



ENHANCING 4-H COMMUNITY SERVICES

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING?

Community Service Learning is a method of teaching and learning that incorporates meaningful community service with reflection in order to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

Through community service learning, young people use what they learn to solve real-life problems. They become actively contributing citizens and community members through the service they perform.

Community service learning can be applied in a wide variety of settings. It can involve a group of youth, an entire club, or several clubs working together. Youth build character and become active participants as they work with others in their community to create service projects.

Community service learning offers active education of youth while simultaneously addressing the concerns, needs, and hopes of communities.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING, COMMUNITY SERVICE, AND VOLUNTEERING

Community service participants volunteer for the primary or sole purpose of meeting the needs of others and bettering the community as a whole. It may be a one time or regular commitment.

Young people engaged in high quality **community service learning** meet the needs of their communities while increasing their knowledge. Service-learning participants take part in structured time to investigate community needs, thoughtful planning of the service project, and guided reflection regarding the relationship between their service experience and their learning. Overall, the most important feature of effective service learning is that youth engage equally with learning and service and reflect on their intersections. May last a month or up to a year or longer.

Volunteering is assisting with a community need, and is often provided by the volunteer when time is available.

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING LOOKS LIKE

If youth collect trash out of a streambed, they are providing a valued service to the community as volunteers. If youth collect trash from a streambed, analyze their findings to determine the possible sources of pollution, and share the results with residents of the neighborhood, they are engaging in service learning.

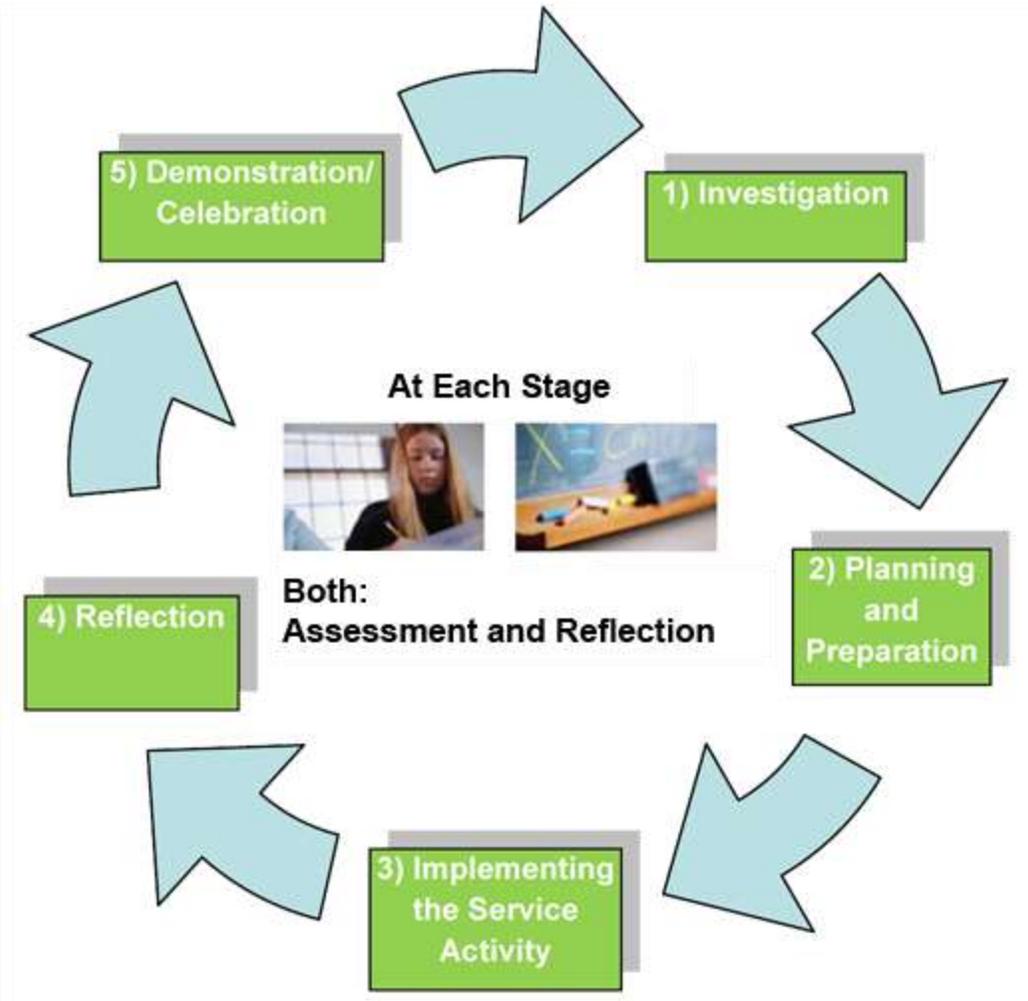
In the service learning example, in addition to providing an important service to the community, youth are learning about water quality and laboratory analysis, developing an understanding of pollution issues, and practicing communications skills. They may also reflect on their personal and career interests in science, the environment, public policy or other related areas. Both the youth and the community have been involved in a transformative experience.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- They are positive, meaningful and real to the participants.
- They involve cooperative rather than competitive experiences and thus promote skills associated with teamwork and community involvement and citizenship.
- They address complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation.
- They offer opportunities to engage in problem-solving by requiring participants to gain knowledge of the specific circumstance of their service learning activity and community challenges, rather than only to draw upon generalized knowledge. As a result, service learning offers powerful opportunities to acquire the habits of critical thinking; i.e. the ability to identify the most important questions or issues within a real-world situation.
- They promote deeper learning because the results are immediate and uncontrived. There are no "right answers" in the back of the book.
- As a consequence of this immediacy of experience, service learning is more likely to be personally meaningful to participants and to generate emotional consequences, to challenge values as well as ideas, and hence to support social, emotional and cognitive learning and development.

