

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

Good service project ideas match real community needs to the interests and skill level of a potential group of volunteers. Good ideas often come from service coordinators, volunteers, teachers, agencies, and other people in the community. The resources in this packet are designed to help the reader generate ideas for service projects, both episodic and on-going, that meet community needs in a creative way. They are meant to start the process of creative thinking, not to provide exhaustive information. Remember to consider the skills, limitations, and motivations of those who will do the service, as well as the needs of the community.

Involving potential participants in the creation of the service project can increase the chances that activities meet real community needs while providing a rewarding leadership experience for young people. There are many methods to identifying community needs, so remember to consider your time frame, and the strengths of your group. Here are a few ideas for identifying community needs.

- ✗ **Mind Mapping**
- Brainstorm issues and pick one to focus on; then brainstorm the cause, effects, where more information is available, and possible project ideas
- ✗ **Conduct a survey**
- Ask young people what their greatest concerns are or give them a list to rank
- ✗ **Hold a community forum**
- Have an open microphone to share community problems and dreams
- ✗ **Interview senior citizens**
- Ask seniors about community changes (for the better and worse), fears, and sources of community pride
- ✗ **Three wishes**
- Ask what people would wish for in their community given unlimited power/resources
- ✗ **Watch the news**
- Keep an eye out for stories that point to community problems that can be addressed
- ✗ **Utopian towns**
- What was your favorite community to visit? Why? How does your town differ?
- ✗ **I have a dream...**
- Read Martin Luther King's well-known speech and think about your own dreams for your community
- ✗ **Group goals**
- Identify the goals of your group and then research the goals of other groups around you are trying to do
- ✗ **Ask legislators**
- ✗ **60-minute search**
- Divide a map of your community into parts and have group members search their areas for needed improvement. Mark "hot spots" on the map and discuss area needs

DETERMINING NEEDS

Before you decide **how** you will determine the needs in your community consider the following questions:

- Who will conduct the process?
- Is this a long-term or short-term project?
- Who are your partner and what do they know?
- How much time do I have to decide?
- How can the process help young people learn?

WHERE CAN I VOLUNTEER?

- | | |
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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Centers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YMCA/YWCA |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Organizations | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hospitals |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nursing Homes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Universities |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Boys and Girls Clubs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Zoo |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prison | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Food Banks |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Salvation Army | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museums |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recycle Centers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Police Department |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Key Club | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lions Club |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Child and Family Services | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> United Ways |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Red Cross | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Runaway Shelters |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Junior Leagues | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fire Department |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Schools | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City Park and Playground |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Libraries | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nature Centers |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Humane Society | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4-H |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nonprofit agencies | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sexual Abuse Centers |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Department of Human Services | |

When deciding which needs to address within the community, be sure to check with local Volunteer Centers and other local nonprofit organizations to see how they are working to address problems in the community. They may already have service projects set up that groups can get involved in. Working with Volunteer Centers and other local agencies can also help keep your work coordinated with a larger effort, rather than duplicating something already being done.

AGE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

Successfully uncovering age appropriate and meaningful service opportunities for young people, lays the foundation for a productive and positive experience for everyone involved

in a service project. The Points of Light Foundation has three resource packets on age appropriate activities (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12). Another good source of ideas for age appropriate service ideas for younger youth is Kids Care Club at www.kidscare.org. This organization has a listing of club projects designed for elementary school aged children, as well as background education on the issues addressed by projects. National Kids Care Week is celebrated the third week in October.

Here are some examples of age appropriate activities for 5-7 year-olds...

- Working in local parks to clean up litter; children can benefit from working in pairs, being outside, using their energy to help the environment, and learning about responsibility. After the clean up sitting in a circle and counting the amount of trash can help teach counting skills and provide an opportunity for reflection.
- Completing arts and craft projects and giving them to seniors in the community can provide an educational experience for children, while uplifting the spirits of seniors. Proper reflection can broaden children's perspectives and teach them lessons in human relations.

Here are some examples of age appropriate activities for 8-10 year-olds...

