

TAKING ACTION

AGENDA

- Working
- Fundraising
- Special Considerations
- The Big Day
- Celebrate
- Project Briefs

Your students should now begin tackling the many tasks required to make their service learning project a reality, as outlined in their action plan. Whether that work spans just a few weeks or an entire marking period, it is important for students to track their progress throughout the process and to keep their commitment to the project active. The following are some strategies and methods for helping your students to track their work and stay committed to the project. Because it is possible that some projects will require students to raise funds or pursue in-kind donations of materials or services, this section of the module will also outline strategies for fundraising and seeking donations.

Tracking Progress

Tracking students' progress is a very important part of any service learning project. Use the "Tracking Sheet" activity sheet to do so. This sheet is designed to be used throughout the course of the project to track students' progress as they complete the tasks they've outlined in their action plan. If you have not done so previously, introduce students to this tool as a means of recording the work they have completed, when they completed it, and when additional tasks are scheduled for completion. Tell students to regularly update their lists and schedules, including those originating from their action plan, as both a means of tracking progress and a way of creating records of their work.

Explain the concept of numbering and dating the different versions of their schedules and checklists to avoid confusing old and new versions. Suggest that students keep these tracking sheets in a project notebook or folder.

Another way to track progress throughout the project is to visually record students' work. If a camera or video recorder is available, encourage students to capture images of their work as they proceed during the project. You may wish to have students keep a project journal, in which they both describe the work they are doing and personally reflect upon their experiences.

Work Ethic

For young people and adults alike, it can be difficult to maintain enthusiasm and keep interest high over the course of an entire project. Inevitably, there are obstacles and challenges, high points and low points, and times during the process when it can be tough to stay motivated. However, the concept of having a strong work ethic—which includes honoring commitments and working to meet deadlines—is one with which students should become familiar. Like any project, a successful service learning project requires a sustained commitment from all involved. The following strategies can help your students to stay enthusiastic throughout their service learning experience.

Student-to-Student Motivation

This strategy requires managing the group dynamic so that students keep one another motivated, help their classmates remain enthusiastic, and hold one another to commitments and deadlines. This strategy will foster the feeling that the project is a team effort; that there is a responsibility to the team; and that losing motivation, not completing tasks, or not meeting deadlines fails classmates and teammates. One way to help students keep each other motivated is to have them create team banners or slogans.

When to Step In

Sometimes, student commitment to a project weakens and their work ethic begins to wane. Deadlines aren't met, tasks aren't fully completed, and general disinterest sets in. You may need to step in, especially if some students are feeling frustrated because they are keeping their commitments and feeling let down by their classmates. If this happens, it may be an indication that the entire group needs to review the action plan and evaluate their reasons for initiating this project.

To remedy this, you might invite a community leader to remind students of how their project will have long-term benefits. You might also have students research college scholarships that are given for school service projects. Another option is to spend a class period doing team-building activities to invigorate students and remind them that working together can and should be fun.

Fundraising

It is not uncommon for a project to require more resources than those that are readily available. However, locating those resources through fundraising and seeking in-kind donations can be an excellent opportunity for students to practice their communication and goal setting skills. The identification and procurement of donations requires carefully crafted letters, phone conversations, a step-by-step approach, and follow-up.

Fundraising can be fun, but it can also be difficult. Avoid projects that rely on fundraising to procure the majority of materials. Encourage students to reevaluate their plans if too much fundraising is involved.

Raising Money

Ensure that students understand the concept of financial philanthropy as an agreement between two parties: one party furnishes money in order for the other to concentrate on providing a service. Encourage students to consider their fundraising efforts as a nonprofit venture—one that generates enough money to provide a service but does not focus on financial gain.

You may wish to try the following fundraisers:

- Bake sale
- Book fair
- Dance-a-thon or walk-a-thon
- Selling balloons or candy for holidays (e.g., Valentine's Day, Christmas)
- Crazy clothes day (students pay \$1 to wear crazy clothing or hats)
- Car wash

In-Kind Donations

Often, it is easier for students to simply have materials donated instead of raising the money to buy them. Explain to students that in-kind donations are donations of goods or services, instead of financial donations.

Local businesses are usually eager to get involved with young people who are contributing to the community. They want to both support students' efforts and to have their business name associated with a constructive effort.

