy is to partner with a school to help meet their learning goals for students. For more information on school-community partnerships, see Abravanel, 2003; Cairn & Scherer, 1994; and Roehlkepartain, 1995.)

However, *learning* is broader than *school* or *academics*. Indeed, an underlying principle of experiential education (one of the philosophical foundations of service-learning) is that the most effective learning takes place outside of the classroom and school. Indeed, the esteemed educational theorist Lawrence A. Cremin (1976) advocated for an "ecology of education" in which "educational institutions and configurations [are viewed] in relation to one another and to the larger society that sustains them and is in turn affected by them" (p. 36). He goes on to say that "the public school ought never to take the entire credit for the educational accomplishments of the public, and it ought never to be assigned the entire blame" (p. 58).

High-quality youth programs in community-based organizations have their own learning objectives (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), which may or may not overlap with what youth are learning in school. These goals may focus on knowledge about the social issues and concerns they seek to address, or they may emphasize the ways the organization seeks to develop young people's career readiness, character, life skills, or leadership.

A service-learning approach challenges community-based organizations to be thoughtful in how they link service to learning goals and methods. In some cases, it may press you to be more explicit and articulate about your organization's overall learning and growth objectives (which will strengthen all program areas, not just service-learning programs). Use this worksheet (with young people as active partners) to reflect on how you can be more intentional and focused in how young people are engaged in learning through your service-learning efforts.

What does our organization seek to help youth learn through their participation in our programs?

1.

2.

3.

Determine how your service-learning program links to these learning goals. Use these levels of curriculum integration as a starting point for reflection and ongoing improvement. If your service projects are operating at Level 1, determine how you can begin moving to Level 2, and so forth.

Level 1—Service projects are planned and implemented with minimal or no links to the program's curriculum and learning goals. (This level is really community service, not service-learning.)

For example: A faith-based organization plans a monthly service project for its youth group based on a request for volunteers from the community.

What might Level 3 look like in your organization?

Level 2—Service engagement is indirectly linked to program curriculum and, thus, enhances general learning goals.

For example: An environmentally focused organization might have participants clean a riverbed, promoting the project as part of their mission.

What might Level 3 look like in your organization?

Level 3—The service project is designed with clear, direct links to program curriculum and general learning goals.

For example: A character development program might explicitly identify leadership skills and positive values that it seeks to nurture through participants' service project with the Humane Society. Preparation, reflection, demonstration, and celebration would all tie to these learning goals.

What might Level 3 look like in your organization?

Level 4—Planning for, engaging in, reflecting on, and demonstrating learning through service engagement is a primary strategy for stimulating learning to achieve learning goals.

For example: A youth program focused on youth leadership might design its whole program around engaging young people in leading children's activities in an after-school program. The youth participants design the curriculum, lead the activities, debrief and problem-solve together, and reflect on the leadership principles and practices that they are utilizing through the service project.

What might Level 4 look like in your organization?

Planning Your Program Evaluation

There is no one right way to evaluate your service-learning program. Many factors affect issues, such as how much you should invest in evaluation and what methods you should use. Program leaders and participants can often carry out their own evaluation effectively. But some situations will require outside expertise and perspective. If the stakes are higher, be sure to engage an evaluation partner in the process. These questions will help you articulate your needs and some of the available options.

1. **Why are you investing time and resources in an evaluation?**

   ____ To improve the quality or efficiency of the program

   ____ To increase the program's visibility and reputation

   ____ To meet an expectation of funders or other stakeholders

   ____ To understand and increase the program's impact on youth and/or on the community/issue

   ____ To fully examine and describe an effective program for replication or funding

2. **Who are the audiences for the evaluation information?**

   ____ Participants engaged in the service

   ____ Community members and partners

   ____ Funders

   ____ Your organization's staff and volunteers

   ____ The media or general public

   ____ Other researchers or policy makers

3. **How will you know if your project is successful? Write a simple (3-4 sentence) statement of what will change as a result of what you're doing.**

4. **What do you need to evaluate?**

   ____ Whether learning, service, and growth goals were met

   ____ Who participated and to what extent (youth, community recipients, partners, staff)

   ____ The quality of the experience for each group involved, and/or what might improve it the next time

   ____ The impact of the service-learning project on each group (the most difficult type of evaluation, requiring more sophisticated methods than described here)

5. **Where will you get the information? Whose voice needs to be part of the evaluation?**

 ____ Program documentation (minutes, calendars, descriptions)

 ____ Service recipients

 ____ Program partner organizations

 ____ Program staff and volunteers

 ____ Parents of participating youth

 ____ Funders or other stakeholders

6. **How will you reasonably and realistically collect the information, based on the resources available (time and money) as well as its potential burden on those providing the information?**

 ____ Questionnaires (forms, paper or online surveys)

 ____ Interviews

 ____ Program documentation

 ____ Observation of activities, participants, and/or staff

 ____ Review of reflection materials and demonstration tools (such as project portfolios, presentations)

 ____ Focus groups

7. **When do you need the information? How will you ensure that it is available when you need it?**

8. **What resources are available to collect, analyze, and interpret the evaluation information?**

 ____ What existing expertise do you have in your partnership to conduct an evaluation?

 ____ What resources may be available in local schools, colleges, or businesses? (High school or college classes could evaluate your program on their service-learning project.)

 ____ What funding or in-kind contributions are available for an evaluation?

Quality Check-Up: Prepare

Use the following questions—based on eight standards for quality service-learning—to shape how to get ready to serve.

Meaningful Service	▪ How are youth learning the knowledge and skills they will need? ▪ What kind of orientation do participants have to the underlying issues involved in the project?
Link to Curriculum	▪ How are learning goals being addressed through preparation for service? ▪ How are participants using their skills from other areas of life to contribute to the service-learning project?
Reflection	▪ What reflection activities are being planned? ▪ How are youth exploring alternate solutions to community challenges? ▪ What is being done to elicit preconceptions and assumptions prior to engaging in service? ▪ What road bumps can the youth envision that might get in the way? How can a troubleshooting process improve their chances of success?
Diversity	▪ How are participants integrating different points of view into preparation? ▪ What conflict resolution and group decision-making skills are being cultivated through the preparation process? ▪ How is everyone—those offering service and those receiving service—part of preparation?
Youth Voice	▪ How are participants meaningfully involved in preparing for service? ▪ What significant decision-making roles do youth have? ▪ How is the preparation building trust between youth and adults?
Partnerships	▪ How are partners collaboratively developing and implementing plans? ▪ Do partners communicate regularly about plans, activities, and progress?
Progress Monitoring	▪ What baseline information are you gathering in order to track progress in meeting service, learning, and growth goals? ▪ What systems are set up to monitor progress?
Duration and Intensity	▪ Is adequate time set aside to accomplish the service goals and to complete the other components of the service-learning process? ▪ Is the project significant enough in duration and intensity to have a real impact in the community and in the lives of participants?