CORE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

- **Investigation:** Volunteers and youth investigate the community problems that they might potentially address. Investigation typically involves some sort of research and mapping activity.
- **Planning and Preparation:** Volunteers, youth and community members plan the learning and service activities, and address the administrative issues needed for a successful project.
- **Action** (Implementing the Service Activity): The "heart" of the project: engaging in the meaningful service experience that will help youth develop important knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and will benefit the community.
- **Reflection:** Activities that help youth understand the service learning experience and to think about its meaning and connection to them, their society, and what they have learned.
- **Demonstration/Celebration:** The final experience when youth, community participants and others publicly share what they have learned, celebrate the results of the service project, and look ahead to the future.



RMC Research Corporation. K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2006/2009. www.servicelearning.org/library/resource/8542

GETTING STARTED - INVESTIGATION

- There are many approaches to work with youth to investigate community problems. Often young people engage in a community mapping activity. In this type of activity, the youth walk through the community using a set of questions to guide their observations. They note what is going on in the environment (Are the sidewalks or pathways littered? Does the stream look and smell dirty? Are there community agencies around the school that serve people in need? Are there places for the elderly to sit? Are there homeless people sleeping on benches?). Community mapping activities often lead to selection of issues such as working with the environment, the homeless, senior citizens, hospitals, and other agencies that are in the neighborhood.
- Another common approach to investigating community problems is to review the newspaper. Collect newspapers for about a week or two in advance of the activity, and then distribute them to the youth. Have the youth identify the various strengths and challenges at the global, national, state, and local level

by cutting out the articles in the newspaper and listing them. Newspaper investigations tend to lead to working on service activities that are more global in nature, such as environmental issues, policy-related issues such as transportation, job training, technology-based projects, and working with children of prisoners, helping infants, and so forth.

- A third approach is some sort of *brainstorming activity*. Youth may be asked to whom they would give money if they were a philanthropist, or which global, national, or state problem they think is the worst and that they would like to do something about.

No matter which of these approaches you use, it is good to do two other things.

First, add a research component. Youth should document the nature of the problem they identified. Younger members can count the amount of litter they see, or otherwise document a problem. Older members can research the issue on the Internet or by conducting surveys of neighborhood people, their parents, or others. The idea here is to teach the youth how to gather evidence. *This evidence should be used to determine a baseline against which they can measure their impact.* Being able to do this helps young people realize how much of a difference they can make and raises their sense of efficacy and desire to volunteer again.

The second thing you need to do is help youth come to a consensus on what community problems they will address. It's good to have the youth work in groups because they will be learning teamwork and collaboration skills and they are more likely to be successful. However, the members need to feel that they "own" the problem, so leaders need to use some way to have the youth identify the problem they will address.

In helping youth to decide, keep these criteria in mind:

- the project is urgent and important
- youth are interested and will be able to be engaged in the project
- youth will actually be able to make a difference
- be sure that youth have voice in making the decisions and that they plan something that will be meaningful to them and to the community.

Reporting

See Community Service Report Form

Sources

- Eyler & Giles, *Where's the Learning in Service Learning?*, 1999, Jossey-Bass Publishers
- National Service Learning Clearinghouse <http://www.servicelearning.org/>
- Service Learning Helper's Guide, National 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System Inc.



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