



Creating Service Learning Opportunities through Youth and Adult Partnerships



Service Learning—a way to connect youths with their communities

PENNSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences
Cooperative Extension

1. Creating Partnerships

A partnership can take many different forms—an informal relationship between you and the volunteer coordinator in another community group, agency, or organization; a volunteer clearinghouse staffed by program assistants or leaders where youths can learn about a wide array of involvement opportunities; or a full-scale community collaboration in which 4-H, schools, community members, other youth-serving organizations, governing bodies, and businesses come together to design and implement a system-wide service learning initiative.

Are You Ready?

- To what degree are 4-Hers already engaged in community service?
- Do you have 4-H educators, program assistants, or volunteer leaders who will be available to meet with youths and agency representatives, train youths and adults, and monitor activities?
- Do you have support from coworkers and the community?
- Can you integrate service learning into 4-H activities that you are already doing?
- Will you be able to involve youths in decision-making roles from the beginning?
- How will you recruit volunteers to help plan and carry out the logistics of the activities as well as help supervise the youth participants?
- Are you prepared to set objectives and evaluate results for both the community and the participants?

Choosing a Community Group, Agency, or Organization

- Are the mission, goals, and objectives clearly stated?
- Are those people for whom the service is intended part of the decision-making process?
- Does the agency see young people as a valuable resource, appreciating their fresh ideas and involving them in decision-making roles?
- Does the agency have well-defined job descriptions for youth volunteers? Are the tasks and facilities age and skill appropriate?
- Will the agency designate staff or adult volunteers to work with you in all phases and help supervise the young people?



Contacting Potential Partners to Set up a Service Learning Project

- If you know people in an agency, talk to them first, no matter where they are in the hierarchy. They can smooth the way.
- Convince them you are interested in helping them accomplish their mission and goals.
- The single most important point to establish is that the tasks must be significant and challenging. Start from the knowledge, skills, and interests of the youth, particularly those related to 4-H projects. Brainstorm project ideas with youths and be prepared to offer a menu of things that you are able to contribute.
- Convey the estimated number of volunteers and the days and times they are available.
- Be specific about the level of supervision you'll provide and the level you'll expect the agency to give.
- Describe the level of responsibility the agency can expect from the young people.
- Discuss training and orientation opportunities for youths to learn tasks they will perform for agency staff/volunteers.

Starting a Volunteer Clearinghouse

Finding Volunteer Opportunities

If your community does not have a volunteer clearinghouse, United Way, or other agencies serving in that capacity, use the same procedures to make arrangements with a number of organizations or community groups. You can keep a directory of the openings at each site. Each youth or small group can then contact the site and negotiate a "contract" for specific services. Both the youths and the agency contacted report back to you.

Establishing a Community-Wide Collaboration

If you do elect to become a convener of a comprehensive service learning partnership, you will need to be able to motivate and facilitate people to develop a shared vision and to work together in new ways. Start with a small planning committee of youths, leaders, and representatives of groups with whom you are already working. Together make a list of potential partners. Answer two questions: (1) how will a partnership benefit them and (2) how might they contribute to the partnership? Consider agency representatives, business leaders, civic clubs, community residents, concerned citizens, elected officials, foundations, United Way, social services, other youth-serving organizations, media, parents, religious leaders, and schools. Invite no more than 15 diverse members to join the partnership (so everyone will have a chance to talk at meetings). From the beginning, share everything you can and encourage ownership by all partners. Successful collaboration is based on the following:

- Shared vision and purpose
- Commitment to take part in shared decision making, using agreed-on processes

- Shared allocation of resources: people, knowledge, skills, and funds
- Jointly developed goals and objectives
- Clear roles and tasks
- Continuous communication
- Systematic record keeping and evaluation
- Credit and recognition for all collaborations

Designing Developmentally Appropriate Ways to Involve Youths

Youths ages 10 to 13 develop at different rates, but some general patterns do exist that may help agencies better understand how to involve youths.

Characteristics of Youths Ages 10 to 13

- Quite active; have boundless energy
- Like group activity
- Like to be with members of own sex
- Have rapidly changing interests; jump from one thing to another
- Usually do best when work is laid out in small pieces
- Need guidance from adults to stay on task to achieve their best performance
- Admire and imitate older boys and girls
- Easily motivated; eager to try something new
- Do not like to keep records and do not see value in them; will need assistance in discovering unique ways to capture outcomes of reflection

2. Selecting Service Learning Projects

You can use a number of methods to identify service learning projects. Get involved in conducting newspaper searches, neighborhood assessments, surveys, and interviews. Visit other service agencies. Match the skills and interests of the youths with the identified projects, perhaps through a survey or by brainstorming.

