

# YVC Service-Learning

**Service-Learning** is a form of experiential education that enhances the quality of a curriculum by pairing it with complimentary service. Learning occurs through a cycle of **instruction** (lessons), **action** (service) and **reflection** as participants work with others to apply what they are learning to real community problems. At the same time, they reflect on their experience, seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deepen their own understanding and skill set. The intent is that the experience changes both the recipient and the provider of the service by linking the service to the acquisition of values, skills, and knowledge.

**Community-Based Service-Learning** occurs on a smaller scale. It's ideal for day or week-long projects that are not conducive to a comprehensive, long-term service-learning plan. Community-based service-learning is a good way to illustrate for the Youth Volunteers why their service is important. For more benefits of community-based service-learning, visit: [http://www.servicelearning.org/instant\\_info/fact\\_sheets/cb\\_facts/benefits\\_cbosl/](http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/benefits_cbosl/)  
For more resources, click: [http://www.servicelearning.org/instant\\_info/bibs/cb\\_bibs/cbosl/](http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/bibs/cb_bibs/cbosl/)

**The Youth Volunteer Corps of Greater Kansas City (YVC)** utilizes both forms. Community-based service-learning is done during one-day and week-long projects while service-learning is done during the school-year when Team Leaders are working with the same group of youth on a regular basis for long periods of time.

*Is your project a one-day, week-long or year-long project? Find the corresponding section below to get started. Remember, these are just guides. The planning and implementation of service-learning programs is a dynamic process, individual to each program, and projects will vary.*

## ***One-Day Project – 2 hour service project***

*Total project time: Approx. 2 hours*

*Service-learning time: Approx. 15-20 minutes*

Start planning **days** in advance:

1. Find out what the agency does (its mission and programs).
2. Find out what your group will be doing that day (project specifications).
3. Find a creative, engaging way to connect the above two items in the minds of your Youth Volunteers.  
Games, group work and hands-on activities usually work better for youth than lectures.
4. Reflect.

*Service-Learning Activity Example: "Elderly Simulation"*

Your project at a retirement community consists of interacting with the elderly residents. Youth Volunteers experience what it feels like to be elderly by taping popsicle sticks to their fingers to simulate arthritis, stuffing cotton balls in their ears to simulate hearing loss, putting plastic wrap over their eyes to simulate Cataracts, putting popcorn kernels in their shoes to simulate calluses, and wrapping Ace bandages around their knees and elbows to simulate joint stiffness. You need to lead a discussion about issues surrounding the elderly such as loneliness, depression, health care, prescription drug costs, memory loss, dementia, and elder fraud. Make sure you explain how your visits help alleviate some of those things.

**Note: Sometimes an agency will ask you to complete a task that doesn't seem related to its mission. For example, it teaches inner-city kids to read but wants you to plant a flower bed. It's up to you to make the connection to your group. Explain how the appearance of an agency affects how its clients, donors, partnering agencies and the community at large perceive it. Explain how the completion of such tasks, which a staff member or outside contractor would normally be responsible for, helps to free up the agency's time and money, which can then go to accomplishing its mission. Try to start an open discussion where Youth Volunteers bounce ideas off one another until they find answers for themselves.**

## ***One-Day Project – 3 hour service project***

*Total project time: Approx. 3 hours*

*Service-learning time: Approx. 30 minutes*

Start planning **several days** in advance:

1. Find out what the agency does (its mission and programs).
2. Find out what your group will be doing that day (project specifications).
3. Find a creative, engaging way to connect the above two items in the minds of your Youth Volunteers  
Games, group work and hands-on activities usually work better for youth than lectures.
4. Reflect.

*Service-Learning Activity Example: “Framework for Better Housing”*

Your project at Habitat for Humanity consists of helping to frame a new house. Over a break, Youth Volunteers construct their own house “frame” using Popsicle sticks and putty. Have several facts on hand about poverty, homelessness, sub-standard housing, sweat equity and the working poor to prompt discussion. Every time a Youth Volunteer has a new answer to why safe, low-income housing is important, they write it on a stick and add it to the frame. Keep working until the house has all the necessary pieces (walls, ceiling, roof, etc.) and stands on its own.

