



## Chapter 4: Implementing Service-Learning

**Once a teacher** has assessed readiness for utilizing experiential learning, created a strong learning community in the classroom, and explored other resources beyond the walls of the classroom, implementation begins. (Further service-learning support is available on-line and through professional trainings at [www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org).)

### Step One: Preparing Students

**Lead students in a discussion of “community.”**

Engage students in a discussion of the kinds of communities they participate in (i.e., family, school, neighborhood, religious, cultural, etc.). Help them recognize that “community” may be described narrowly or broadly — that people operate in multiple communities at once, and that all are members of the broader global community.

**Lead students in a discussion of “service.”**

Engage students in a discussion about the concept of service or volunteerism. Be prepared for discussion about “mandated” community service (the judicial system), also known as community restitution. (This can give many students a preconceived negative view of service.)

**Explain service-learning.**

Explain that service-learning is a teaching/learning method. Share examples of the learning that can occur through meaningful service activities (e.g. language arts through producing a brochure for a community cause like a walk-a-thon; chemistry skills through water testing; second language skills through creating bilingual storybooks; geometry skills through construction of a playground for a HeadStart Center.)

**Conduct a “pre-reflection.”**

Assess students’ prior knowledge of resources and needs in the community (i.e. services provided versus unmet needs).

**Identify a “community of focus.”**

While much of service-learning can happen outside school walls, facilitators new to service-learning may want to narrow their definition of “community” to school. Often it is a good idea to “start small” with service-learning.

Available from the NYLC Resource Center at [www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org).

Excerpted from “Getting Started in Service-Learning”

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Many effective service-learning programs happen within the school, such as initiating a recycling program, creating bilingual storybooks for younger students, or developing a “Welcome to the School” guide for new students. Once comfortable with the strategy, teachers can help students expand their concept of community outside the school to the broader, even to the global community.

## Step Two: Conducting a Community Needs Assessment

Determine, with students, which of the following approaches will work best to assess need.

### Needs/Assets List

Brainstorm with the students the assets and needs in the community.

### Walkabout

Take a walk around the community recording observations of what can be seen, heard, etc. Keep an eye out for both strengths and deficits.

### Media Search

Scan newspapers, listen to radio, or watch TV reports for information about the community.

### Map

Have students make a map of the designated area, including points of interest and concern. Also indicate the locations of important resources.

### Survey

Create and conduct a survey, or examine the results of a pre-existing survey of community needs.

### Interview the Experts

Interview members of community organizations, businesses, and agencies to gather information. This can be an opportunity both to gather their ideas for improving the community, as well as to garner their support.



#### practitioner tip:

Needs assessments must be age-appropriate. While first-graders might want to go on a walk to assess the needs of their school neighborhood (a “walk-about”), eighth-graders might prefer administering surveys at the local mall.

### Step Three: Selection of the Need

Once the needs assessment has been completed, and the students' skill areas assessed, the students should determine the community need they want to address based on considerations such as their interests, the time required, the community and student assets available, and funding requirements.

### Step Four: Identifying Project and Learning Objectives

Based on the need selected, students decide what they can do to help meet that need; often this step can be done with the help of community partners. The following questions will generate ideas for a project:

- Who or what **could students teach** to meet the need? Could they teach seniors about computers, teach peers about conflict resolution, or tutor younger students in math?
- What **product or performance** could students create to meet the need? Could they build benches for a community gathering place, create brochures about proper use of drains to avoid polluting the local stream, or make baby quilts for new mothers in the community?
- What **service** could they provide? Could they prepare meals for the Meals on Wheels Program, create an HIV/AIDS participatory prevention play, or distribute voter registration materials?

Based upon the student-selected need to be addressed, students examine the curriculum standards for their grade or subject area to determine which will be met through the project, with the help of their teacher/facilitator. These learning objectives, along with the *project goals* developed in the next step, should be posted. (Remember that more than one discipline area will likely be involved.)

#### practitioner tip:

Keep in mind that as you create an action plan, you and your students will find additional learning objectives. It is important to identify the learning objectives and standards that fall outside your discipline to help students understand the inter-disciplinary nature of the “real world” and service-learning.

### Step Five: Creating an Action Plan

An action plan will help students, community partners, and teachers alike track progress. It is an important tool in service-learning project management. A simple chart including the following basic areas can be adapted to any project. (Note: Often it is a good idea to post the student assessment and project evaluation methods as well.)

#### Project Goals

What does the group want to accomplish through this service activity? What will be better in the community as a result of this effort? Project goals should be tied to learning objectives. Post the goals with learning objectives in the classroom for students to reflect on throughout the process.

#### Project Name

This can help with both internal and external communications, even with possible funders.

## Sample Action Plan

**Goal:** Creating School/Community Bilingual Newsletter

**Project:** Zinesters (a middle school service-learning language arts/ELL project)

**Task:** Present idea to ELL class

Learning Objective	Preparation	Person/Team Responsible	Resources Needed	Time Frame
Making a persuasive argument.	Training in building an argument, from thesis to conclusion.	Teacher and Team C	None	By Sept. 30

### Preparation

Is there specific subject matter, knowledge, or skills that students will need training or orientation in? (For example: training for working with the elderly or disabled; training in effective reading strategies for tutoring; orientation on volunteer procedures at the local food bank; practice interviewing and note-taking.) Learning objectives are frequently attached to this part of the action plan.