3. ACT
Make a Meaningful Difference in the Community

What It Is

The action phase is often the most visible and tangible part of service-learning, as it involves providing the meaningful service in the community. It moves social issues from participants' heads into their hearts and hands, and it motivates them to learn and grow while also contributing to community life.

Why It Matters

The action phase of service-learning is its heart. Not only is it when participants provide the service that meets human and community needs, but it also provides the experiential foundation for their personal growth and learning that will occur through the reflection and demonstration processes.

How to Do It

The action phase varies considerably, depending on the type of project you're doing, where you do it, the age of the people involved, the number of participants involved, and many other factors. So some of the following tasks may be less or more important. There are a number of ongoing tasks that often require attention:

- *Establish clear assignments, expectations, and schedules.* Some of the common problems in service-learning experiences occur when roles, expectations, and assignments are not clear. Efficient logistics will create a better experience for all involved, and it will also maximize service and learning.

- *Ensure that participants are appropriately engaged* in ways that match their maturity, skills, physical capacities, and other qualities. Worksheet 10 offers a job description format for the participants that can help clarify these issues. If a task or a project doesn't fit well with particular participants, find creative ways to match their skills and interests with the broader project learning and service goals.

- *Nurture a supportive experience for participants.* Relationships grow when diverse adults and youth work side by side for a common purpose. Encourage youth not to focus so much on the task at hand that they fail to attend to the relationships with their peers, adults, and those being served. Take time to know each other's names and a little bit about each other. Use every opportunity to tell participants *what* they are doing well and *why* their efforts are making a difference. Encourage them to do the same for others in the project.

- *Stay focused on the learning and growth goals.* Just because participants are serving doesn't mean they are engaged and learning. Ask questions that remind youth of the learning goals, and give them opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills to the project at hand. Take advantage of unexpected learning opportunities that come up.

- *Promote interpersonal and cultural sharing.* Engaging with people who are different from themselves in race, culture, abilities, age, economics, or religion provides an opportunity for deepening an understanding of others and breaking

At a Glance

> The action phase involves providing the meaningful service in the community. It also provides the experiential foundation for learning and growth through reflection.

> The action phase requires clarity in expectations, assignments, and schedules. It also requires matching the participants with the appropriate tasks for their skills and maturity. Take care to manage risks while also challenging participants to grow.

> Focus on building relationships among participants and with community members while serving. Building bridges across differences is a core strategy in service-learning.

> Collect data, artifacts, pictures, and other documentation for reflection, demonstration, celebration, and evaluation.

down stereotypes. However, if not processed well through reflection and dialogue, the experiences can inadvertently reinforce misperceptions or prejudices. The goal is to make the most of these interactions not only to ensure that the service is provided with respect, but also to contribute to growth and learning goals.

- *Cope creatively with changes and challenges.* Regardless of how well you think you've prepared, unknowns remain, and once you are onsite, you will need to respond to the unexpected. Always look for creative options. These may include brainstorming solutions and alternatives with youth, seizing a teachable moment about the challenge, and maintaining a positive attitude, knowing that the group will often mirror your attitude.

- *Provide supervision and ensure safety.* Participants (and others) can sometimes get so caught up in a project that they don't realize how much they are stretching their bodies, minds, skills, or emotions beyond their limits. In addition, agencies that work primarily with adult volunteers may not know when their expectations exceed what youth participants can do safely and effectively. Anticipate any personal or physical safety issues in advance and prepare youth accordingly. Provide regular supervision and monitoring as well.

- *Keep energy and interest levels high.* In extended service projects (which are more effective and have greater impact), fatigue or disinterest can set in. Breaks, recreation, and refreshment can be important to keeping participants contributing fully. Snacks, resting in the shade, time to chill and chat (with each other and the people receiving service), and storytelling can all help renew energy. In addition, encouraging youth to learn and try different tasks that are part of the project can also reduce fatigue or disinterest.

- *Collect data, artifacts, and stories for the evaluation.* This may include surveys, interviews, observation, videotaping, photography, and other methods. Be sure to gain the perspectives of community residents, community partners, and the participants engaged in service-learning.

- *Journal during the action phase.* What is journaling doing in a section on action? Journaling is a reflection process, right? Actually, journaling *is* a reflective process, but it's also an effective way to document an experience in "real time" in order to be able to look back afterward and recall details, feelings, and so on. (In extended service projects, reflection also helps keep continuity, energy, and focus.) Build in time during or right after service for your team to write, draw, or otherwise describe what they saw, how they felt, things they did, people they met, and other thoughts that stand out for them.

- *Document experiences in preparation for reflection, demonstration, and celebration.* Participants will get the most out of their service-learning if they document their experiences, learning, and questions along the way. Giving time and attention to documentation and reflection in the midst of action will help ensure that the experience has a lasting impact. There are many ways to promote reflection during the action stages:
    - Ask youth questions about what they are doing and why, what they are learning, and what they are confused or concerned about.
    - Encourage participants to write down any key words or phrases that describe their experience, their feelings, or what they are learning.
    - Assign participants to be the official photographers and/or videographers.
    - Encourage youth to keep a journal.
    - Arrange for participants to write about their day while they are at the site. The closer in time to the event, the more likely they will be able to remember it.
    - If you are traveling to and from the site together, use the time to discuss the day's events and experiences.
    - Build in time at the end of the day to see how everyone is feeling and talk about any issues that came up during the day.
    - Keep your own notes or a journal to capture your reflections for later sharing.

On the Web

The Web—particularly social media—can be a valuable tool during the action phase. Here are some possibilities:

- Have participants capture video of the service-learning project (or create their own video diaries) for posting on video-sharing and other social networking sites.

- Encourage selected youth to Twitter about their experiences during the service activities.

- Invite participants to blog about their service-learning experience. (If the service is being provided far from home, this becomes an important way to keep others up to date on how the project is going.)

Try It!

Design T-shirts on which participants write one or more of their personal goals for their service experience. Or create one design that lists your group's goals. Ask them to wear their shirts during the action and/or reflection phases of the project. (Thanks to the Afterschool Corporation of New York for this tip.)

