Planning a Service-Learning Project

Each service-learning project is unique because it is driven by the needs of the community and the skills and giving passions of the learners. This framework will guide you as you design the service-learning project with the following stages of development: *investigation, planning, action, reflection,* and *demonstration.*

Stage	Description	Action
Investigation and Identifying a Need	Ideas to investigate may arise from a lesson or from an observation or personal interest/giving passion outside of the classroom. **Hint:** The project is more meaningful if planning and investigation are driven by youth voice.	Brainstorm participant interests and community needs. Identify and confirm a need that can be addressed in a big or small way by youth action. Gather statistics and identify the exact need. Establish beginning benchmarks or statistics to be compared with ending benchmarks in order to measure impact of their action. Investigation may lead participants to discard a project idea because they discover there isn't a need or the project doesn't suit the time or skill parameters.
Planning and Setting Measurable Goals	Participants brainstorm possible steps, resources, learning skills required, shared responsibilities, and timeframe.	Ask the following questions while planning the service-learning project: What will we accomplish? (Benefits to activists; benefits to community) Who will we work with? (Brainstorm possible partnerships, community helpers, or nonprofit organizations for the project.) How can we engage a diverse group of people, talents, and perspectives? What needs to be done to accomplish our goal? Who will do what? (Youth roles, facilitator role, role of partners) What training, skills, or sensitivity are required for us or our partners? What resources do we need to be successful and how will we get them? (Resources, permission, tools, transportation, money) How long will each step take?
Action	Take action to volunteer, serve, or be an advocate for someone or something.	Implement the plan and reflect on progress along the way. Challenge youth to apply academic or career skills. Look for opportunities to practice problem solving, teamwork, and other life skills. Document the action through pictures, videos, interviews, journals, etc.

Reflection	Reflect on the process before, during, and after the action phase.	To vary the style of reflection, use journals; discussion; songs, skits, and games; art projects; and diagrams. Answer the following questions: What do we hope to accomplish? How are we doing? How do I feel about the process and project? What could we do to make it better? Are we communicating with our partner? How do we feel about our process and plans? What is the measureable impact of our action? (Compare statistics collected in the investigation phase with statistics collected after the service-learning project.) What is the value given back to the community in time and treasure? Should we continue the project in some form? This is a time for self-assessment and teacher evaluation of curriculum skills.
Demonstration and Celebration	Demonstrate to a wider audience the steps, impact, and outcomes of the project. Celebrate the success.	Brainstorm ideas for sharing the project with others. Think about including other youth, family members, and members of the community. Involve the community partner in the planning of the demonstration and celebration. Invite the media to get involved in observing a formal presentation or by publishing an article or letter of advocacy.