- Adapt-a- _____ projects, for example adopting sections of rivers, highways, beach, or park trail to offer an on-going service opportunity. Consider partnering with other organizations such as Volunteer Center or schools and involve adults.
- Have a read-a-thon project; offer older children the opportunity to pair up with and read to younger children. This activity helps encourage children's creativity and gets parents to use the library. Older and younger children can also do activities related to the books they've read, have the older child plan them.

As children begin growing into young adults and begin to have more service experience, it is important to provide opportunities for young adults to be involved in planning projects, assessing community needs and recruiting volunteers. Having an adult to facilitate the process, ensure barriers are addressed, and access resources creates an environment where young adults can really get creative about addressing some of the problems they see in the community. At times young adults will need help uncovering potential partners, as well as advocating for projects, but let them do it. At this stage of development it is important to provide support and be realistic about what can be accomplished without extinguishing creativity and energy.

TIPS ON FREQUENTLY USED METHODS TO GET YOUTH INVOLVED

Working with other Youth

- Be clear and firm about the rules
- Make sure ratio of volunteers to small children is kept low
- Do not let kids out of sight
- Be sure volunteers are supervised
- Partner with local schools and head starts

Running Drives

- Collect only what you contracted to collect
- Check local health codes
- Designate volunteers to collect items
- Be sure volunteers have information on pertinent organizations
- Set standards for goods to be collected

The Environment

- Consult with area experts about proper handling, storage and disposal of collected materials
- Be sure volunteers wear appropriate clothing
- Pay special attention to small children around the site
- Check to see limits of collection centers

Working with Seniors

- Don't try to do too much
- Allow for visiting time with each senior
- Make sure to know of dietary restrictions if providing food
- Have staff or volunteers on hand who know first aid
- Try to partner with local senior centers or groups

Hunger and Homelessness

- Start small (helping one family or donating to a food drive)
- Work with agencies to identify recipients for food, clothing, etc. before starting a drive
- Be sure donations are in good condition
- Be sure you have storage facilities
- Ask shelters and soup kitchens other ways your group may get involved

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY & ON-LINE RESOURCES

Kids Care Clubs

www.kidscare.org

Kids Care works to develop compassion and a love of volunteering in elementary and middle school aged youth. This site provides monthly service projects, compassion education, model programs, project resources, and partners based on issues such as literacy, hunger, poverty, the sick, and the elderly.

EPA Community Service Projects

http://www.epa.gov/teachers/community_service_projects.htm

On this site the Environmental Protection Agency list several projects designed to help the environment that can be done in local communities.

National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet #16 (What you can do to help end homelessness)

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/help.html>

This tip sheet provides ideas for different service projects that benefit the homeless, as well as a listing of local homeless organizations to partner with.

Project Action Guide: Project Ideas

Project America

<http://www.projectorg.guide/projhome.html>

The “Project Ideas” excerpt is divided into sections on youth, seniors, people with disabilities, hunger and homelessness, drives, the environment, and others. This resource gives examples of project ideas that have been completed across the country.

Idea Generator

Make A Difference Day

http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/ideas/ideas_generator.html

This tool allows you to search for project ideas that have been completed in conjunction with Make A Difference Day based on criteria you complete.

The Kids Guide to Service Projects

Barbara Lewis (1995 Free Spirit Publishing)

http://www.freespirit.com/egi/s_product_nf.cgi?productid=124

This book presents straightforward tips to carrying out service projects on a myriad of topics. One idea is generally developed in depth, followed by brief descriptions of similar projects.

Catch The Spirit! Ideas and information on how young people can make their communities a better place to live

http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/children/spirit/spirit.htm

This resource gives ideas for different service projects based on possible interest of young people (for example; animals, reading, and sports). It also offers a list of local resources for volunteer ideas, as well as a listing of National Organizations with information for young volunteers.

Sharing between seniors and elementary students

EPICenter (CNS)

<http://www.cns.gov/resources/epicenter/>

This excerpt from the Corporation’s Effective Practice website, explores a nice service partnership between residents of a senior housing community and children at an elementary school. Links for other intergeneration projects are also included

Step One: Assessing Your Community’s Needs

Youth In Action Bulletin (April 1998)

<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/youthbulletin/9804/step1.html>

This informative article helps shed light on identifying community needs. From defining the “community” to analyzing survey data and examining the assets of your community; this piece has some great tips for anyone exploring the needs of their community.