Real-Life Example

Synergy Works! is a popular five-week service-learning program in rural north central Idaho. The activities students engage in have ranged from learning about agriculture and food preparation (including making homemade ice cream!) to learning about world cultures (again through food preparation, but this time it was cooking squid with seniors). It is also a good example of the relative weight that can be given to action. Only one of the five sessions is focused on action; the rest of the time is devoted to *actively* addressing the other phases.

A Service Project Job Description for Youth

What you will be doing:

Where you will be doing it:

When you will be doing it and how much time you can expect to spend:

Your supervisor (including contact information):

The expected results or outcomes of your work:

Expectations for you while you are providing the service:

- o   Be courteous, friendly, and respectful to others serving with you or receiving the service.
- o   Get to know the people whom you are serving.
- o   Work cooperatively as part of your team to reach the goals.
- o   Become familiar with emergency procedures at the work site.
- o   Tell project leaders or staff when you cannot meet your timeline.
- o   Do not use language or dress in ways that might be offensive to people in the community.
- o   Use your time (and other people's time) well. If you don't feel like you're contributing, tell a program leader.
- o   Keep in mind your learning goals. Try to apply your knowledge to the situation.
- o   Ask questions about things that you don't understand or that make you curious.
- o   Be honest in raising issues and concerns that may arise.
- o   Ask for help in learning new skills that you need.
- o   Have fun!

Quality Check-Up: Action

Use the following questions—based on eight standards for quality service-learning—to shape how to effect action that makes a difference in the community.

Meaningful Service	▪ Are the service activities appropriate to participants' ages and abilities? ▪ Are the activities interesting and engaging to participants? ▪ Do those being served value the service being offered?
Link to Curriculum	▪ Are participants learning information or skills related to learning goals? ▪ Are participants learning how the knowledge and skills they are using are relevant to other areas of their lives?
Reflection	▪ Are the activities prompting participants to think deeply about complex community problems and alternative solutions? ▪ Are participants being exposed to issues that can shape how they understand their roles and responsibilities?
Diversity	▪ If stereotypes surface while providing service, how are they addressed?
Youth Voice	▪ How are participants expected to use their knowledge and skills by playing leadership roles while offering service? ▪ How are trust and open expression of ideas encouraged while serving?
Partnerships	▪ Are partners in regular communication throughout the service activity? ▪ Are partners actively involved in the service activities?
Progress Monitoring	▪ What information is being collected from multiple sources to show evidence of quality of programs as well as progress toward meeting specific service, learning, and growth goals?
Duration and Intensity	▪ Are participants spending enough time engaged in service that they are able to make a meaningful contribution? ▪ Does the service activity continue across a period of several weeks or months in order to achieve service and learning outcomes?

4. REFLECT
Integrate Learning from the Service Experience

What It Is

Reflection should be more than summarizing events and talking about feelings during the experience (though it's important to articulate both of these). It should involve more challenging thinking, analysis, problem solving, and interpretation. It should press youth to see the experience in a broader context of civic, policy, and community life, and it should cultivate stronger thinking and reasoning processes. Thus, reflection experiences need to be intentionally structured to facilitate this kind of growth and learning.

Reflection helps participants internalize, interpret, and apply their experiences, integrating them into their knowledge and who they are. Though reflection should occur before, during, and after providing service, it is particularly emphasized following the service experience.

At a Glance

> Reflection is more than talking about feelings; it should involve challenging thinking, analysis, problem solving and interpretation so that participants integrate the experience into their learning and identity. Effective reflection is crucial for quality service-learning.

> Tie the reflection processes to your service, learning, and growth goals.

> Participants should be engaged in selecting, designing, and leading reflection times. Utilize a variety of methods and approaches that match different learning styles.

> A basic experiential learning cycle can provide a helpful flow for reflection, providing three core reflection questions: What? So what? Now what?

Why It Matters

The significance of high-quality reflection is borne out in the research. According to an analysis by RMC Research (2008), well-designed, cognitively challenging reflection:

- Helps students develop a deeper understanding of the world around them, as well as greater self-confidence, social responsibility, and moral-political awareness.

- Facilitates greater caring, deeper relationships, and a stronger sense of belonging.

- Increases student engagement in school (which theoretically should translate into deeper bonding to the community-based organization that sponsors service-learning).

- Helps youth be open to new ideas, and see and analyze issues in new ways.

- Increases the likelihood that youth will apply what they have learned to real life.

How to Do It

- *Weave cognitive challenges throughout planning and service activities,* focusing on your goals for growth and learning. Guide youth to learn more about issues, investigate causes and solutions, explore options, and persuade others. Focus on helping youth develop skills in problem solving, decision making, exploration, testing hypotheses, classifying information, and other advanced cognitive skills. Encourage youth to examine and correct their preconceptions and assumptions by drawing connections between previous and new knowledge. This can be done in a number of ways:
  - Ask questions about their experience in service, what they saw, and what they think is behind the issues,

challenges, or strengths of the community.

- Invite community members or leaders to talk with the youth to debrief their service experiences and contextualize them in community and cultural dynamics.
- Have youth research and present to others the underlying issues to the challenges and strengths they saw in the community, which will develop their research and presentation skills.

- *Engage youth in selecting and designing reflection activities.* One option is to give them several choices for reflection, then letting them choose how they individually want to reflect.

- *Utilize the experiential learning cycle to shape the reflection process.* One of the theoretical foundations of service-learning is that learning begins with concrete experience (in this case, service). Thus, the emphasis is on "do, then think about it," as opposed to a traditional learning model of "think, then apply it." Three simple questions structure the experiential learning approach to reflection. You can see samples of these questions in Worksheet 12:

  - *What? Looking back on the experience (reflective observation)*—Begin with an opportunity for participants to piece together their experience and their feelings about it. Encourage them to examine what happened within and around themselves, as individuals and as a team. What were their thoughts, experiences, feelings, hopes, and concerns?

  - *So what? Interpreting the experience (abstract conceptualization)*—Once participants have "remembered" their experiences, they can find broader meaning by interpreting that experience and formulating new concepts out of that experience. During this phase, bring experiences into dialogue with social trends, experts, classroom learning, literature, religious or philosophical writings, or other information that is relevant to your specific learning and development goals. This is the phase where explicit ties to the curriculum are most obvious.

  - *Now what? Exploring the possibilities for change (active experimentation)*—This final phase is about integration of learning so that it can shape the future. This integration may involve individual, whole-group (or subgroup) commitments to follow through with ongoing service or activism and continue addressing the issues. It should also solidify how the knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through the project can be applied or transferred to other areas of life through questions such as: What am I going to do with what I have experienced and learned? In what ways are my views of the issues changed by my experiences in this project?

