



*“Through service, I found a community that embraced me; citizenship that was meaningful; the direction that I'd been seeking. Through service, I discovered how my own improbable story fit into the larger story of America.”*

- President Barack Obama

*“Through service learning, students develop as citizens, learn problem solving skills, and experience a sense of social responsibility by engaging in thoughtful action to help their communities.”*

- Service Learning and Assessment:  
A Field Guide for Teachers

RaceBridges For Schools provides over 20 printable lesson plans and teacher resources that seek to promote inclusive behavior and explore diversity and race relations. This teacher resource is about Service Learning. It provides a model of education with ways to build bridges into "other" communities, connecting with people who are different from our students and ourselves. At the heart of Service Learning is the discovery of the human strengths and gifts that unite us, demonstrating that they are far stronger and deeper than what divides us.



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## I. WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service Learning is a process whereby students learn and develop through active participation in organized service experiences that actually meet community needs. Service Learning provides students opportunities to use their acquired skills and knowledge in real life situations in their communities; this enhances teaching by extending student learning into the community and helps foster a sense of caring for others (Burns, 1998).

### ***How is Service Learning different from community service hours?***

Many schools have instituted a graduation requirement of community service hours in which students volunteer to help out an individual or organization in need. There is great value in getting students involved at the local level and experiencing the benefits of contributing to positive change for and with others.

The primary goal of Service Learning is to advance students' understanding of academic content through preparation, action in the community, and personal reflection. Service Learning projects provide opportunities for students to engage with real-life conditions while learning about related theories, processes, history and themselves. When students succeed in Service Learning projects, they demonstrate an increased understanding of the connection between service, citizenship, learning, and personal growth and it is this direct connection with the curriculum that distinguishes Service Learning from community service.

### ***How Does Service Learning Work?***

According to the National Service Learning and Assessment Group, recent advances in understanding the human brain, intelligence, and how we learn indicate that successful schools need to provide:

- Rich, safe learning environments that address multiple realms of intelligence;
- Opportunities for experiential learning to promote construction of knowledge and understanding;
- Opportunities to develop both intelligence and skills through mediated learning;
- Opportunities to transfer learning through reflection; and
- Balanced assessment measures that include portfolios and performance assessments as well as more conventional standardized tests.

Service Learning is gaining prominence as an effective approach for meeting established education standards while developing critical thinking skills and social responsibility.

### ***What are the benefits of Service Learning?***

Today's young students, the Millennials, have a rich relationship with the concept and practice of service. Their understanding of the world has been shaped by 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the economic collapse. Many of them have a familiarity with global issues as a result of surfing the internet from a young age. Recent surveys show people born between 1982 and 2000 are the most civic-minded since the generation of the 1930's and 1940's and that 61% of them say they feel personally responsible for making a difference in the world. Service Learning builds on students' abilities and interest in the world around them while imparting critical skills.

A national study of Service Learning programs documented through *Learn and Serve America* suggests that effective **Service Learning programs improve grades, increase attendance in school, and develop students' personal and social responsibility.**

(<http://www.learnandserve.gov/>)

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF THIS RESOURCE

The Obama Administration has announced a national Call to Service inviting all of us to do our part in contributing to the healthy future of our communities. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which goes into effect on October 1, 2009, provides increased opportunities for Americans of all ages to get involved. What does this emphasis on service across the country mean for our work in the classroom?

This resource looks at the model of Service Learning to bridge the gap between teaching the value of service and meeting your curriculum standards. Although many schools have instituted successful community service programs, the primary goal of Service Learning is to advance students' understanding of academic content through preparation, action in the community, and personal reflection. A Service Learning project can be designed for any subject area and grade level and can involve a single student, a classroom, or an entire school.

### **This unit provides:**

- Brief background information on the model and benefits of Service Learning.
- 5 key concepts of Service Learning with guiding questions.
- Links to other useful online materials.

### **PURPOSE**

- To introduce the core concepts of Service Learning;
- To provide a map for educators building their own Service Learning project;
- To link educators to other resources related to Service Learning;
- To encourage students' engagement with the issues in their local community;
- To assert the importance of ongoing assessment.

### **OUTCOMES**

By the end of a Service Learning project, each student will:

- Have actively participated in a local act of service;
- Demonstrate increased understanding of a local issue including an understanding of how larger systems and history inform present conditions;
- Have reflected in writing and discussion about their role and growth;
- Have assessed their performance and growth in measurable ways.

**3. FIVE KEY STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT****1) Investigate & Research****Identify a topic or issue:**

- What curriculum goals do you need to meet with your class?
- What are you already teaching that has a local application?
- How can you make researching your topic part of the project for your students? (i.e. creating a database, survey, webpage, maps or literary review.)

**Identify a Community Partner:**

- Who is already doing work locally that relates to your material?
- What activities can you and your partner agree on that genuinely advance the community group's work and mission?
- What will success look like for you? For your community partner?
- How will you and your partner work together and what will you accomplish?
- What can you realistically contribute with the time and resources you have?

**2) Plan and Prepare**

- What do your students need to know in advance to understand what they will see and hear onsite?
- Can your community partner come into the classroom to provide some preparation or training?
- What historical context or theoretical underpinnings can you provide for your students in advance?

**3) Take Action**

- How can you structure the day and your assessment tools so that your students are keeping their own records of their experiences on site?
- Are your students clear about their role and shared goals for the day?
- How will you collect your own observations for student assessment?

**4) Reflect on the Experience**

- How will your students privately reflect on this experience? (i.e. journal entries, writing prompts)
- How will your students reflect together as a group? (i.e. small group discussion, large group presentations, storytelling)
- How else will you guide your students to find meaning and connection to their school, their local community, and to the world?
- How do these reflections circle back to and advance your curriculum goals?