Meaningful action includes direct service (tutoring, visiting the elderly), indirect service (environmental cleanup, fund-raisers), and advocacy (speaking to officials, notifying the community, writing letters to businesses). Service may be teaching others (demonstrating 4-H project skills, tutoring), producing a helpful product (books, oral histories, plays, computer games, murals), or addressing a significant need or issue (analyzing local streams, building playgrounds).

While it's understood that participants will benefit most by being involved in a project for a sustained period of time, you can develop a "shopping list" of service activities for one day, one weekend, one week, or longer.

- Day: fund-raiser, bike clinic, cultural fair, serving holiday meal to homeless
- Weekend: park or roadside cleanup, painting mural, building wheelchair ramp
- Week: day camps for needy children, gleaning crops to donate to a food pantry, helping with Senior Olympics, "Random Acts of Kindness" week at school



3. Planning and Preparing

Once a project has been selected, the collaborating team should develop a detailed plan for implementing it. The team should include 4-H educators, leaders, youths, representatives from collaborating organizations and schools, and members of the community to be served. Schedule several planning meetings. Decide how each detail should be carried out and who's in charge of seeing it through. Make sure everyone has input and gets a job! The following format may be helpful.

Name of Project:

Description:

Desired Outcome of Service to Community:

Desired Outcome of Project to Youths:

Number of Youths to Be Involved:

Knowledge and Skills Needed:

Preparing Youths to Serve and Learn (Training and Orientation):

Collaborators and Their Contributions (Clear Agreements):

Preparing Collaborators to Work with Youths:

Recruiting and Screening Adult Volunteers:

Preparing Adults as Supervisors:

Reflection Opportunities before, during, and after Service:

Communications (with Parents, Collaborators, Youths, and Public):

Parental Support/Involvement:

Risk Management (Liability Issues):

Resources Needed:

Facilities:

Equipment:

Materials/Supplies:

Transportation:

Printing/Duplication:

Publicity:

Awards:

Funding:

Action Plan for Service (Who Does What? When? Who Supervises?):

Evaluation (Criteria for Success):

Recognition/Celebration:

Risk Management

The potential for injury or damage always exists when doing service projects. Risk management involves assessing the risk, reducing or controlling it, and making sure adequate insurance is in place to cover liability issues. Some of the common issues that must be addressed are:

■ *Transportation*

Whenever possible, use bonded drivers. If staff, volunteers, or parents drive, make sure they have a current driver's license and know that their car insurance must cover any liability. Set up clear possibilities about seat belt use and rowdiness. If the collaborating partners are to provide transportation, make sure they have adequate insurance.

■ *Insurance*

Determine if your organization's insurance and that of your collaborating partners already cover, or can be modified to cover, community service learning activities—transportation, volunteers, and sites. If not, you may need to purchase additional insurance.

■ *Parental Permission*

Require a signed parental permission form before youths can become involved in any community service learning activity. It will not absolve you from responsibility for negligence. However, if parents are made aware of exactly what the youths will be doing in the project and give their written consent, then you have some proof they have assumed the risks involved. Permission slips should include the work site location, type of transportation, dates and times of service, objectives of the experience, any risks involved, and what youths are expected to bring.

■ *Medical Release/Health Form*

Supervisors should keep up-to-date medical release/health forms within reach. These forms permit medical attention in an emergency and inform the medical provider of the youth's health insurance coverage. The health form also alerts supervisors and medical personnel to existing health conditions or current medications.

■ *Screening, Supervision, and Preparation*

Take every precaution to assure reasonable safety and document those steps.

- Screen site and volunteers.
- Provide adequate adult supervision, and keep a master chart showing how young people are being monitored.
- Provide emergency training for responsible adult and teen leaders.

■ *Media Release Forms*

Members of the community for which the service is being provided may not wish for their names or pictures to be included in publicity. Always obtain written permission from them (or their parents if they are under the age of 18).

4. Preparing Youths for Service

Youths need some preparation before they begin a service project, but a lengthy orientation can be a turnoff. Training and orientation are needed in four areas listed below.