- *Use a variety of reflection approaches and activities* that are appropriate for different styles of learning, utilize different skills, and fit with both learning and service goals. These may include:

  - *Verbal reflection,* including class or group discussions; dialogues with community members or experts; role plays; or group simulation experiences.

  - *Written reflection,* including worksheets, journaling, essays, articles for organizational newsletters or community newspapers, blogs, or poetry.

  - *Artistic reflection,* including drawing or painting; performing drama or music; and creating scrapbooks, bulletin boards, video shows, or a Web site.

Though developed for K–12 school settings, *Connecting Thinking and Action: Ideas for Service-Learning Reflection* (Billig et al., 2004[19]) is a helpful tool with dozens of practical, adaptable, and specific reflection activities and tools.

- *Tie in your evaluation process, goals, and findings to date.* The reflection process can be integral to your program evaluation. Not only should the reflection process itself be assessed, but the process of reflection should generally include dialogue that is relevant to key evaluation questions. In addition, asking youth to reflect on findings to date

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[19] www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/132/Reflection%20Guide%20Internet1.pdf

can enrich the interpretation of those results while also stimulating deeper reflection. In the end, evaluators should have access to the results of reflection, either as participant-observer or through the notes from the evaluation process.

- *Allow plenty of time for reflection.* All of this takes time and focus, so tagging reflection onto the end of a long day of service won't suffice (though it might be part of the process). Allow enough time for youth to practice their learning skills, integrate information, work through differences, and reach satisfying conclusions. Time spent on reflection and interpretation will sometimes exceed the time spent providing service. Establishing clear expectations that the reflection time is integral to the service-learning experience will allow for fully integrating the service experience into participants' lives through new skills, attitudes, and perspectives.

On the Web

Many participants are quite used to sharing their reflections through Web sites, text messaging, video sharing, blogging, Twitter, and other social media. Take advantage of this natural learning style in the reflection process, recognizing that their online postings can also be used to demonstrate their learning and impact. Here are some ideas:

- Set up a private group on Facebook, MySpace, Ning, or another social media site, and have all youth join it. Then pose questions (and have youth pose questions) for reflection. Have them find and upload links to online resources, videos, and other materials that help with reflection.

- Encourage participants to share their reflections through their own social media sites, and link to your program site.

- Identify online communities that are addressing the underlying issues or concerns of your service-learning project. Encourage participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and questions with the advocates and experts who are part of that online community (keeping in mind, of course, appropriate precautions to ensure participants' safety).

Real-Life Example

A central learning goal of the Walking the Walk program at the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia is to increase mutual understanding and respect among participants in diverse religious traditions, including the Baha'i faith, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. This program is a subgrantee of a Learn and Serve America-sponsored program of Search Institute and Interfaith Youth Core called Inspired to Serve: Youth-Led Interfaith Action.[20] In Philadelphia[21], groups meet twice a month in different houses of worship throughout the city, alternating between a focus on service and a focus on reflection. During the reflection time, they use art, poetry, collages, and other activities to explore the issues underlying their service as well as the shared values across religious traditions that inspire and motivate them to engage in those issues. They also talk directly with the people whose lives are touched by the issues at hand. For example, the youth worked with a program called Books Behind Bars to provide reading materials to prisoners. As part of their reflection, they engaged in dialogue about the criminal justice system with a 59-year-old man who had spent 24 years behind bars, obtained a GED in prison, and is now pursuing his college degree.

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[20] www.inspiredtoserve.org

[21] www.interfaithcenterpa.org/programs/program-walk.html

Key Questions for Reflection

Use these basic questions as starting points for developing the reflection questions that are specific to your service-learning program or experience.

What?

- What did you do?
- What did you see, hear, smell, taste?
- What did you think?
- What did you feel?
- What happened?

So What?

- What does it mean?
- What difference did our actions make? For whom? How?
- Why do you think things are the way they are?
- What do you think and feel about it now?

Now What?

- What changes will you make because of what you learned and experienced?
- How will you apply what you've learned to your everyday life and learning?
- How will you apply what you've learned to the broader social and political issues that you care about?

Quality Check-Up: Reflect

Use the following questions—based on eight standards for quality service-learning—to shape how to learn from the service experience.

Meaningful Service	▪ What did the participants do in their service that was most relevant, interesting, and meaningful to them? ▪ How do your reflection activities guide participants in exploring the societal issues underneath the service that they have provided?
Link to Curriculum	▪ How do the reflection activities tie to established learning goals as well as the program curriculum?
Reflection	▪ What verbal, written, artistic, and nonverbal activities are you utilizing to demonstrate understanding and changes in participants' knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes? ▪ How do reflection activities encourage deep thinking about complex community problems and alternative solutions? ▪ What reflection activities guide participants to examine their preconceptions and assumptions regarding their roles and responsibilities?
Diversity	▪ How are participants identifying and analyzing different points of view through the reflection process? ▪ How do reflection activities help participants understand and value the diverse backgrounds and perspectives?
Youth Voice	▪ How do participants' own perspectives shape the reflection process? ▪ What needs to be done to create an environment for reflection that fosters a sense of trust and open expression of ideas?
Partnerships	▪ How are partners involved in the reflection process?
Progress Monitoring	▪ How will participants use evidence collected throughout the experience to reflect on progress toward meeting service, learning, and growth goals?
Duration and Intensity	▪ How much time is needed to fully reflect on the service experiences?

5. DEMONSTRATE AND CELEBRATE
Recognize and Reinforce Learning and Impact

What It Is

It is sometimes said that teaching is the best way to learn something. That's what demonstrating is really all about; it gives participants a chance to synthesize and articulate what they have learned, what difference they have made, and how they've grown through their service-learning experience. They may do this with a small audience (the leader or the group), or they may demonstrate what they've learned to key community leaders, the media, or a global audience on the Internet. Though demonstration may be part of a grade in school (and done through testing), community-based organizations have the opportunity to demonstrate learning in ways that are more authentic and integrated into the program and the issues involved.

Complementing and reinforcing demonstration is celebration. It invites participants and partners to step back and say "thank you" to all who are involved in the service-learning efforts. It may involve public, high-energy events with media coverage. Or it may involve writing and sending a personal note to participating youth. This honoring and recognition is not just gracious; it also helps to cement the experience in participants' lives.

At a Glance

> Demonstration involves having participants show what they know and what they've done. Celebration invites participants, partners, and community members to acknowledge both the growth and learning, reinforcing participants' commitments to being civically engaged.