In-kind donations can be solicited for a variety of project needs and plans. Suggestions include the following:

- Materials and prizes from hardware stores, craft stores, general goods stores, supermarkets, sporting goods stores, toy stores, and restaurants
- Advertising from local television and radio stations, newspapers, local business newsletters, and church bulletins
- Workspace from hotels, colleges and universities, and community organizations
- Services from transportation companies, printing companies, and advertising agencies

In order to solicit donations, explain to students that they will need to contact the people or businesses whose help they would like by telephone, in writing, or both. Their communications should explain the details of their project and clearly state what benefits the potential donor will receive by becoming involved (e.g., opportunities for positive media attention, recommendations from students, being part of a constructive effort, and so on). Remind students to treat these communications with great care and respect in order to achieve the best possible results.

Special Considerations

There are many elements to the service learning project, and within those elements are many details. This is perhaps most evident in two specific tasks: the collection of materials and the arrangement of transportation. The following section outlines some strategies and special considerations to take into account for these tasks.

Materials

Ensure that those responsible understand that managing the project's materials means more than simply finding out how to acquire the articles needed. Additional considerations include record keeping, storage, and maintenance of the materials.

Record Keeping

In their action plan, students included a checklist of the materials they needed and indicated how they planned to procure each item. Even if their project requires few materials, it is still important for them to keep track of the following:

- What's needed
- What's been acquired
- What needs to be returned
- Where things are stored

Encourage your students to add columns to the materials checklist in their action plan reflecting the above issues. They should use this extended checklist to keep records of the project's materials. This checklist should be updated weekly.

Storage

Remind students to consider not only the amount of space needed to store their materials, but also issues of safety and maintenance. They should consider questions such as the following:

- Do you have permission to store things where you'd like to keep them?
- Is your storage area in a secure place, where you know the materials won't be disturbed?
- Are there any materials that must be specially stored (e.g., paint, cleaning solvents, breakable materials, perishable items)?
- How long can you use the space to store materials?

Encourage students to contact staff members within the school who are familiar with these issues, such as the maintenance crew or the cafeteria staff. Remind students to consider them as business contacts and treat them accordingly. Also, remind them to always put requests in writing.

Maintenance

Ask students to imagine what will happen when the project has been completed and they have to clean up. They should consider questions such as the following:

- Will there be any trash left over from the materials used? How will the trash be disposed of? Are there any special procedures to be followed (e.g., separating recyclables, using special trash bags or bins)?
- What will be done with leftover materials?
- Are there any borrowed materials that must be returned immediately after the project is completed? How will students get materials where they need to go on time?
- What kind of cleanup will be required? Are there any potential messes or spills that must be prepared for? Will any particular cleaning supplies be needed in order to adequately clean up these spills?

Explain to students that materials, maintenance, and cleanup should be considered integral parts of the project, not afterthoughts. As a general rule, project sites should be left as clean or cleaner than they were found, and commitments to return borrowed items should be honored without fail. Remind students not to let a successful project be marred by misgivings about an inadequate cleanup job, or the loss or untimely return of borrowed items.

Transportation

Arranging transportation for a service learning project can be a project in itself. Even if students are not planning a project that takes place off school grounds, transportation will likely be needed in order to take trips off-site for meetings or collection of materials.

The process for securing transportation often varies from district to district—and sometimes from school to school—but there are questions everyone must consider when arranging transportation:

- **Money:** Is there a school budget that dictates how many times buses or vans can be made available for student trips? If so, are there budgetary constraints?
- **Chaperones:** Is there a required chaperone-to-student ratio? What are the requirements to be a chaperone? Whom can you recruit to act as a chaperone?
- **Space:** How many people need to be transported (including teachers, students, chaperones, etc.)? How many buses or vans will be needed to accommodate them? How much space will be needed to transport materials?
- **Time:** What time is the project scheduled to begin? What time do you need to arrive in order to have sufficient time to set up? Until what time will you need to stay in order to have sufficient time to clean up?
- **Paperwork:** Are there specific forms that must be filled out when requesting transportation? Who needs to complete and sign them? To whom should they be submitted?
- **Availability:** Are there buses available for the dates and times that your group needs them?
- **Alternatives:** If transportation cannot be arranged through your school, are there other options (e.g., parents, private bus services, public transportation) that can satisfy your transportation needs?

