

# SERVICE LEARNING IN ACTION



Extension  
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DEPARTMENT OF  
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SERVICES**



# INTRODUCTION: EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH SERVICE LEARNING



Welcome to *Service Learning in Action!* This curriculum and workbook series is designed to teach youth key service learning concepts through engaging lessons and an easy-to-follow workbook. Together, they guide youth and their adult mentors through each step of the process, while exploring best practices and key Service Learning standards.

This curriculum empowers youth to take action and implement service learning projects using the IPARD model (Investigation, Planning, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration). The goal is to:

- Offer bite-sized, 15–20-minute lessons that focus on applying concepts and soft skills, making service learning meaningful and manageable.
- Provide a practical, action-driven workbook to guide youth in planning and executing service learning projects.
- Align each section with the stages of the IPARD model, ensuring structured learning and real-world application.

### WHY SERVICE LEARNING?

*Service learning empowers youth by combining real-world problem-solving with intentional learning and reflection. It strengthens essential skills such as leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking while fostering deeper connections between youth and their communities.*

*By empowering youth voice, this curriculum values youth as experts, promotes partnerships with adults, and creates a culture of belonging, purpose, and hope.*

*Service learning offers the following benefits too:*

- Youth by offering real-world engagement.
- Community by providing fresh perspectives.
- Society by empowering youth to take ownership of their role in shaping the future.

*Our goal is to change the culture by helping youth see themselves as changemakers - individuals who recognize problems and take action to create positive, lasting solutions.*



*“Service Learning provides students with opportunities to connect and apply learning and skills from classroom content to address unmet needs that exist in their community.” -**John Pasquale***

By guiding youth through meaningful service learning experiences, we help them find their “why”—the purpose that drives them to make a lasting impact.

# FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

## WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

### Simple Distinction:

- Service is about offering help.
- Service learning is a hands-on approach where youth collaborate with others to address real community needs while building leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills through meaningful, reflective experiences.

### Research Definition:

- Service-learning is an approach to teaching and learning in which youth use academic and civic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs. Three phrases in this definition are particularly significant:
  - "An approach to teaching and learning" - Service learning is a collaborative effort involving youth, their mentors, facilitators and community leaders. Youth are not expected to do everything alone, nor should it be a project designed without their input.
  - "Academic and civic knowledge and skills" - Service learning builds leadership, teamwork, civic engagement, and personal development through hands-on experiences.
  - "Genuine community need" - Youth must investigate and understand their community before deciding how to serve, ensuring their efforts are both culturally respectful and community-driven. The project should be meaningful and relevant to both youth and the community.

There is a substantial amount of research on the significant value and impact of service learning. It has a profound impact on both youth and communities, developing essential life skills and promoting civic engagement. Research highlights its value in improving academic performance, enhancing personal growth, and developing leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.



Jacoby (1996) and Billig (2000) emphasize that service learning bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world issues, allowing students to engage actively in their communities. Eyler and Giles (1999) further argue that service learning cultivates empathy, responsibility, and social justice. According to Toole, J., & Toole, P. (2003), service learning encourages youth to reflect on their actions, which not only builds confidence and competence but also strengthens their leadership abilities. They suggest that, "through service learning, youth develop a deeper sense of ownership of their community and their role in shaping it."

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) underscores the importance of empowering youth voice in service learning, noting that it helps build a culture of belonging and responsibility, where youth feel capable of creating meaningful change. Through service learning, young people are encouraged to develop a strong sense of agency, critical thinking skills, and a lifelong commitment to service.



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# THE IPARD MODEL: YOUR ROADMAP TO SERVICE LEARNING



The IPARD approach is a youth-centered, inquiry-driven method for service learning. IPARD stands for Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration. This cyclical process can occur once within a service-learning experience or be repeated throughout a project's duration. By focusing on issues of their choosing and generating their own questions, young people increase their engagement, ownership, and contributions. This approach helps them build valuable skills and deepen their understanding. (NYLC)



### Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) developed a set of key concepts that are essential for making service learning meaningful and effective. These standards help ensure that projects are not only educational but also have a real, positive impact on your community and your personal growth. For more information, visit the NYLC Service Learning Standards page: <https://nylc.org/k-12-standards/>

- Meaningful Service
- Link to Learning
- Duration & Intensity
- Reflection

- Youth Voice
- Progress Monitoring
- Diversity
- Partnerships

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# THE VISION FOR THE WORKBOOK & CURRICULUM

Our goal was to create something simple and action-oriented that empowers youth to use their voices and truly lead a service learning experience. It began with the idea of creating bite-sized, practical lessons that facilitate youth-led discussions throughout the service learning process. We recognized the need for a workbook that both youth and adults can easily pick up and apply the IPARD model and Service Learning standards to plan a successful service learning experience—whether for a small project with a few participants or a large service event involving hundreds of people.



### The 8 Sections

We broke down the IPARD model into 8 actionable steps that connect to real-world service experiences.

- Perspective - Getting in the Service Learning Mindset and identifying your goals
- Identify the need - Figuring out together what the genuine need is in your community and how to address it
- Resources - Identifying and gathering the resources you will need to do the service
- Collaborate - Brainstorming and selecting the people you want to partner with for the service
- Plan - Planning and preparing for the service event
- Action - Coordinating and leading the service event
- Reflect - Reflect on how the service went, if you accomplished your goals, and what you learned through the process
- Demonstrate - Demonstrate to others the outcome or effect of the service

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” - **Margaret J. Wheatly**

## HOW THE CURRICULUM & WORKBOOK WORK TOGETHER

To help youth confidently complete each workbook page, they first need to understand some key ideas. That’s why we created 2–4 short concept lessons and one hands-on apply lesson for each of the 8 sections.