> Use information, artifacts, stories, and data from the project as the basis for demonstration and celebration.

> Share the successes with community leaders, the media, and other stakeholders.

> Match demonstration and celebration approaches to the participants' interests and skills.

> Use many different approaches for both demonstration and reflection so that participants with different gifts and learning styles can fully participate.

> Hold a culminating event to bring together everyone involved in the project and to provide a focal point for demonstrating and celebrating both learning and service.

Why It Matters

Demonstrating learning and impact is sometimes woven into reflection or into assessment or evaluation. However, recent service-learning quality standards suggest the value of highlighting demonstration as a distinct component of service-learning because of its value to integrating learning, developing youth leadership and voice, and setting the stage for broader impact and action. By demonstrating learning, growth, and community impact, participants increase their own self-efficacy and challenge negative stereotypes of youth. They also motivate broader community engagement in the issues or cause that they are seeking to address.

In addition, rewards, recognition, and celebration can reinforce learning and help solidify commitments. However, if commitments are out of proportion to the service or if they are used to "bribe" youth to serve, they can backfire. So it is important to contextualize the celebration with demonstration of learning, growth, and impact.

How to Do It

There are many occasions and methods for participants to "show what they know" and to highlight the impact of their service. Here are a few possibilities:

- *Gather information, stories, and key learnings* from the service-learning experience, particularly those that are related

to your service, learning, and growth goals. These can become the basis for your demonstrations. Some sources of information may include:

- Stories, letters, or interviews from the project sites and the community members.
- Data (qualitative and quantitative) from the evaluation.
- Photos, videos, tools, media coverage, and other artifacts from the service projects.
- Work plans, publicity materials, and other project documents.
- Materials from reflection sessions, such as journal entries, essays, artwork, or poetry.

- *Select demonstration methods that match partcipants' interests, skills, experience, and learning styles.* Youth will be more engaged and successful in showing and telling about what they've done if the approaches fit them, challenging them to grow, but not setting them up for disappointment or failure. There are many options that fit different learning styles, interests, and skills. Worksheet 14 provides a format to help brainstorm the possible ways you could demonstrate progress toward your service, learning, and growth goals.

- *Engage and recognize community partners, service recipients, families, youth, supporters, and others.* Emphasize how each has enriched the lives of others, including the ways the service built bridges across differences. Encourage them to tell stories about how the work together has enriched community life and what's needed to continue to address the underlying social issues that are involved.

- *Think outside the box (or posterboard).* There are many different ways to demonstrate learning. Don't assume that you have to do it like you did the last time. Try some new approaches, such as those offered on Worksheet 15. Ask youth about any hidden skills, interests, or talents that could be part of the demonstration. These may include skills in art or technology—or any other skills they have. Use different forms of learning that tap different intelligences, such as writing, speaking, art work and/or posters, photo essays, DVDs, music, skits, or building something that demonstrates what they have learned.

- *Create project portfolios.* A service-learning portfolio is a collection of items that helps track the growth and development of a service-learning project and the people involved. Portfolios can be developed by a team, individuals, or both, and may include photos, drawings, notes and letters, learning-session outlines, journal pages, worksheets, menus from lunch stops, and other important "artifacts" from your experience.

Building on your goals for service, learning, and growth, a portfolio can highlight the things participants learned, contributions from all participants and supporters, the people served, and/or the partnering agencies. Putting together a portfolio can help your team . . .

- Clarify what was done and how;
- Link instruction and action;
- Connect values with real-life issues and experiences;
- Trace changes in how you think about and respond to the issues and people you meet;
- Celebrate obstacles encountered and overcome;
- Showcase the range of your talents and abilities;
- Recognize your growth as a team that works together;
- Grow in your writing and communication skills;
- Identify what is meaningful and valuable to you as individuals as well as a group; and
- Share what you learn with the wider community.

While much of the compilation for the portfolio and the reflection on its contents will take place after the action phase, you will need to collect things along the way. It will help if you have a central location for storing items or if you provide a folder or box for each young person. Encourage everyone to be on the lookout for interesting, unusual, or significant artifacts that represent key experiences, memories, or learning.

- *Hold a culminating event.* The event might be a traditional awards banquet or ceremony or less formal picnics, potlucks, parties, dances, or ice cream socials. Focusing the demonstration and celebration phase on a culminating event offers you, the participants, and community partners and members with a meaningful conclusion of a project as well as a bridge to future efforts. Effective culminating events recognize the efforts and impact of youth and their community partners. They also solidify relationships with community partners. Use Worksheet 16 to guide planning for such an event.

- *Use the participants as experts.* Have them prepare and lead an inservice workshop for the staff of community-based agencies and other settings.

- *Give public "thank yous,"* letting people know you value and appreciate their contributions. Honor them (by name) in newsletter articles, presentations, bulletin boards, and other public places. Send announcements to their families, schools, and other organizations of which they are a part.

- *Offer small, tangible symbols and reminders.* These might include certificates, plaques, T-shirts, pins, or other awards. Or offer small gifts, such as mugs, key chains, baseball caps, flowers, books, music CDs, or gift certificates.

- *Seek media coverage for your service-learning efforts* (bringing recognition to the youth involved as well as the whole program). Or write letters to the editor thanking people for their roles. Highlight the impact they had and the contributions they made to the community. For more suggestions on how to work with the media, download the *Learn and Serve America's Communicators Institute Binder* from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.[22]

- *Coordinate with schools so that youth get service credits on their transcripts*. These can be ways to meet graduation requirements, club requirements (such as National Honor Society), or college expectations.

- *Nominate youth for local and national awards and scholarships.* The President's Volunteer Service Awards are given to individuals of all ages who demonstrate a commitment to service. Local organizations can become a Certifying Organization that nominates and certifies awardees based on specific criteria.[23]

On the Web

- Have youth create e-portfolios in which they purposefully collect and showcase their learning and impact. An e-portfolio may include a variety of digital artifacts, including self-reflections, video clips, comments from adult leaders, peers, parents, and community partners. These can then be evaluated in light of learning and growth objectives, and they can contribute to the larger program evaluation and storytelling. These e-portfolios[24] can be interactive and dynamic through the use of Wikis, blogs, and other online tools.

- Have youth participate (with appropriate supervision) in online communities where people are dealing with the issues they addressed through their service experience. Have them contribute their stories, ask questions, and share their perspectives.

- Submit your project idea, story, or photos to NSLC,[25] which will often share the information nationally through their Web site, electronic newsletters, and other venues.