### Sequence of Tasks/Curricular Connections

Planning backwards from scheduled completion date, what steps need to happen first? For example, to draft a mural design, students may need to research the history of the local community (social studies). They may need permission to use the space. They may want to start with scale drawings (math). Paint types and amounts must be established (chemistry). They may want to research recycled paints (science). Assess how each task connects to learning objectives. Ask students “Have new learning objectives been established based upon the necessary tasks?”

### Timeline

When do certain tasks need to be accomplished to complete the project in a timely manner?

### Roles and Responsibilities

Who is responsible for what activity on the timeline, and by what date?

#### practitioner tip:

Even as students go about the process of determining need, planning, and preparing for the project, they also are meeting learning objectives and addressing standards. Learning occurs at all levels of the service-learning process.

### Resources Needed

Each project may require a variety of resources, including materials, funds, and additional volunteers or community partners. Work with students to determine what resources are needed and how will they be obtained. Are there parents who can contribute? Neighbors? Partners?

### Partnerships

Partners can help meet a variety of needs for the project. They can help teach the necessary skills, provide resources or funding, be the service site, provide expert project consultation, or help publicize the students' efforts. It is critical to ensure that the service is done with the community involved.

### Budget

Are there hidden costs to the project that may require additional funding? Often, projects cost little and local businesses are willing to cover any incidentals — particularly when students make the request, and handle the situation professionally.

### Public Relations

What steps and strategies will be used to notify others in the community about the project and its potential impact? Who will be contacted, when, and by whom? This is an opportunity for language arts objectives to be realized, and for students to learn more about the real media world. Teaching them to write a simple press release is often a worthy addition to the experience. (See the appendix, page 51, for a sample press release.)

## Step 6: Assessment/Evaluation

This area concerns both student-level assessment and project-level evaluation. Both are critical to service-learning, as they help build the case for its efficacy.

### Student Assessment

How will student learning be assessed throughout the project to ensure that learning objectives are being met? Will there be opportunities for students to self-assess their learning? Strategies for student assessment range widely, but often employ rubrics that categorize the end result as “acceptable” or “unacceptable” in measuring competencies. Rubrics can be used in evaluating student portfolios, videos, plays, writings, or other presentations. Similarly, they can be used if assessment is happening through interviews or discussions. (See the appendix, page 50, for a rubric framework.)

### Project Evaluation

How will the impact of the project be evaluated? Will baseline data need to be gathered in order to complete a final evaluation? (Such data as the number of participants, hours of service, end products, and the community response to products, are typical in program evaluation.)

## Step 7: Reflection

This is perhaps the most important element of the plan, from the teacher's perspective. Through the reflection process, students make cognitive gains.

### Hierarchy of Questions for Reflection

#### Knowledge (What do you know?)

What were your first impressions of the nursing home?

#### Comprehension (What do you understand?)

How was the nursing home similar to or different from what you expected?

#### Application (Can you use the knowledge you have learned?)

How has volunteering at the senior home changed your perspective on an older person you know well?

#### Analysis (Have you given the knowledge meaning and sense beyond the obvious?)

What parts of the experience have been most challenging to you?

#### Synthesis (Have you taken in the knowledge and personalized it?)

What have you learned about yourself from the placement site?

#### Evaluation (Have you appraised the value and worth of the project?)

What changes would you recommend in how this service site operates?



## Step 8: Wrapping Up

### Final Reflections

Final reflections may take any number of formats, such as video, drama, music, or pictorial representations. All participants involved in the project should be invited to reflect on their experiences and indicate what they have learned. Sharing final reflections can occur at the celebration event.

### Celebration

The final celebration includes all service participants — including youths, partners, and service recipients. It usually involves the final reflection efforts of the students, recognition of the contributions of all involved, and can happen at the project site, school, or at a partner’s business.

### What’s next?

Whether the class seeks to take the project to the next level (as in a multi-year effort to clean the stream), or individual students choose to remain involved, it is important to identify additional ongoing opportunities. This activity usually takes place during the final reflection within the class. (See the “service-learning cycle” on page 25.) Do not skip this step as it answers the larger, societal impact questions students often have.

## Teacher/Facilitator Tips

Cultivating the following facilitator habits will lead to service-learning successes.

### Flexibility

Realize that this is a process that may need more planning, some tweaking, or starting over. In experiential learning, applying academic content to real-life problems does not always lead to expected results. Remember that more learning occurs during the process than in the final product.

### Constant Assessment/Evaluation

It is most beneficial to assess and evaluate throughout the project, including pre-assessment, so that learning gains can be monitored. Be sure to involve students in this process, through student portfolios and self-reflective journaling across many artistic mediums — all of which can demonstrate the breadth of learning and knowledge gained.

### Reflection (student- or teacher-initiated)

While opportunities should be given to students to select their own reflection strategies, teachers should plan for a variety of reflection activities throughout the project that address all the learning modalities represented in the classroom. Consider speaking, writing, multimedia, and other activities that may help students process the experience. (Having students write in a journal addresses only 20 percent of the learning styles in an average classroom.) See the appendix, page 50, for reflection ideas.

### Monitoring Timeline

It is important to ensure that students meet deadlines and perform tasks in a manner that assure timely completion of the project. Identify student monitors who are responsible for reporting regularly on the project's progress.

### Monitoring Progress

Know when to step in and when to allow students to overcome challenges on their own. There will be times when the project takes a turn that no one anticipated. It is important for teachers to allow these challenges to occur and be solved by the students. Avoid the temptation to step in and solve problems for students.