- For example, in the Identify a Need section, youth need to understand basic human needs, so we include a lesson on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. They also need to learn how to brainstorm and share ideas confidently, so we include a lesson on brainstorming. Finally, the apply lesson helps facilitators guide youth in setting up and reflecting on their service experience to use the workbook effectively.
- This curriculum teaches youth important skills and ideas to help them plan and carry out successful service learning projects. The workbook includes thought-provoking questions and discussion prompts for each section, guiding youth in understanding what’s needed to plan a service event.

The workbook can be used on its own, but it's even more valuable when paired with the curriculum. Together, they give youth the tools and knowledge to succeed in their service learning goals.



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# HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM AND WORKBOOK

### Simple Action-Based Lessons

- These lessons are designed to be short, 15-20 minute, activity-based lessons that are simple enough for youth to easily facilitate. Each concept is taught through a fun, hands-on activity, followed by a reflection discussion. The apply lesson uses the worksheet as the main activity, ideal for planning a real service experience, but it can also be used for a practice scenario.

### How to use the Workbook and Curriculum

- The lessons and worksheets can be used together, in order, or separately based on the needs of the youth. This curriculum is flexible to fit your needs. If you want to start a meeting with a quick 15-minute game, a concept lesson is perfect. If you have a big event coming up, you can use a relevant worksheet to help plan without needing to go through a full apply lesson. You can also teach several concept lessons in one meeting, or spread them out. If you focus on the apply lesson, use it to help youth fill out the workbook and plan how to meet community needs. We recommend doing just one workbook page per meeting to get the most from the apply lesson.

### The Facilitator Toolbox

- Each lesson includes boxes with facilitation tips—your toolbox for success! These tips are there to help you prepare and deliver the lessons smoothly. You'll find ideas for teaching a mix of younger and older youth, adapting lessons to meet different needs, and asking questions that help explore the topic further. You'll also get tips on how to check understanding and make sure everyone is following along. Our goal is to help you feel confident and ready to guide your youth in a fun and meaningful way.



# ADAPTING LESSONS FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES

*This guide gives you strategies for adapting service learning lessons to meet the needs of all students, no matter their learning styles, abilities, or backgrounds. These tips make sure lessons are accessible and engaging for everyone.*

### **Supporting Diverse Learning Styles & Abilities**

- **Visual, Tactile, & Assistive Tech:** Offer materials in different formats, like large print or tactile maps. Use diagrams, graphic organizers, and digital tools to help students express themselves.
- **Verbal & Communication:** Use brainstorming, sentence starters, and allow different ways to present ideas—like recordings or discussions
- **Cognitive & Processing:** Provide extra processing time, step-by-step guidance, and color-coded instructions. Offer different ways to reflect—like writing, talking, or visual storytelling.

### **Adapting for Time, Group Size & Special Needs**

- **Scheduling & Planning:** Use flexible formats like checklists, digital tools, or visual schedules. Break tasks into smaller steps and encourage teamwork in different ways.
- **Mobility & Physical Accessibility:** Adapt activities for all abilities, offering seated options or assistive tools. Recognize efforts with alternative methods, like appreciation boards or recorded messages.
- **Group Participation:** Adjust team sizes to match energy levels. Assign roles based on individual strengths, with ways to contribute verbally, non-verbally, or digitally. Modify activities while keeping all participants engaged.
- **Younger vs. Older Participants:** Simplify instructions for younger students; introduce complex problem-solving for older youth. Tailor activities—young learners focus on details, older ones analyze leadership and teamwork.

### **Making Service Learning Relevant**

- Adapt activities to fit different communities by adjusting timelines, group structures, and engagement methods. Tailor the experience to address the community's unique challenges, and connect it to the personal experiences of the students, showing how it relates to the bigger picture



NYCL - Teaching Tool: Stages of Service Learning  
[https://prod-nylcorg.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/08105558/Investigation-Teacher-Tool\\_21.pdf](https://prod-nylcorg.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/08105558/Investigation-Teacher-Tool_21.pdf)

NYCL - The Iparad Framework  
<https://prod-nylcorg.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/08105604/IPARDFramework-Jul-2016.pdf>

ServiceLearning Standards for Quality Practice  
<https://nylc.org/k-12-standards/>

# FINAL TIPS AND ENCOURAGEMENT



Facilitators play a crucial role in inspiring youth to engage in meaningful service learning. This curriculum is designed to empower students to take action, develop leadership skills, and create lasting change in their communities.

Service learning is more than just helping—it is a structured approach that combines civic engagement, teamwork, and real-world application. By guiding youth through the IPARD model (Investigation, Planning, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration), you help them connect their learning to community needs in a meaningful way.

Flexibility and reflection are key. Each lesson is designed to be adaptable to different learning styles, abilities, and community contexts. Whether you're working with a small group or a large project, encourage students to think critically, collaborate, and take ownership of their service experience.

Most importantly, this curriculum is action-driven. It provides practical tools and step-by-step guidance to ensure your service learning experience is engaging, reflective and applied. By engaging with this process, students will see themselves as changemakers—capable of identifying challenges and leading solutions that benefit both their communities and their own growth.

Facilitators, your role is to spark curiosity, guide discovery, and encourage students to find their “why” in service learning. Through your leadership, you help them build confidence, agency, and a lifelong commitment to making a difference.



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# REFERENCES

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# RESOURCES

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National Youth Leadership Council: <https://nylc.org/service-learning/>

Points of Light: <https://www.pointsoflight.org/youthandfamily/>

ServiceLearning Standards for Quality Practice: <https://nylc.org/k-12-standards/>