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[22] www. servicelearning.org/lsa/lsa_page/marketing.php

[23] www.presidentialserviceawards.gov

[24] http://electronicportfolios.org

[25] www.servicelearning.org/library/share/index.php

 Real-Life Example

Demonstrating learning and impact is central for the girls of Girl Scout Troop 362 (Hardy, West Virginia). For years, they have been part of the wetland management program at the nearby White Rock Girl Scout Camp. Through their involvement, they have learned about how wetlands are created, the habitat they provide for animals, and the purpose wetlands serve for humans. The girls have charted the growth of the wetlands and have collected invertebrates and amphibians to measure animal growth in the wetlands. When they see a need to remove invasive species at the wetlands, they take it on as a service project. They also teach younger girls stream monitoring, wetlands activities, and general watershed education at Girl Scout–sponsored events.

An Older Girl group from the troop began monitoring stream health in the community. They created a presentation on their efforts, and contacted the town clerk to ask for permission to present the results to the Wardensville Town Council. As a result, the city granted permission for the troop to monitor the stream that flows through their community park. The troop also procured funding from the local Lions Club and Veterans of Foreign Wars to purchase a water testing kit and boots so that they can continue to expand their environmental efforts. This effort has been supported by a Learn and Serve America grant to the West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service.[26]

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[26] www.volunteerwv.org

Exploring Options for Demonstrating Impact and Learning

Potential Audiences	Method	Focus: Demonstrating . . .		
		Learning	Growth	Impact
Self, leader, group	Verbal			
	Written			
	Artistic			
	Tech			
	Integrated			
	Other			
Community members, partners, and service beneficiaries	Verbal			
	Written			
	Artistic			
	Tech			
	Integrated			
	Other			
Supporters and allies (family, friends, partners)	Verbal			
	Written			
	Artistic			
	Tech			
	Integrated			
	Other			
Other community stakeholders	Verbal			
	Written			
	Artistic			
	Tech			
	Integrated			
	Other			
People with influence over the issue	Verbal			
	Written			
	Artistic			
	Tech			
	Integrated			
	Other			

Creative Ways to Demonstrate Impact and Learning

Verbal Demonstrations	Written Demonstrations
- Give oral reports to your group. - Teach others what you learned. - Do public speaking about the project. (Approach local service clubs such as Kiwanis, Lions, and Rotary to see if you can be on their schedule.) - Plan a training session for other youth. - Testify before a decision-making or policy-setting group to educate and inform (but not lobby, if your program receives government funding). - Lead a school, congregation, or community education assembly. - Present at a conference or workshop. - Hold a press conference to highlight the cause. - Teach material to younger children.	- Write a letter to a community newspaper or Web site. - Write an essay to inform or persuade others. - Create poetry about the issues. - Write briefing papers for policy makers. - Create fact sheets (or Web pages) on the issues and service opportunities that you addressed. - Create a booklet of reflective readings that includes journal excerpts and other writings about the experiences. Sell it to raise funds to address the issues. - Submit an article to a newspaper or magazine.
Artistic Demonstrations	**Tech Demonstrations**
- Develop and perform a skit or one-act play. - Write and perform music that addresses the concerns and issues. - Design a T-shirt, poster, or button that raises awareness of an issue. - Create a photo exhibit, and find a local business (e.g., coffee shop) to display it. - Create artwork, posters, or bulletin boards. - Create a project mural in a public space.	- Make, post, and share a video online. - Keep a blog throughout the project. - Create a Web site about the topic. - Appear on a local cable TV show.
Integrated Demonstrations	**Other Demonstrations**
- Create and share portfolios (traditional or electronic). - Create a fund-raising campaign to support the underlying social issues. - Host a culminating event for the project.	

Planning a Culminating Event

Use this template to plan a final event that honors participants' efforts, allows them to share what they have learned, and builds on their service-learning for the future.

Title of the event: _____

Date and time: _____

Location: _____

Participants and their roles:

Participant	*Roles and Responsibilities*
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

How will you invite participants to the event?

Activities: How will you celebrate, demonstrate knowledge, growth, and impact, and set the stage for the future?

Write a brief agenda for the event.

How will you publicize the event (press release, posters, etc.)?

How will you evaluate the success of the event?

Quality Check-Up: Demonstrate and Celebrate

Use the following questions—based on eight standards for quality service-learning—to guide how you demonstrate what has been learned and what impact the service has had.

Meaningful Service	▪ How will participants demonstrate their understanding of how their service experiences relate to underlying societal issues? ▪ How will participants demonstrate how their efforts were valued by those served? ▪ How are celebration activities consistent with the service provided?
Link to Curriculum	▪ How will participants demonstrate and celebrate progress in reaching learning goals? ▪ How will participants demonstrate that the knowledge and skills developed through service can translate to other settings?
Reflection	▪ How will participants demonstrate the connections they have learned through their service-learning experience to public policy and civic life? ▪ How might the "products" of reflection activities be utilized in celebration?
Diversity	▪ How will the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those offering and receiving service be reflected in the demonstrations of learning and impact? ▪ How will participants show that they recognized and overcame stereotypes through their service experience?
Youth Voice	▪ How do participants demonstrate that they have acquired new leadership and decision-making skills? ▪ How are youth involved in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service-learning experience?
Partnerships	▪ How are all partners engaged in the demonstration and celebration of learning and impact (including both receiving and offering recognition)? ▪ How are partners engaged in evaluating whether and how the experience met common goals?
Progress Monitoring	▪ How will participants use evidence from multiple sources to demonstrate and celebrate progress in meeting goals for learning, service, and growth? ▪ How will participants communicate evidence of progress toward goals and outcomes with the broader community?
Duration and Intensity	▪ How are celebration and recognition activities planned to be proportionate to the project's level of duration and intensity?

6. SUSTAIN
Keep Your Service-Learning Efforts Going and Growing

What It Is

Sustaining (also called "institutionalizing") service-learning focuses on making it an integral part of your organization's programming and culture—and sustaining a commitment to service and civic engagement in the lives of the participants who "graduate" from your program. It has several key components (Education Commission of the States, 2002):

- Shared leadership by stakeholders throughout the organization or system (including the youth, the parents, and the partners, as well as the organization's board, executive leadership, and administrative staff);

- A shared vision among a broad range of stakeholders that recognizes service-learning as an important strategy for achieving the organization's goals;

- Adequate resources to fund personnel, training, and other expenses;

- Ample time for planning and collaboration;

- Training that addresses all levels of experience;

- Open communication and feedback methods; and

- A pervasive sense of shared purpose and trust.

