

Community Service and Service Learning

The terms **Community Service** and **Service Learning** are often used interchangeably. Both involve the element of service yet there are fundamental differences between them.

Community Service has often been the traditional choice for students who want to help in their community. Students often work on a service project for a limited amount of time and there is often recognition for the completed work, either in the form of school credits or a small token of gratitude from their respective beneficiaries.

Service Learning, which incorporates academic learning into service projects, is becoming more common and popular in today's classroom. Students will learn about the history and needs of the agency they are helping, and also see the positive changes that their involvement can make. By incorporating different aspects of learning into community service, students become invested in their work and are more likely to stay committed to the cause.

We have included information on **Service Learning** in this article. Some of the activities in this section are **Community Service** and some are **Service Learning**. However, all the activities can be modified for **Community Service** or **Service Learning**.

Four Stages of Service Learning

In order for students to get the most out of service learning, it is important to incorporate the four stages of service learning – Preparation, Reflection, Action and Demonstration. Preparation will ensure that you have identified a need and established a goal for service and learning. Reflection before and throughout the project will allow both teachers and students to monitor their actions of service, as well as define the learning that will occur. Action ensures that students are working with their community partners to achieve the goal.

Demonstration provides students with the opportunity to share their experiences with others, either through written materials (pamphlet, Web page, editorial) or spoken means (presentation, assemblies).

Types of Service Projects

Students can choose from various forms of service projects – Direct, Indirect, Advocacy and Research.

Direct service: students work hands-on with their beneficiary. Feeding and walking dogs in the shelter is an example of direct service.

Indirect service: benefits the community as a whole. Developing a fun and informational Web page to encourage adoption at the local shelter is an example of indirect service.

Advocacy: campaigns allow students to speak up for political changes both local and global. Writing a letter to local officials and the editor of the local paper to encourage more funding for the animal shelter is an example of advocacy.

Research: involves students conducting interviews and surveys to determine public thought on an issue. Interviewing residents on their views and opinions of the local shelter is an example of research.

A Blueprint for Service Learning

The following steps will guide you through the service learning process. Students can assist with and participate in these steps as is appropriate for their age and ability, taking on more responsibility as they gain experience.

Step One: POINTS OF ENTRY.

Think about what you're teaching. What are the underlying skills and content you want your students to come away with? Ongoing school projects, student-identified needs, and community-identified needs are also good ways to find your entry point into service learning activities.

Step Two: MAP OUT YOUR PLANS.

Identify and write down your service idea. Include in detail the content and skills that will be taught, the cross-curricular connections you can make, the books the students will read, and the community contacts that would be helpful to find and cultivate. Think about where your students will have their voice in the project. Be specific about your plans for preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration.

Step Three: CLARIFY PARTNERSHIPS.

Establish contact with collaborators—teachers, parents, community members, agency representatives, or others—who you want to participate. Discuss and clarify specific roles and responsibilities for all involved to avoid any confusion once the project is underway.

Step Four: REVIEW PLANS AND GATHER RESOURCES.

Determine the kinds of resources you'll need, and start gathering and organizing them. These may include books, newspaper articles, and reference materials from partner agencies. Also, schedule any visits, guest speakers, or field trips.

Step Five: BEGIN THE PROCESS OF SERVICE LEARNING IN ACTION.

Initiate the four stages of the service learning cycle: preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. Encourage youth voice and choice as you move through the service learning process.

Step Six: ASSESS THE SERVICE LEARNING EXPERIENCE.

Once demonstration and closing reflection have been completed, review and assess the learning accomplished, the impact of the service, the planning process, the reciprocal benefits for all involved, and ways to improve for next time. Debrief with all partners, and of course include the students.

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Ideas for Service Projects

When students work on a local issue concerning animals, they will be able to see practical results as they build a strong connection with their community. Local animal shelters and humane societies are always looking for help in various areas.