**5) Demonstrate Your Results and Celebrate****Evaluate**

- How will you share your accomplishments publicly?  
(i.e. writing to the local newspaper about the experience, creating a blog.)
- How will you plant seeds for further action in the future?  
(i.e. developing an ongoing relationship with the community partner.)
- Who can help you evaluate your project design to make adjustments for the future?

**Celebrate**

- How will you celebrate and spread the message?
- Can you share your findings and experiences with a public audience through a year-end assembly or classroom website?
- How can you plant the seed with your students to continue acts of service even after the completion of the project?

**A NOTE ON ASSESSMENT**

According to the National Service Learning and Assessment Group, the assessment of student learning in Service Learning work is best when it::

- Is complex and multi-dimensional;
- Centers on feedback;
- Is rooted in context (i.e. situational);
- Can be done by the teacher and students;
- Is both informal and formal;
- Is on-going and should occur at every stage of the project.

Service Learning projects can be assessed with the same measures of learning that you use after a lecture or a lab. You can develop a rubric to get at content knowledge, review student writing for insights into their thought processes, or observe students at work to see their demonstration of essential skills.

Keep in mind that much of the students' learning will be demonstrated while they are in the field, working with other students or processing their experiences alone. For these reasons, knowledge growth can be hard to capture. The best way to capture these multiple levels of learning is to develop methods that work for you and allow you to check in on a regular basis.

You could have your students keep a journal along the way while you offer them writing prompts to guide their thinking. You could create a schedule for clear deliverables such as data collected in a certain graph format or photographs documenting the process. Ongoing assessment also ensures your ability to diagnose student needs and as they arise and improve instruction.

**4. AN EXAMPLE OF A SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT****1) Investigate & Research**

**Identify a topic or issue:** The Fire Department has determined that many senior citizens in the community, especially low-income seniors, do not have smoke detectors that work properly putting these seniors at great risk in the event of a fire.

**Identify a Community Partner:** Students can work with a retired senior volunteer program to obtain names and addresses of low-income seniors in their community. Students can also work with members of the Fire Department to improve circumstances for impacted seniors.

**2) Plan and Prepare**

A member of the Fire Department can train the students about how smoke detectors operate and the role they play in saving lives.

If you're teaching a Math class, the students can design a survey to determine how many senior households have functional smoke detectors.

If you're teaching a Science class, the students can investigate the effects of smoke on the human body and create flyers to distribute this information when they make the rounds.

If you're teaching an English class, the students can write articles for community blogs or the local paper to highlight the issue.

**3) Take Action**

Teams of students and firefighters can go into identified homes to administer and install smoke detectors and distribute information flyers.

**4) Reflect on the Experience**

Offer writing prompts for journaling and group discussion time.

**5) Demonstrate Your Results and Celebrate**

**Evaluate:** Using tools that help you to assess student learning as well as progress on the local issue can help determine future steps for this Service Learning project.

**Celebrate:** The students and their community partners can meet to share accounts of the project and allow each person to appreciate the impact of their contributions.

*[adapted from Service Learning and Assessment: A Field Guide for Teachers]*

## 5. ABOUT SERVICE LEARNING

To see more about the specific impacts of Service Learning on participating K-12 students, visit: [http://www.servicelearning.org/instant\\_info/fact\\_sheets/k-12\\_facts/impacts/](http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/k-12_facts/impacts/)

Service learning also strengthens both education and local communities by:

- Building effective collaborative partnerships between schools or colleges and other institutions and organizations;
- Engaging parents and other adults in supporting student learning;
- Meeting community needs through the service projects conducted;
- Providing engaging and productive opportunities for young people to work with others in their community.

In the spring of 2008 the Obama Administration signed **The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act**, which goes into effect October 1, 2009 and increases opportunities for Americans of all ages to serve in their communities.

Some of the highlights of this act that pertain to young people and Service Learning initiatives in school include:

- Introduction of \$500 education awards for rising 6th-12th graders, a Semester of Service program for high school students to engage in service learning, and Youth Empowerment Zones for secondary students and out-of-school youth.
- Increase in AmeriCorps annual positions from 75,000 to 250,000 people by 2017, and focusing that service on education, health, clean energy, veterans, economic opportunity and other national priorities.
- Establishment of a nationwide Call to Service Campaign and a September 11 national day of service, and investing in the nonprofit sector's capacity to recruit and manage volunteers.
- Creation of a Social Innovation Fund to expand proven initiatives and provide seed funding for experimental initiatives, leveraging Federal dollars to identify and grow ideas that are addressing our most intractable community problems.
- Establishment of a Volunteer Generation Fund to award grants to states and nonprofits to recruit, manage, and support volunteers.

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**Additional Online Resources:****Learn and Serve America**

*Supports and encourages Service Learning throughout the United States. By engaging our nation's young people in Service Learning, Learn and Serve America instills an ethic of lifelong community service.*

<http://www.learnandserve.gov/>

**Roots and Shoots**

*Designed for classroom teachers and informal educators, Roots & Shoots strives to help you design a Service Learning project with your students.*

<http://www.rootsandshoots.org/>

**Service-Learning – Student Guides**

*Designed by Robert Schoenfeld, these guides, are tailored to assist different age groups of students in organizing their Service Learning projects, improving their thinking and writing skills, and increasing their test scores.*

<http://servicelearn.com/>

**Connecting Service Learning to the Curriculum: A Workbook for Teachers and Administrators.**

*This is a planning and evaluation manual created by teachers for teachers and contains a solid overview of the Service Learning model including planning guides, extensive resource listing, and examples drawn from the field.*

<http://www.vermontcommunityworks.org/cwpublications/workbook/workbook.html>