Why It Matters

Too often, service-learning is an innovative practice that depends on the advocacy of one or two people within a system to keep it alive and strong. A focus on sustainability seeks to make service-learning an integral part of how the organization does business so that everyone assumes it's a core part of programming. Furthermore, by being intentional about continually improving quality, it maintains its strength as a valued part of the organization's offerings.

It is important to note that sustainability is particularly challenging in community-based settings. A study of how Learn and Serve America grantees institutionalize and sustain service-learning found that community-based grantees were least likely of all grantee groups to continue offering service-learning after the grant ended. Whereas 75 percent of all grantees (K–12 education, tribal territories, higher education, and community-based) continued to offer service-learning, only half of the community-based grantees were continuing to do so (Melchior & Bailis, 2002).

At a Glance

> Sustaining focuses on making service-learning integral to your organization while also maintaining participants' commitment to service and civic engagement.

> Reflect on the results from completed service-learning projects to guide your next efforts, building on what has been done. Help participants find ways they can use their own gifts and interests to pursue their next involvement—whether or not they are still part of your program.

> Make evaluation an integral and essential part of your ongoing service-learning program. Not only will it help you with continuous improvement, but it will also document your program's quality and impact for organizational leaders, funders, and other stakeholders.

> Develop a cadre of quality leaders for your service-learning program. Offer ongoing opportunities for staff development.

> Engage the organization's leaders to ensure that they are committed to service-learning.

> Build a strong and diverse funding base, and nurture a strong network of partners that will sustain the commitment to service-learning into the future.

How to Do It

- *Determine next steps based on reflection and assessment from completed service-learning efforts.* Participants will have identified a new set of issues or the next step in the service, learning, and growth that build on what they have done. Try the following:
    - Analyze issues and opportunities to identify next steps for the youth or for the broader community. This could include asking community leaders and other stakeholders to review participants' efforts (highlighted in the demonstration phase) and offer their insights on new opportunities for partnerships.
    - Engage with youth, partners, and community leaders in a community visioning process, identifying benchmarks for success and a plan for implementation.
    - Link with new community partners to address issues from a new perspective or that bring new opportunities to the table.

- *Encourage youth to find opportunities to pursue their own passions and interests,* through individualized projects, or through other networks, particularly if they are "graduating" from your program or organization. These may include:
    - Participating in a national service program, such as AmeriCorps or others that are part of your organization's national network. These programs encourage people to make an ongoing, intensive commitment to service.[27]
    - Joining a local or national group that addresses the social issues raised during the project.
    - Exploring career or vocational options that build on the issues and/or skills and interests that were cultivated through the service-learning project.

- *Make evaluation an integral part of your service-learning program.* Sometimes it's hard to focus on evaluation as an important part of service-learning. Too often it is associated with negative things: testing, compliance, external demands—an intrusion into the "real work." People in service-learning are often motivated by their passions and values, not numbers or data. The result is that leaders and participants may not be eager to think through what needs to be evaluated and how, or to participate in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

    The result is a missed opportunity. An ongoing and consistent focus on evaluation can contribute in many different ways to sustaining your service-learning efforts:
    - It can provide systematic feedback to help design and strengthen your program.
    - It can show where and how the service-learning program is making a difference for (or having an impact on) the participants, the organization, and the community—all of which help make the case for the program with organizational leaders, funders, and other stakeholders.

    The scope, complexity, expense, and sophistication of evaluation can vary considerably, depending on your purposes and the audiences of the evaluation. Simple evaluations (primarily for program improvement and telling your story) can often be conducted internally, using existing tools and resources, such as those compiled by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC).[28]

    As the stakes increase due to external funding or a desire to demonstrate impact, you will likely need to engage an evaluation expert to work with your program to design the evaluation that meets more rigorous standards.

    However, another option to consider is to engage youth in youth-led evaluation of your program, which is consistent with the youth voice and youth leadership emphasis of service-learning. In this approach, young people learn basic principles and practices of evaluation, including how to formulate evaluation questions, developing skills in observing, interviewing, developing surveys, and conducting focus groups, and analyzing and interpreting what they discover. (For a practical guide to this approach, see Shumer, 2007.)

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[27] www.nationalservice.gov/about/programs/index.asp

[28] www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/hot_topics/eval_assess/index.php

- *Build leadership capacity to guide high-quality service-learning.* It's not enough to give people a curriculum or program guide and expect them to deliver a quality program. They need to understand the underlying principles and practices of effective service-learning. These efforts will be most effective when they allow for learning and practicing knowledge and skills, developing networks and interpersonal relationships, and engaging in joint problem solving.
  - Provide periodic introductions to service-learning to all staff in the organization.
  - Offer ongoing training staff and partners to receive informal or formal training that deepen their skills in leading service-learning. Many resources may be readily available so that you don't have to do this yourself. These include:
    - ❏ A service-learning coordinator in a local school or youth-serving organization.
    - ❏ Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC),[29] which has information and training tools on a wide range of topics.
    - ❏ Community-based organizations in your area that have received Learn and Serve America grants.[30]
    - ❏ The National Service-Learning Conference, sponsored by the National Youth Leadership Council,[31] as well as service-learning conferences offered by state departments of education and other networks.
  - Match the training to levels of experience. Introduce new staff to basic concepts and practices, while also giving those with more experience opportunities to deepen and renew their practices. (Consider utilizing the more seasoned leaders to train or mentor those who are newer.)
  - Offer regular feedback, which may include informal check-ins, questions asked in team meetings, or formal evaluations.
  - Offer incentives for high-quality practices. These could include awards or recognition programs, or, in the case of employees, opportunities for advancement based on their leadership in quality service-learning practice.
- *Make sure your organization's board and executive leadership are invested in and committed to service-learning.* Here are some possibilities for doing this:
  - Pay attention to organizational priorities to be sure your service-learning efforts are aligned.
  - Invite them to participate in an intergenerational service-learning project.
  - Ask for time for youth to present the results of their service-learning project at a senior management or board meeting.
  - Include regular communication about your efforts in internal publications.
  - Propose service-learning friendly policies that allow, encourage, support, or otherwise codify, in writing, the organization's commitment to the practice.
  - Be sure they know about the support from community partners as well as any media coverage for your service-learning efforts.
- *Build a sustainable funding base.* This can be one of the greatest challenges for practitioners who "just want to do the work." But having (or partnering with) leaders who can focus on ensuring that adequate, ongoing funding is in place for the program (particularly core staff) is vital. Securing the coordinator's position is a critical step in ensuring long-term viability. Within larger organizations, dedicated staff help keep the project on the radar screen. Each organization has different types of funding sources, including program allocations, grants, donations, user fees, and others, so approaches will vary. Here are some possibilities:
  - If you haven't been involved in fund development, work with people who have, rather than just trying to figure it all out on your own.