1. An idea of the underlying issues in the project (homelessness, hunger, environment), the agency's mission and goals, and how to do their assigned tasks

Issues

Provide some background information about the people and/or the situation in which they live. The goal is to sensitize and revise preconceptions rather than to provide detailed information. Help youths begin to unravel the puzzling social, economic, and political realities. Can they identify hidden factors that help explain the ways people behave in certain life situations? Are they able to confront their own fears and prejudices?

Job Description

Ask the agency to provide a clear and simple statement of its mission and goals. Help the agency build a job description around a series of simple questions such as the following:

- What is the job?
- What will the participant do?
- Who is in charge?
- Where will the participant work?
- How much time will this take?
- Who can do this job?
- How can the participant tell when the task is complete or done well?
- What will the participant learn through this experience?



Skills Training

If certain skills are needed that have not been developed through 4-H project work, decide if providing the necessary training is realistic. The agency should be able to provide the training needed for working with the target audience.

Sample Job Description

Job

Adopt-A-Grandparent Program Volunteer

Responsibilities

You will visit a nursing home and select a resident who rarely has family visitors. During regular visits, you

will assist with recreational activities and letter writing. You may want to tape an oral history, plant tomatoes, make a scrapbook, bring a pet, or just talk about what kinds of things your adopted grandparent did at your age! Cards and letters from you will make a difference, too.

Skills and Knowledge Needed

Young person between the ages of 10 and 13 who wants to improve the quality of life of an older person. Moderately skilled in writing and conversation. Understands physical and mental changes that occur as people age.

Time Required

At least two visits per month—one to two hours in the afternoon or early evening, anytime Monday through Friday. You should mail at least one card or letter to your adopted grandparent each month.

Supervisors

The activities director of the nursing home and your 4-H leader

Site

Golden Age Nursing Home

Benefit to Community

The adopted grandparent will become more interested in life, reconnect to the outside world in a positive way, and feel valued. Physical health may improve.

Benefit to Youth

Chance to develop a valuable relationship with another person; gain knowledge of eldercare issue, problem/opportunities of aging, local history, and heritage; increase sense of caring.

2. Activities for teambuilding, decision making, and problem solving with follow-up during and after the service experience

Teambuilding

“Group Juggle” is a simple activity using six or seven crushed paper balls. Participants stand in a circle. The first player throws a ball to a person across the circle, who throws it to a third, and so forth, until everyone has a turn, but one turn only. Repeat with each player throwing the ball to the same person each time. When the pattern becomes smooth, add another and then another ball. Players should be able to keep six or seven balls moving at once. Ask what they have learned. (When everyone learns their task and works together, things run smoothly. If someone drops the ball, it’s not total disaster; the team needs to help them get started again. If they’re teased or made to feel like a failure, they may drop out. If the circle gets too small, the group can’t keep as many balls in the air.)

Decision Making

Practice skills using a scenario from the prospective service project. For example, ask, “What if a supervisor left you a note to do a task you weren’t quite sure how to do?” Ask the participants to brainstorm alternatives, consider the pros and cons of each, and make a decision based on their conclusions. (For example, (1) don’t do it; (2) find another adult who can help figure it out; or (3) try to fumble your way through it.)

Problem Solving

Hold a paper-stacking contest in which each team gets an equal amount of scrap paper with which to build a tower. They get nothing else (no stapler, glue, or tape). Folding the paper is the only method of construction. Give awards for the highest, the cleverest

construction techniques, and the most architecturally attractive. Remind them they will seldom have everything they need when working on a service project, but imagination and ingenuity can save the day.

3. General role expectations and guidelines for appropriate behavior

Participants should understand the need to:

- Approach the project as if it were a “real” job.
- Be reliable. “No-shows” are deadly to the success of a program. Notify the supervisor if you cannot make it.
- Be on time and have a positive attitude.
- Dress appropriately and behave courteously.
- Make arrangements for transportation, if not provided.
- Familiarize yourself with all emergency procedures. (Do not place volunteers in situations that threaten their health and safety.)
- Respect the privacy of the agency’s clients and confidentiality of client records.
- Ask for assistance from a supervisor or other adult when needed, but don’t let them do it all for you.
- Perform tasks as outlined and complete them on time.