Though students are responsible for handling the details of their service learning project, you may need to spearhead the process of securing transportation. Encourage students to solicit your help on their behalf, just as they would if they were soliciting the help and participation of an outside partner.

The Big Day

Every moment and detail leading up to the “big day” has been important, and those moments and details—when added together—actually require more time and energy than the event itself! This module reflects that same phenomenon. Many pages of explanation regarding planning have preceded this one, and it seems as though the “big day” requires less explanation than all the sections that came before it.

For days, weeks, or perhaps months, your students have worked to plan and prepare a project that will, for some of them, be their first experience in making a contribution to their communities. They have practiced and applied their communication and teamwork skills, as well as their time management and decision making skills. They have also shown themselves to be competent writers and record keepers. They have undoubtedly encountered obstacles along the way, but they have found ways to address them and to persevere.

Your students will likely feel a mix of excitement and nervousness on the day that their project takes place. They will likely look to you for help and encouragement as their teacher and mentor. If they sense in you a feeling of pride and calm, they will be able to effectively perform their tasks that day and enjoy themselves.

Tips for the Day of the Project

- Don't forget to eat! Arrange for snacks or lunch if you will be away from school during regular meal times.
- Take pictures! Bring cameras and record as much of the day as possible. Consider appointing a few students to be the day's photographers. Sometimes, convenience stores or large drugstore chains will donate disposable cameras that are still on the shelves after their expiration dates have passed. The cameras still work, but cannot be sold.
- Invite others to take part! If appropriate, formally invite local political and community leaders, your school principal, your district superintendent, or others who may be interested in seeing the results of students' work.
- If appropriate, demonstrate school spirit! Make a sign explaining who you are and hang it at the site of your project. Wear clothing in your school's colors, or decorate your own T-shirts.
- If things fall apart—for example, if weather or administrative issues impede or halt the project entirely—help your students to remember that it's the process and commitment that are most important. Even an unfulfilled project does not diminish the commitment to community that your students have demonstrated. Allow students time to feel sad or angry that they were not able to fulfill their plans, and provide them with an opportunity to discuss those feelings. However, make sure that students ultimately understand that their work has not been in vain because of what they have learned from the service learning project.

Celebrate

You and your students have put a great deal of time and energy into this project, and you deserve to reward yourselves for your efforts. Whether the outcome of the project was exactly what you had hoped for or not, this is a time to celebrate. The celebration can be whatever your class decides is enjoyable and in line with school regulations. You may choose to watch a video of your project, watch a video about helping others, or create a photo album to tell your service learning story. Do you have the time and money to go to an amusement park, go to a sporting event, or have a picnic in a nearby park? Be creative in how you choose to celebrate your success. The limits for celebration should only be those set by the school and by the district—other than those, the sky should be the limit!

Project Briefs

This module would not be complete without some brief descriptions of exemplary service learning projects. We hope these either serve as models of what can be accomplished in a project of this sort or inspire your class to organize a similar project.

- A group of high school students in New Jersey began their participation with a local charitable organization at the start of the school year. They decided that two of the most pressing issues facing youths in their area were drugs and teen pregnancy. The teacher provided students with a list of local charitable organizations, which she obtained from the internet. The description of one such organization appealed to the students as a way to address the two issues. The organization is a home for “boarder babies.” These babies, who have been abandoned, neglected, exposed to drugs and/or HIV, are healthy enough to go home from the hospital, but have no homes to go to. The organization posted their wish list on the internet, and the students decided that they would raise money through bake sales to purchase items from the list and deliver those items to the organization on Make a Difference Day. The students spent Make a Difference Day caring for the babies and learning about their needs. The students continued to support the organization through bake sales and donations. They donated over \$500 and many hours of their time.
- A middle school class in Michigan learned about lead poisoning contracted from house paint. The students contacted the local Department of Health to obtain a list of houses in the area that needed to be repainted in order to not be condemned. The students visited nearby homes and offered to repaint a house owned by an elderly couple. The students had the paint donated, recruited the assistance of a professional painter, and worked for a week to complete the painting.
- A high school math class in Arizona noticed that the elementary school yard looked uninviting and neglected. Students researched the developmental stages of elementary school students and invited a mathematician and an elementary school teacher to be guest speakers. The students obtained permission to paint a mural of geometric shapes and designs on the wall that faced the school yard and created math games for the students to play during recess. Once a month, students supervised recess at the elementary school.