

Involving Youth in Service Learning



Because philanthropy includes giving of one's time and talent as well as treasure, YACs are encouraged to support efforts that involve young people in service learning through volunteering. Many YACs require that youth be involved in the preparation of grant applications and that the project seeking funding have a youth volunteer component. In addition, as part of Best Practices it is recommended that YACs be involved in at least one service learning project a year.

As a result of its needs assessment, a YAC is often able to tie such a project to its identified top priorities and one of its grantees. YAC members often use these types of projects as a way of introducing their friends and peers to the YAC. This can be a useful recruiting tool that encourages YACs to look beyond their immediate friends for YAC involvement.

One YAC took on the assignment of developing an asset map of county resources as a tool to help develop quality out-of-school programs — one of their top priorities. Another YAC sponsored a County wide Youth Leadership Conference with a Challenge Day for area high school students, also tied to their grantmaking priorities.

YACs support the service learning projects of youth-service organizations and schools—usually employing one of three options.

Option I: YACs collaborate with youth-service organizations in which structures already exist for allowing participants to do service. These collaborations allow more flexibility for YACs as to where and when they participate in service activities.

Option II: This option incorporates community service into school based programming. YACs work with service clubs, multi-class participants, or a volunteer clearinghouse in which a program manager coordinates service opportunities for students who express a willingness to volunteer. The program coordinator works with local agencies to set up service placements, orients and trains volunteers, and develops school wide campaigns around the issue of service learning participation by young people. A great resource for this option is [Learning to Give](#). This program seeks to perpetuate a civil society by, educating children about the independent sector, developing behavior and philanthropic experience and, stimulating private voluntary citizen action for the common good. This site can help teachers in your community combine philanthropy in their lesson plans.

Option III: A blending of the two previous approaches, this option emphasizes collaboration with both the school system and youth service organizations—which discourages duplication of service projects.

The most important aspect of a service learning project is that the tasks assigned or created for volunteers are significant and challenging—truly meeting a community need. Whichever option, or combination chosen, service learning projects need to be structured and well supervised. A project can be designed to take a few hours over several days as opposed to a large commitment of time on one day. The project should also take into account the developmental needs of the youth participants, such as education, basic skills, employability, and leadership.

In addition, YAC members benefit from a time of reflection and evaluation about the project to discuss and identify the problem worked on, realize the effect of their service, and understand the broad implications of the unmet need.

YAC members often use these questions in reflecting about a proposed service learning project:

- What exactly is the youth need being addressed in the community? Why is it a need, and what is the extent of the need?
- What difference does it make to me when I help meet this youth need? What positive or negative feelings do I have when I am involved in providing the service, and why?
- What city, state and federal policies relate to this youth issue? What could the YAC suggest to improve the laws or regulations pertaining to this issue?

Tools that can help facilitate YAC member reflection on a service project include:

- Journal-keeping
- Analyzing and problem-solving
- Observational exercises

Whatever tools and processes are used, discuss what went on during the service project, why the project was chosen, and what ways members may have grown as a result of the experience. Many YACs report that the group works better and is able to look at issues from different perspectives as a result of participating in a service project.

Keep records of the hours contributed by YAC members. This information may be included in letters of reference and any other forms of recognition that the foundation might offer. Finally, if not already on file, require parents or guardians to sign permission forms, waivers and liability forms that include basic information on the service project, including transportation, the volunteer site's insurance coverage, and safety issues. Clear expectations and safety procedures should be discussed with and distributed to participants and service project-site coordinators. All YAC members and other youth involved need to understand the importance of a safe learning environment. If there is ever any question about these issues, the foundation's lawyer should be consulted.

Season's of Service

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	http://www.mlkday.org/
National Youth Service Day	http://www.ysa.org/nysd/
National Volunteer Week	http://www.pointsoflight.org/NVW/nvw.cfm
Join Hands Day	http://www.joinhandsday.org
Make a Difference Day	http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/index.html
National Family Volunteer Day	http://www.pointsoflight.org/organizations/nfvd.cfm