

# 4-H Community Service



**"Enthusiasm is contagious.  
Start an epidemic."**

- Don Ward.

## **Planning Your Community Service Project**

*Based on a  
Community  
Service-Learning  
Model*

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

**4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

# What is Community Service?

**“Cleaning up a river bank is service. Reading a book about environmental conservation is learning. Youth reviewing results from water studies, presenting the scientific information to a pollution control agency and discussing the impact these results may have on future pollution control issues and our own behaviors is service-learning.”**

—Angelia Salas, 2006 4-H Teen Peer Mentoring and Service Learning training

## Community Service Learning

“Community service,” a well-known term in community programming, has its own definition: “the voluntary action of an individual or group of individuals without pay.” Examples of this type of service are conducting food drives, participating in adopt-a-highway programs, tutoring, teaching younger children, or raking leaves or shoveling snow for elderly neighbors. It is action in the community, involving community members – young people, adults and families – coming together to work on a common interest or community need.

Combining the definition of community service and learning and putting it in

the context of a community is what community-based service learning is all about. The Michigan Community Service Commission defines it as “activities that meet genuine community needs and require the application of knowledge, skills and reflection time.”

To be effective it is important that **youth** are actively involved in the process. They should be engaged with assessing community needs, designing projects to address community needs, and reflecting before, during and after the service experience. In addition, service activities are designed to meet learning objectives, not just to “do service.” Successful community service-learning projects include the five steps listed below.

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## Five Steps to Community Service

**“Make a career of humanity and you will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.”**

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Note:

The term “community service” has different meanings in different situations. Some may consider it service without pay; however, in most communities, youth and adults are required to do “community service” through the court system as punishment for various criminal offenses. This has led some young people to be reluctant to be identified with community service activities.

Follow these five easy steps and see for yourself that community service-learning can be fun!

### Step 1: Pick a project by determining needs.

**Brainstorm as a Group.** Discuss prominent issues that need attention in your neighborhood and brainstorm ways to address the problems. Prioritize your ideas and select the best one. Think about what you would like to learn from the project.

**Select From the News.** Select stories that have emotional effects on your group. Discuss them together to select your project.

**Conduct a Survey.** Survey members of the community to find out about their greatest concerns. Do a project about which the community residents feel strongly. Perhaps community members will be inspired to help with your project!

**Research the Issues.** Do some web searches or go to the library and find out as much as you can about the problem in your community.

### Step 2: Plan your project and get some publicity.

Good planning is crucial to any community service project. It’s what determines your project’s success. While developing your plan, consider your ultimate goals, who will be helped by your service and if the project is needed. Use the information gathered, to plan the tasks, responsibilities, due dates and other “nuts and bolts” types of components in a community-based service learning project.

For more information on how to plan your project, refer to *YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service-Learning Guide* (4-H 1553), which is available from your county MSU Extension office or on the web.

In addition to good planning, it's important for you to inform the public of your planned community service-learning project. Public awareness can contribute a great deal to your project's success. You can help generate publicity by sending well-written news releases to local radio stations and newspapers. Well-written news releases are concise, but still include "the 5 Ws and an H": who, what, when, where, why and how. Make sure your news release includes a short explanation of your project and basic contact information for someone who can answer questions about it. For more information on writing news releases and gaining publicity for your community service-learning project, see *The Communications Toolkit: Fun, Skill-Building Activities to Do With Kids* (4H1560). The "Toolkit" is available from your county MSU Extension office or the MSU Bulletin Office.

### Step 3: Do the service.

This is the exciting part of the project because you get to put your plan into action. Remember this is a team effort. Everyone in the group should know his or her responsibilities. Do your best and have fun!

### Step 4: Reflect.

As a result of your project, many of your club members should experience and learn new things. It is important that you take the time to let participants share their thoughts and feelings with one another. This process is known as reflection. Take time out at the conclusion of your project for discussion. Encourage members to bring up both positives and negatives. Be sure to have someone taking notes. These tips will be helpful next time!

Consider including a time for the recipients of the service project to reflect on the experience. This doesn't happen in many situations and can be a wonderful learning tool.

#### Tip:

You can order most of the 4-H curriculum mentioned in *Planning Your Community Service Project* from the Michigan State University Extension Educational Materials Distribution Center (the Bulletin Office) at <http://web2.msue.msu.edu/bulletins/mainsearch.cfm>

There are many ways for club members to engage in the reflection process, including participating in group discussion, writing in journals and creating web pages. Think of ideas for building this in before, during and at the end of the project. Reflection can be broken down more specifically to include:

**Sharing:** Discussing what happened. Sharing what actually happened during the event with positive interaction and learning from group members.

