Meaningful Service

INTRODUCTION
Meaningful Service is a standard that makes the service-learning experience relevant, age and developmentally appropriate, meets the needs of the community and is closely tied to curriculum.

Getting Ready
1. Gather all supplies.
2. Make copies of My Skills and Interests worksheet.
3. Prepare room for active participation and discussion.

OPENING QUESTIONS
As a facilitator, being able to create an environment for meaningful service means creating a safe place for youth to explore passions and interests. This simple activity draws attention to local and global issues, discovers interests and passions, and forms service-learning experiences.

LET’S DO IT!
Step 1 (10 minutes): Have youth explore headlines and stories on the internet and/or newspapers. These may be global issues or local. Have youth search a variety of websites and stories, taking notes on those issues and topics that spark their interests. Say, “Pay attention to pictures, headlines and topics that you seem to be drawn to. Don’t rush this process – allow yourself to feel what you are passionate towards”. Make a list of the topics.

Step 2 (2 minutes): Have youth review what they have written. Have them write key words that express feelings about these topics or issues (calm, sad, angry, helpless, excited, etc.).

Step 3 (8 minutes): Have youth fill out My Skills and Interests worksheet.
Step 4 (3 minutes): Tell youth to compare what they found interesting in the newspapers with what they wrote down on the worksheet. Ask, “Are there similarities? What are the themes of your interests? Are there issues and needs in your community that relate to your interests?”

Step 5 (2 minutes): Instruct youth to choose 1-2 of their topics that they would like to learn more.

Step 6 (additional time): Develop a plan for a service-learning experience to change or advocate for an issue in your local area.

TALK IT OVER MORE
(5 minutes)

Reflect
What did you learn about community issues?
Why is it important to know about issues in our communities?
What could you change or make better because of your project?

Generalize
What are the next steps for developing your project?
Who will you need help from during this project?

Apply
How will you bring your project to the public’s awareness?
How can you use this process in other areas of your life?

REFERENCES

National Youth Leadership Council: http://www.nylc.org/

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Nicole Pokorney, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development, 2013.
Meaningful Service: Preparing for Service-Learning

Student Skills and Interests Inventory

Understanding what students are interested in, what their strengths are, what skills they already have and what they would like to learn is important as you think about student roles in service-learning projects.

While offering students opportunities to choose how they can best contribute to a project is important in getting them engaged, it’s also important to allow them opportunities to work outside of their comfort zones and try on new roles so that they can grow and stretch.

The attached student questionnaire will guide students in reflecting on their skills and strengths and prompt them to think about how they learn and what areas they’d like to improve with new skills or knowledge.
My Skills and Interests

Name: ____________________________ Age: ______________

My hobbies and interests are: ____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Some day I want to be: _________________________________________________________________

My favorite activity at school is: _______________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

My favorite activity at home is: _________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

I know how to: ______________________________________________________________________

I am really good at: ___________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

An interesting thing I have done is: _____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

I care for others by: ___________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

I think I could improve: __________________________________________________________________

I find it difficult to: ___________________________________________________________________

I can teach others how to: __________________________________________________________________

My best qualities are: ___________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

I want to learn how to: __________________________________________________________________

I learn best when: _____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
Safeguards and Liability

Any educational program particularly those involving young people, contains an element of risk. Service-learning challenges are no different than those of athletic teams, work experience programs, or field trips that take students out into the community. These programs must be designed and implemented to ensure the safety of both those serving and those being served. Adults need to be sure they are taking reasonable precautions.

Consider Liability

• Discuss liability with your school or agency’s legal advisor to explore existing policies for risk management.
• Check the school’s insurance coverage parameters.
• Check with your state volunteer office regarding liability issues that may be particular to your state.
• Identify or develop procedures and policies that minimize risk and danger.
• Understand state laws and district policies on whether students and school staff can drive themselves or others. Be sure all drivers are covered by the insurance required.
• Follow your school district or agency’s confidentiality guidelines at all times, and make sure that college student, Senior Corps, or other volunteers are aware of the requirements.