## ***Week-Long Projects***

*Total project time: 24 hours over 4 days*

*Service-learning time: Approx. 30-45 minutes per day*

Start planning **several weeks** in advance:

1. Find out what the agency does (its mission and programs).
2. Find out what your group will be doing that day (project specifications).
3. Find a creative, engaging way to connect the above two items in the minds of your Youth Volunteers  
Games, group work and hands-on activities usually work better for youth than lectures.
4. Divide the plan up into four stages.
5. Reflect.

*Service-Learning Activity Example: “Law of the Land”*

Your project at a nature sanctuary consists of various tree and trail maintenance. Youth Volunteers devise their own unique piece of environmental legislation (i.e.: federally mandated minimum green space requirements for cities). Youth Volunteers then defend their legislation against criticism where you play the role of a cynical city planner or a cutthroat corporate CEO. You should develop a cohesive lesson about urban sprawl, waste management, global warming and other environmental topics.

- **Stage 1**-Explain the activity and how it relates to project. Begin the environmental lesson.
- **Stage 2**-Continue the environmental lesson and have the Youth Volunteers start designing their legislation.
- **Stage 3**-Youth Volunteers continue designing their legislation and “making their case.”
- **Stage 4**-Time to present. Bring plenty of critical knowledge to play “Devil’s Advocate” as Youth Volunteers try to convince you of the legitimacy of their legislation.

## ***Year-Long Projects***

*Total project time: Approx. 9 months*

*Service-learning time: Every session should be an installment of your service-learning plan, with community service projects scheduled at logical intervals to enliven the lessons.*

Research shows that the school-year (approx. 9 month) time period is best for maximizing service-learning benefits for youth. Ideally, you’ll have roughly the same group of youth all year so lessons will build on each other. The following steps are helpful in creating an effective school-year service-learning program. All steps are useful to consider, but need not be carried out or followed in the order below. Read through all 10 steps before starting and remember to include Youth Voice\* in as many phases as possible.

### **Step 1: Community Mapping**

Community mapping is a process of identifying problems and assets of the local community. You can consult with community members, civic groups, businesses, government officials, school personnel and Youth Volunteers to

determine both the needs of the community and the available resources, including partnership opportunities. Find out who else is doing (or has done) something similar. Try asking:

- When you walk around your neighborhood, do you see, hear or smell anything that bothers you?
- Do you consider your neighborhood “typical?” How does it compare to other areas you have visited?
- Are there any local practices that may affect other communities (e.g. your town’s pollution drifting downstream, local mall selling clothes made in sweatshops, etc.)
- Collect the “Local” section from your newspaper for a week or so before your first meeting with the youth and go through the stories with them. Ask: “What are the most prevalent stories? How do they affect you?”
- Is anyone already working on the problem? Can they use your help?
- What community agencies have the ability to solve this issue? Why aren’t they working on it?

Once your group identifies what issue they want to focus on (graffiti, lack of youth activities, littering, etc.) and the local resources available to help them (nonprofits, social clubs with a community focus, interested faculty members, etc.), you can begin designing the service-learning plan.

### **Step 2: Form Community Partnerships**

Most successful service projects require forming partnerships. Build on existing relationships or develop new ones with potential partners identified in Step 1. Be realistic about your resources, needs, and limitations and make sure your goals are of mutual interest to all of your partners. Also be concrete about the roles and responsibilities of each partner organization. Visit <http://www.kennesaw.edu/community/servicelearning/Pages/steps.shtml> for more details.

### **Step 3: Set Specific Educational Goals and Curriculum**

Determine what you expect your group to learn. Establish what content objectives or standards will be addressed, and incorporate your service and learning objectives into lesson plans. Devise ways to measure whether those goals are being met including reflection and assessment activities.

