

SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

Organizational Skills Domain

“I pledge my hands to larger service...for my club, my community, my country, and my world.” These words in the 4-H pledge ring true when youth become involved in performing community service projects. For more than 100 years, 4-H members have been involved in service to benefit their community. This started when the founder of 4-H, A.B. Graham, engaged his young members in beautifying their schools in Springfield, Ohio. The goal is to instill a service practice in 4-H members and volunteers to contribute positively to their communities and people within their influence. This practice makes youth feel connected to and part of something bigger than themselves. Young people can make a positive difference in the world².

Through community service or service learning, youth practice skills to become helpful citizens and develop a sense of pride and ownership for the community in which they live. Community service is one way to help youth develop leadership and civic engagement skills and become productive and contributing members of their communities. Community service also teaches the value of giving back and allows youth and adults to work together to help others.

Community service is often a one-way activity where youth collect materials and create and disseminate information, with very little research into the need for those services. Still, it is a precursor to the more advanced service learning experience. Figure 1 demonstrates the concepts of

low/high learning and low/high service. Community service typically has low or high service but not high learning. Authentic service learning is both high service and high learning⁴.

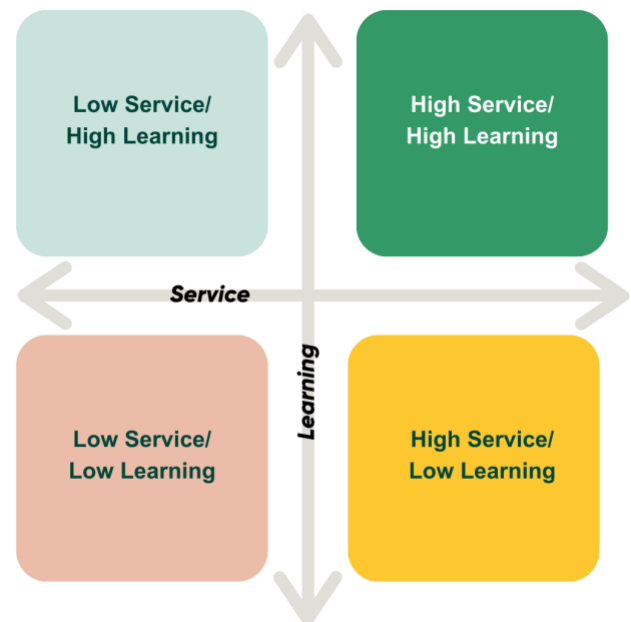


Figure 1. Service & Learning

Understanding the level of service and learning that occurs in any community service activity is essential. Consider a mix of all types in your program offerings.

Service learning is “An educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service to provide a progressive learning experience³...”

We adapted this section from the Discover 4-H Service Learning Clubs¹. Service learning is meant to connect youth to the needs in their community and the learning objectives or skills that will be learned by meeting those needs and sharing their knowledge with the community.

Some examples include:

- Helping in a community garden to learn how to grow vegetables while managing pests,
 - Connect (process, reflect, & apply) the participants to the community needs of the people served, and develop a plan to teach.
- Serving in a homeless shelter to learn how to prepare and serve meals for large groups of people, sharing what they learned through a podcast.
 - Connect the participants to the community need the people served, and teach others.

The Service Learning Cycle (see Figure 2) comprises Pre-Service, Service, and Post-Service.

- Pre-Service is the stage where the youth decide what community needs they want to address and which skills they want to learn.
 - Identify needs.
 - Establish learning objectives.
 - Plan and prepare.

- Service is the stage where they conduct meaningful service and observe the impact and outcomes.
- Post-Service is the stage where you can assist the youth in evaluating their experience and exploring how their new skills or understanding can be applied to other areas of their lives. And finally, how they will share what they have learned with others.

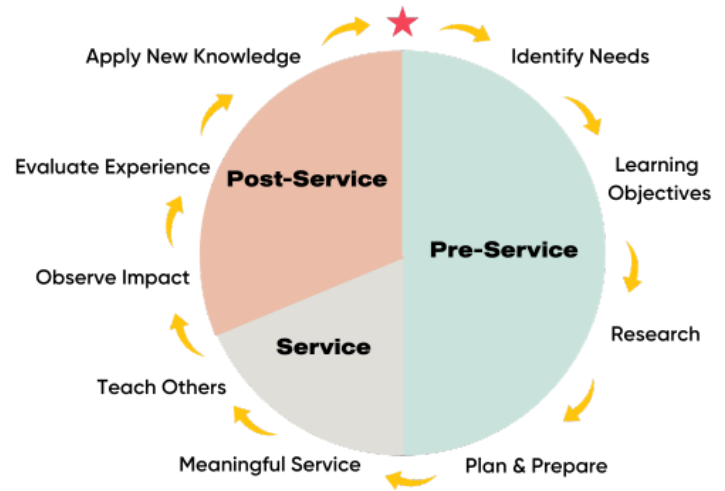


Figure 2. Service Learning Cycle

Planning, conducting, and evaluating a community service project is an excellent opportunity for 4-H members to “learn by doing” and develop leadership and civic engagement skills. Encourage 4-H members to get involved in all project phases and have fun.

References:

- ¹Ivie, D., Ivie, J., & MacArthur, S. (n.d.). Discover 4-H service learning clubs. Utah State University Extension. Retrieved from www.discover4h.org
- ²Lerner, R.M., & Lerner, J.V. (2013). *The positive development of youth: Comprehensive findings from the 4-H study of positive youth development*. Chevy Chase, MD, National 4-H Council.
- ³Wolpert-Gawron, H. (n.d.). *What the heck is service learning?* Edutopia. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/what-heck-service-learning-heather-wolpert-gawron>
- ⁴Youth Service Learning Project Planning Guide Book, (n.d.). University of California, retrieved from <https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC4-H/files/255116.pdf>.

The original resource 4-H Organizational Skills: Service to the Community (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Cathy Blunier, Johnna Jennings, Deanna Roby, Sheri Seibold, Melinda States, and Judy Taylor

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