

Definition of Service Learning / Civic Engagement

The goal of civic engagement is not only to provide a vehicle for completing a high school service learning requirement, but to develop problem solving and self-efficacy skills that will motivate students to graduate from high school and become active members of their communities.

- Action and advocacy that meets a need as defined by a community and is related to classroom instruction in government, history, law and democracy; including relevance to young people's lives, for example:
 - While studying the immigrant experience in the U.S., students develop a project identifying community resources for immigrants and create brochures about family services and voter information.
 - While studying urbanization in the U.S., students look at problems that existed then and now, and collaborate with local government and organizations to design a solution to one of the issues.
 - While studying ecosystems, students research public policy related to the impact of pollution on health of plants and animals, perform water testing experiments on local a local river, and create a public service announcement.
- Collaboration with others toward a common goal: teachers and peers; local elected officials; city and county departments; non-profit organizations; local businesses.
- Civic Engagement can include service learning activities, such as student-driven projects that include reflection on the process and demonstration of what was learned.

Based on National Youth Leadership Council's definition of service learning

- Picking up trash on a riverbank is service.
- Analyzing water samples is learning.
- When students collect and analyze water samples, document their results, and present their findings to a local government agency -- that is service learning.

Service Learning is an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic knowledge to address genuine community needs.

 [National Youth Leadership Council](http://www.nylc.org)

Meaningful Service: Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities. Service-learning projects work best when they fit the ages and developmental abilities of the participants, include interesting and engaging service

activities, explore the context of the underlying societal issues the service addresses, and address needs that are important to the community being served.

Link to Curriculum: Effective service-learning is an integral part of the learning process. It has clear learning goals that are aligned with the school curriculum or purpose of the extracurricular program. Learning becomes experiential and applied, deepening students' understanding of the material, how it's used, and why it's important.

Reflection: Throughout the process, reflection is the key to growth and understanding. Young people use critical and creative thinking to ensure that the learning makes sense and has meaning for them. Reflection activities should be used before, during, and after the service experience to assess where students are in the learning process, help them internalize the learning, provide opportunities for them to voice concerns and share feelings, and evaluate the project.

Diversity: Throughout the process, reflection is the key to growth and understanding. Young people use critical and creative thinking to ensure that the learning makes sense and has meaning for them. Reflection activities should be used before, during, and after the service experience to assess where students are in the learning process, help them internalize the learning, provide opportunities for them to voice concerns and share feelings, and evaluate the project.

Youth Voice: Young people are active partners in a service-learning project, with strong voices in identifying community needs and planning service activities. They also play active roles in the evaluation of the project and its impact on the community. This nurtures youth ownership of the project, which in turn **empowers young people to take control of their learning, develop leadership skills, and take their places as valuable, decision-making members of their communities.**

Partnerships: Service-learning builds partnerships between young people and the broader community. **Partnerships can involve not only those being served but also government, businesses, community organizations, social service agencies, and other groups that share the project's goals.** By bringing people together in collaboration, these partnerships can bridge intergenerational, ethnic, and cultural gaps; provide young people with strong role models; and strengthen community infrastructures.

Progress Monitoring: To assess the quality of service-learning and monitor success, service-learning participants collect evidence of their progress toward goals and results from multiple sources throughout the service-learning experience. They share the evidence of their accomplishments with the broader community, including policy-makers and education leaders, to deepen service-learning understanding and ensure that high quality practices are sustained.

Duration and Intensity: Service-learning should have sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet the goals of the project. In other words, it should allow youth enough time to investigate community needs, prepare for service, take action, reflect repeatedly on the project, demonstrate their learning and the impacts of the project, and celebrate the

achievement. Service-learning works best when it is conducted during concentrated blocks of time across a period of several weeks or months.

Successful service-learning projects are tied closely to specific learning objectives, and many of the best are tied to numerous areas of study. For example, when seventh- and eighth-graders studied the historical significance of a local river, they developed projects to build nature trails, test water samples, document contamination of the local habitat, and restore historical sites. Their teachers connected those activities to their studies in earth science, mathematics, language arts, physical education, music, visual arts, and social studies. These connections not only expanded the impact projects had on learning, but also provided the young people with a deeper understanding of how different subjects are interrelated.

Pre-Service Reflection: Participants carefully examine what they know and feel about issues raised by the project

Ongoing Reflection: Find out where participants are in the learning process. Give them a chance to voice concerns and share their feelings.

Post-Service Reflection: Assess the meaning of the service experience., integrate new understanding, and propose further action.

New Applications: Continue to use new knowledge and skills to make decisions, solve problems, and grow and caring, contributing members of their communities.