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[29] www.servicelearning.org

[30] www.servicelearning.org/lsa/lsa_page/networking.php

[31] www.nylc.org

- Engage youth in fund-raising. They will learn important skills, and they are often the most effective spokespeople for the power of service-learning programs.
- Identify multiple funding sources so that you do not become overly dependent on one.
- Seek to build core program expenses into the organization's core budget, rather than relying solely on "soft money" or short-term grants.
- Get more information on fund development for service-learning, including current funding opportunities, from NSLC.[32]

- *Nurture strong partner relationships.* Service-learning programs are more likely to be successful and permanent when they have stable long-term relationships with partners and other stakeholders. Partners can open new avenues and broader networks for support and engagement, including service opportunities, reputation and fund-raising, and in-kind services—not to mention long-term impact. They can also help to expand the service-learning opportunities throughout the community. Here are strategies to consider:
    - Work with partners to develop a formal, cohesive, long-term vision for the service-learning partnership that aligns with both organizations' missions.
    - Help partners understand the actual investment required to provide high-quality service-learning so that they know what their investment needs to be over the long term in order to achieve the vision and goals.
    - Establish intergenerational advisory boards or committees for the program that includes key partners and stakeholders.
    - Make it a priority to communicate regularly with partners. Encourage them to make site visits and get involved in other ways that advance their priorities.

On the Web

- Keep current information about your service-learning on your organization's website, and encourage youth to share their stories and testimonials by posting blogs, videos, or other information. This can help stakeholders recognize the value of the program to their vision.

- Ask youth to create videos of examples of how your program implements the quality standards for service-learning. Post these on the Web and use them to orient new staff and volunteers.

- Use social networking sites (such as Facebook and MySpace) to connect with other service-learning professionals and get new ideas to renew your program and your commitment to service-learning.

- Access the Providers' Network (www.slprovidersnetwork.org), which offers guidelines, networking, library materials, and interest groups to improve service-learning quality.

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[32] www.search.servicelearning.org/index.php?q=funding

Since the mid-1990s, service-learning has been integral to the mission, strategy, and programming of the Camp Fire USA's Sunshine Council in Lakeland, Florida.[33] Teenagers serve on the organization's board of directors, and they have a wide range of service-learning opportunities, from a week-long service-learning road trip around Florida (called CF66), an environmental camp, environmental youth corps, a general youth volunteer corp, a service-focused alternative spring break, and a summer service-learning program. Camp Fire USA offers regular training for staff and volunteers, and staff also share their service-learning expertise with other organizations and partners in the community. One way the organization keeps the momentum going is by highlighting several national honors that it has received, including the Colgate-Palmolive Youth for America Awards, the Disney Community Service Award, and the Outstanding Council Program Award from National Camp Fire USA. (For more information, see Naughton, 2000.[34])

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[33] www.campfireusa-sunshine.org

[34] nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/NatlServFellows/naughton_s.pdf

Starting (But Not Staying) Where You Are Now

No service-learning program begins with all the pieces in place. Effective, sustained programs take time to cultivate and build. Use this worksheet to reflect on how your organization addresses key issues related to institutionalizing service-learning. Then determine small ways you can gradually move toward greater institutionalization in each area.

	Adoption	**Implementation**	**Institutionalization**
Program Leadership Capacity	Program staff and volunteers have a shared understanding of and commitment to service-learning.	Program leaders consistently seek to implement the quality standards for service-learning.	The organization offers ongoing staff development and monitoring to ensure that standards are implemented.
Current status	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
What could you do to move toward institutionalization?			
Organizational Commitment	The organization's leaders know about and support the service-learning program.	The organization's leaders see service-learning as key to achieving their mission.	Service-learning is built into the organization's mission and strategic priorities.
Current status	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
What could you do to move toward institutionalization?			
Funding	The organization has short-term, dedicated funding to support service-learning.	The program has multiple funding sources, though it still relies on "soft" funding.	Service-learning is built into the organization's annual core operating budget.
Current status	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
What could you do to move toward institutionalization?			
Partnerships	Partners understand and support service-learning as useful to their mission.	Partners are eager to participate and focus on improving quality.	Partners see the service-learning collaboration as essential to their mission.
Current status	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
What could you do to move toward institutionalization?			

Quality Check-up: Sustain

Use the following questions—based on eight standards for quality service-learning—to shape how you sustain the service-learning experience and program.

Meaningful Service	▪ How will you add more challenging projects as the participating youth mature and have more experience? ▪ What will you do to ensure that the program continues to address attainable and visible outcomes that are valued by those being served?
Link to Curriculum	▪ How will learning goals build from one project to the next? ▪ How will you help participants transfer knowledge and skills from one project to the next?
Reflection	▪ How can the "products" of reflection be utilized to build community and organizational support and involvement? ▪ What reflection methods will guide planning for future projects?
Diversity	▪ How are new participants and adults being brought into the program in order to diversify and enrich the relationships and perspectives?
Youth Voice	▪ How are participants involved in making decisions about the overall priorities and directions of the program? ▪ How are youth involved in advocating for the service-learning program within the organization and among supporters?
Partnerships	▪ How will you help to institutionalize commitments to service-learning among the various partners? ▪ What steps will you take to establish a shared vision, common goals, and ongoing action plans among partners to address community priorities?
Progress Monitoring	▪ How will evidence from previous projects be used to improve future service-learning experiences? ▪ How will participants communicate progress toward goals and outcomes with the broader community in order to deepen service-learning understanding and ensure that high-quality practices are sustained?
Duration and Intensity	▪ How will you build greater and greater duration and intensity into short-term service-learning efforts? ▪ How will you work to ensure that programs are of adequate duration and intensity for impact while also avoiding burnout or drops in participation?

From: Roehlkepartain, E. C. *Service-Learning in Community-Based Organizations: A Practical Guide to Starting and Sustaining High-Quality Programs.* Scotts Valley, CA: Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2009. www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/cbo_toolkit

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Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse offers a wealth of tools, information, and resources for all aspects of service-learning. The community-based programs section identifies and organizes the information that is most useful for this part of the service-learning world. Check it out frequently, and be sure to share your ideas, successes, tools, and challenges with others through this Web site: www.servicelearning.org

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