**Processing:** Thinking about and sharing what was learned and what was important, including what problems or issues occurred, similar experiences of the group members and how they felt about the experience.

**Generalizing:** Doing more indepth reflection and having the group members think and talk about what life skills they learned during the experience.

**Applying:** Applying what was learned to other experiences. Young people think about how they can use the life skills and knowledge they have learned in other situations in their lives with their peers, their families and in their community. For example, in most group service projects, young people learn to work as team members. This life skill can be used in the classroom or on a job. However, to understand this they need to reflect on their learning.

For lots of cool ideas on ways to reflect on your project, see *Reflection Activity Ideas: For Community Service & Service-Learning Projects* by Jessica Jens, Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin-Extension, 4-H Youth Development. You can download this 20-page booklet at <http://4h.uwex.edu/pubs/index.cfm>

### Step 5 – Celebrate.

Take time to celebrate the completed service project. Be sure to find a way to let club members, key volunteers and funders who made the program successful feel appreciated. Provide refreshments, write a thank-you letter or pass out mementos of the day. "Goody bags" full of small candies with an attached thank-you note from the leaders can be an inexpensive and tasty way to show appreciation.

On the following page, "Your Personal Community Service-Learning Project Guide" is a journal for your young club members to keep track of their community service-learning projects from start to finish. It follows the same five steps previously described. Use the information just given in "Five Steps to Community Service" to help your members work through "Your Personal Community Service-Learning Project Guide."

# **Your Personal Community Service-Learning Project Guide**

## **Your Personal Guide to Making a Plan, Carrying It Out and Discovering What Was Learned**

**Fill in the blanks for success!**

**Project:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Step 1: Pick a Project**

**This is what I want to do:** (Write in one or more sentences specifically what you want to do in your project. Example: I plan to organize club members in a mass planting of daffodil bulbs in various public locations in the city.)

**This is why it is important to the community:** (Example: The flowers will beautify the streets changing the thoughts people have about the community, which can reduce crime.)

Great projects are designed to meet specific objectives. (Check off the ones that you want to meet.)

Through this project I want to:

- Engage in the valuable work of helping others.
- Practice life skills such as organizing, problem-solving and decision-making.
- Increase communication skills.
- Reinforce and further enhance skills and knowledge acquired in 4-H.
- Build teamwork, cooperation and diversity skills
- Develop self-confidence and a sense of empowerment that comes from reaching out and helping others.
- Practice good citizenship by making a difference in the community.
- Gain experience in the work world.
- Also: (please list)

## Step 2: Plan Your Project and Get Some Publicity

An Action Plan may help you to get organized and to develop a time line once you have brainstormed what is needed to complete the project.

Fill out the following Action Plan table to help you get your project organized.

Action Plan			
(Add lines as needed)			
List the tasks, who is responsible to complete them, what is needed and when the tasks need to be completed. Make copies for team members so they remember what they have agreed to do! Post a master copy in your meeting space, so the team members can monitor their progress.			
What are the tasks to be completed?	Who will do them?	What resources are needed?	When do they need to get done?

*Studies show that nine out of ten people say “yes” when someone asks them to donate their time.*

**Ask yourself the question – what problems might I run into? List those possible problems below:**

## Step 3: Do the Service

Take lots of pictures and enjoy the day, knowing that the team has planned for every possible challenge, and when the day is over, close it with some wrap-up questions.

### What Have I Forgotten?

Leave enough time to gather necessary materials, to pick up last-minute supplies and to enjoy the energy that comes from doing these types of projects. There will always be unexpected challenges that come up on the day of the event, and a little humor in dealing with them helps the team members deal with the stress of the day.

## **Step 4: Reflect**

Look back over your experience and complete the following.

**This is what I did:**

**This is what I learned:**

**I helped:**

**I think that the project made a difference because:**

**My thoughts and feelings as I did the project were:**

**Next time I would:**

**As I look back at the objectives that I chose in Step 1, those that I accomplished were:**

**I would apply the skills that I learned from the project in this way:**

**Overall I feel that the project:**

## **5. Celebrate**

Take the time to celebrate your accomplishments.

**My community service project celebration included the following people or groups:**

**What we did to celebrate was:**

**This is how I can share what I learn:**

Adapted with permission from *Plan It Sheet* (4H1501). 4-H Youth Development, East Lansing:Michigan State University Extension, 1991.