4. “Learning to learn” using the questioning process of reflection should be introduced and then reinforced throughout the service experience

My Service Learning Project

Name of project:

Address:

Name of volunteer coordinator:

Phone number:

E-mail address:

The mission statement of my service learning project is:

My task in the project is:

The project ties in with my 4-H curriculum by:

Being involved in the service learning project offers me the opportunity to learn:

I plan to gain these skills from being involved in the service learning project:

My Journal for Week # _____

Project # _____

During week # [] I learned:

Action Step #1*:

Action Step #2:

*An action step is action that you have taken to bring you closer to fulfilling the service learning project's mission.

Reflections: What I've Learned through Service Learning

Reflection on week # []:

My principal challenge was:

My biggest success was:

My game plan for next week is:

The service learning project was a dynamic and educational time for me. I gained great knowledge in these subjects and fulfilled these academic standards:

I learned:

I fulfilled this requirement:

Reflections: My Contribution to the Community

I devoted [] hours to the service learning project. Here are four examples of how I helped to make my community a better place:

1.

2.

3.

4.

6. Evaluation

Evaluation is essential and can be quite simple to do. The two purposes for evaluating a community service learning program are (1) to measure the impact of the program on the participant, the collaborating partners, and the community and (2) to help improve the program so it can be more effective in the coming years.

You can capture valuable information in a number of ways. Use the products of participants' reflection. Use quotes, photos, videos, and media scrapbooks. Keep records of numbers of participants, leaders, and community partners and hours contributed as well as the number of people served or "products" produced. Also, plan to obtain information from participants, community partners, adult supervisors, parents, and service recipients. You can use mailed questionnaires, telephone interviews, or focus groups. Keep the number of questions short. Suggested questions follow.



Impact Measures

Participant Outcomes

Questions for Participants

1. What two or three things made this program worth the time and effort?
2. Name one way you used your 4-H skills and knowledge.
3. Name one thing you learned about an issue in your community.
4. Name one thing you learned about yourself.
5. Describe to what extent you gained the following (quite a bit, somewhat, not too much):
 - New skills or new ways to use old skills
 - A special relationship with team members
 - Greater responsibility and leadership roles
 - A sense that I was making a difference
 - Increased awareness of community needs
 - Greater understanding of a community issue
 - Knowledge about myself
 - A goal to look for more ways to serve my community

Questions for Adult Supervisors/Community Partners

1. List the outcomes you expected for the participants in terms of learning, citizenship, and personal/social development. Was there evidence that participants increased their level of knowledge and understanding, changed their attitudes, or improved their skills?
2. To what extent did the participants achieve those outcomes? What did you observe as evidence?
3. Were there any unanticipated outcomes? Explain.

Questions for Parents

1. What has your child gained from being involved in the service learning program?
2. Describe any changes you may have noticed in your child's attitude or behavior as a result of the program.

Community Partner Outcomes

Questions for Community Partners

1. What are two or three things your agency gained from being involved in the service learning program? Can you describe benefits in terms of dollars saved?
2. Describe to what extent your agency gained the following (quite a bit, somewhat, not too much):
 - Increased visibility
 - Expanded networking
 - Enhanced volunteer recruitment opportunities
 - Increased services to clients

Community Outcomes

Questions for Participants, Adult Supervisors, and Community Partners

1. What were the expected community outcomes or benefits?
2. To what extent were each of those achieved? List tasks completed/not completed (for example, an objective may be to improve math grades of third graders through regular tutoring by volunteers. The school, as a partner, would track that group's grades for you).
3. Can you describe benefits in terms of dollars?
4. What were some unanticipated outcomes?

Questions for Service Recipients

1. How has the program benefited you personally?
2. How has the program benefited your community?

Program Improvement

Questions for Participants

Explain how effective the community service learning program was in the following areas (very effective, somewhat effective, not at all effective):

- Asking for and accepting your ideas
- Providing training and orientation
- Placing you in an appropriate service activity
- Providing adequate supervision
- Helping you reflect on your experience

Questions for Adult Supervisors/Community Partners

Explain how effective the community service learning program was in the following areas (very effective, somewhat, not at all):

- Fostering shared decision making
- Engaging youths in responsible roles over a sustained period
- Providing structured opportunities for reflection
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities for all involved
- Providing training and orientation
- Promoting good attitudes and work habits
- Providing adequate supervision
- Arranging recognition and publicity

Questions for All

1. What are three strengths of the program?
2. What are three ways it can be improved?



4-H Club Motto


“To make the best better”

4-H Club Pledge

I pledge
my head to clearer thinking,
my heart to greater loyalty,
my hands to larger service, and
my health to better living, for
my club, my community, my country, and my world.

4-H Club Colors

Green and White



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