### **Step 4: Select a Project and Begin Preliminary Planning**

Pick a specific project with measurable goals and determine how all the partners can work together to achieve those goals. Be sure to identify people in your school or organization who can coordinate the project and maintain continuity from year to year in case someone leaves.

### **Step 5: Plan Your Project in Detail**

After you arrange a meeting schedule with your group, you can set up a timeline, create a budget, and assign tasks for your service-learning program. Be sure to include your partners in this process. Thorough planning, from schedules to evaluation tools, can identify and correct many potential problems before they happen.

### **Step 6: Acquire Necessary Funding and Resources**

If additional funds, goods or services are needed, seek assistance from local businesses, national corporations, parents, faith-based organizations, government programs (e.g., AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, Learn and Serve America, your State Education Agency), civic groups and other community organizations.

### **Step 7: Implement and Manage Project**

Put your plan into action. Continually assess your project to determine what is working and what could be improved. Involve project partners in evaluating and improving your project.

### **Step 8: Organize Reflection Activities**

Make sure Youth Volunteers are thinking about their service experience on a regular basis (e.g., through journals or classroom assignments) and organize activities that allow them to analyze their service and see how their ideas, knowledge and perceptions are changing. Use such reflections to help assess and improve the project. You can use the Record of Service found at: [http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/for\\_volunteers/service\\_record/index.asp](http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/for_volunteers/service_record/index.asp)

### **Step 9: Assess and Evaluate Your Service Program**

Ensure that your evaluation assesses the outcomes of the service project for the youth, the community, and the organizations involved. Documentation and evaluation of the project will create a legacy for the individuals and organizations that participated in and benefited from your service activities. It will also point the way to the next project for your classroom, and may foster activities in other classrooms.

### **Step 10: Celebrate Achievements**

Everyone likes to be recognized for a job well done. Recognition of Youth Volunteers can help build habits of service and lead to a lifetime of community involvement. Don't forget to recognize key community partners as well. Recognition may include: displays in school or online, celebratory events such as ribbon cuttings or groundbreakings, visits by local officials, and participation in national recognition programs.

#### *Service-Learning Activity Example: "Hillcrest Community Center"*

YVC of Kansas City has an ongoing relationship with an alternative high school in a low-income community. In 2006, a Team Leader was assigned to work with the school's high-achieving student group. After a community mapping exercise (**Step 1**), the youth concluded that they believed youth crime was the most important issue facing their community. Through further discussion, they decided that if young people had somewhere to go, especially at night, they would be less inclined to get into trouble.

Their solution was to improve the Hillcrest Community Center and make it more youth-friendly (**Step 4**). They approached the Center and found a willing partner in the director (**Step 2**). The Team Leader built a lesson plan around the issues of youth crime, school violence, civic engagement, bullying, and conflict resolution. Working closely with the faculty liaison, the Team Leader then devised an "Educational Objectives" plan complete with pre- and post-surveys to measure the success of the curriculum (**Step 3**).

Working with the youth, the Team Leader developed a detailed project plan for the remainder of the year, which included designing and administering a survey to the two local high schools. The survey was designed to find out what local youth want out of a community center.

The results were tabulated and presented to the Center director (**Step 5 and 7**). Through regular meetings with the director, the youth helped create a "Wish List" using the survey results. They helped plan the budget and determine logistics for each item. Luckily, the Center had funds set aside for such additions, and further fundraising wasn't necessary (**Step 6 and 7**).

A portable stage was the first thing purchased as a direct result of the group's suggestions. More changes are in the works. An entire session with the youth was devoted to reflection (**Step 8**). To celebrate, the group invited everyone involved to a hot dog party and had open-gym activities (**Step 10**). The Team Leader, youth, faculty liaison and Center Director completed a project evaluation to assess the success and failures and what could be done better next time. The evaluation was shared with the school administration and YVC staff (**Step 9**).