Practice Safety

• Develop master schedules showing where students are when they are off-site.
• Use parent permission and release forms.
• Provide clear and adequate supervision and training. If students are volunteering at a nursing home, they need to know what they should do if someone suddenly gets sick, slips, or falls. At a daycare center, they need to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate play.
• Develop a rationale for how students are paired with the individuals they are helping.
• Clarify rules for safety with students, for example, walk on the sidewalk and know the medical needs of the service recipients.
• Assign tasks that are age-appropriate and within the young person’s capability or experience.
Planning Checklist

Plan logistics for the project

☐ Create a timeline outlining your activities and schedule.
  • What deadlines can you set for specific parts of the project?
  • When will you complete your project?
  • Do you have sufficient time to complete your project?
  • Have you built in extra time in case of unexpected problems?

☐ Clarify where your project will take place.
  • Do you have permission to use the space?
  • Do you have limited time at the project area?

☐ Investigate transportation sources
  • What kind of transportation might you need?
  • How much will it cost?
  • How many people need transportation?

☐ Consider supplying refreshments
  • Will you be supplying any food or drink during the project?
  • What will you need? How often?
  • How much will it cost?
  • Can you get some or all of the refreshments donated?

☐ Gather project materials
  • What project materials will you need? Make a very specific list.
  • How much will materials cost?
  • Can you get any of the items donated?
  • Can you use recycled supplies?

☐ Plan project orientation:
  • Who will orient students to the site and project?
  • Who will orient partners?
  • Are etiquette and cultural orientation needed?
  • What skills do students need to acquire?
  • What background information is still needed?
Engage Partners

- Who will help supervise students?
- What family members or community members can you consider?
- How will you ask them to participate?
- Type and frequency of communication with each partner?
- What will you do to prepare participants for the project?
- Can you provide speakers? Offer activities? Present videos?

Develop a publicity plan

- How will you present your project? Who will you present it to?
- What media avenues can you use?
- Will some media outlets donate publicity time, like radio and TV stations, newspapers, or other publications?

Create a budget

- How much do you anticipate your service-learning project will cost?
- Can you define where all the costs will come from?
- Who can help with funds in the event of unforeseen problems?
## Overcoming Barriers

### School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Barrier</th>
<th>Possible Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation costs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing dates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal/staff support</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Need for extra supervision/volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student buy-in</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of funding/resources</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Consider:**

- Teaming and interdisciplinary projects.
- Forming service-learning projects within school structures.
- Restructuring schedules to create blocks of time, as needed.
- Finding ways for students to contribute and serve their school community.
## Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Barrier</th>
<th>Possible Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety concerns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing strong partnerships</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding agencies to match your service needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding agencies that will accept youth as volunteers, given age limitations or group size</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Consider:**

- Determining whether parents work for organizations that could be potential partners.
- Sending letters to parents explaining service-learning.
- Inviting the local newspaper and media to showcase service-learning.
- Inviting community members into your classroom to become a greater part of the learning and service goals.
- Finding creative ways to meet community needs and get around age restrictions.

For example: Many students want to advocate on behalf of abused and abandoned animals, but animal shelters often have age restrictions on their youth volunteers. To get around this issue, a group of students created “animal profiles” for each animal at the shelter. The profile contained a picture, biography of the animal, and important facts to know about adoption. They distributed these profiles in their local neighborhoods to promote animal adoption.
## Predictions of Impact

The chart below can help you think about and predict what the impact of a service-learning might be on the various participants and institutions that the project reaches. By reflecting on potential results, you and your students can increase personal understanding of the importance of the project and begin to see how it connects within the entire fabric of the community.

Use a variety of modes in reflecting about potential impacts on individuals and institutions. This can be done through classroom discussions, small groups, individual journaling or dialogue journals, role-plays, songs, and more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts on Individuals</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Service Recipients</th>
<th>Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• New academic skills and knowledge</td>
<td>• Well-being</td>
<td>• Perceptions of agency clients and students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased social skills and confidence</td>
<td>• Relationships to students and community</td>
<td>• Behavior related to the issue addressed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Engagement in the community</td>
<td>• New knowledge, skills, or connections</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased awareness of the issue addressed</td>
<td>• Behavior related to the issue addressed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impacts on Institutions</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Community Partner Organizations</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum</td>
<td>• New ways of working in the community</td>
<td>• Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Partnerships</td>
<td>• New partnerships</td>
<td>• Ways of working with the public</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• School staff perception of students</td>
<td>• New relationship with schools</td>
<td>• Cost savings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased awareness of the issue addressed</td>
<td>• Increased community resources</td>
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</tbody>
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