



Service Learning Guide

What is Service Learning?

Service-learning is a teaching method that enriches learning by engaging students in meaningful service to their schools and communities. Young people apply academic skills to solving real-world issues, linking established learning objectives with genuine needs. They lead the process, with adults as partners, applying critical thinking and problem-solving skills to concerns such as hunger, pollution, and diversity.¹

Habitat for Humanity International is dedicated to eliminating poverty housing throughout the world. Along with building homes, Habitat seeks to make substandard housing and homelessness socially, politically, and religiously unacceptable in the hearts and minds of all people. Service learning is a great opportunity to present young people with information that will shape how they perceive societal issues, including substandard housing.

With local affiliates located across the nation, Habitat can be a great partner for designing service learning projects. Lessons relating to poverty housing, homelessness and home ownership can be developed for almost any age group or subject matter:

- Elementary school: focus on the concepts of community, home, and homelessness
- Middle school: discuss poverty and the factors that can contribute to poverty
- High school: look at historical, governmental and economic factors of homelessness and home ownership

Likewise, Habitat can be incorporated with almost any subject area, such as math, art, social studies, English, science, shop, government or home economics – just to name a few. And while Habitat is most often associated with building, there are plenty of other ways for students to contribute, such as advocacy, fundraising, and helping homeowner families.

What are the benefits of Service Learning?

A well-designed service learning projects results in:

- students showing increased academic achievement.
- students learning real world applications of subject matter.
- students improving engagement and character.
- students developing increased self-esteem and leadership skills.
- students learning the habit of volunteerism.
- students becoming more engaged as citizens and volunteers as adults.
- a community need being met.

Hallmarks of well-designed Service Learning projects

¹ National Youth Leadership Council

There are five key characteristics of a well-designed Service Learning project.

- 1. Meets a real need.** In order to be more than just community service – or even worse, busy work – the project must address a real need in the community.
- 2. Students are engaged as leaders.** Students can and should take the lead as often as possible during the service project – from helping to define the community need and coming up with the project, to team leading during service to organizing the showcase. Service learning provides opportunities for students to use a wide range of talents.
- 3. Relates to subject matter.** Again, Service Learning isn't just volunteer time. It relates back to an academic subject and helps the students learn and apply it in a very real, hands-on way.
- 4. Time is set aside for reflection.** Service projects are intense experiences for students – but without processing them, students can forget or fail to make connections with the academic material. Reflections can take a variety of forms, from journaling or drawing, to small groups and guided conversation. A useful reflection sequence is What, So What, Now What – what did you experience today, so what did it mean, and now what do we do from here?
- 5. Project engages community partners.** A good community partner not only provides a meaningful service site, but can be a resource of knowledge and materials to use in the classroom as well. Long term or repeated projects are very effective, so finding a partner that you can work with over and over again will be a big asset.

Putting Together a Service Learning Project – You can do it!

The following steps serve as guidelines for designing a Service Learning project with Habitat for Humanity.

Step One: Partnering

Find the Habitat affiliate closest to you (www.habitat.org/local) and set up a meeting. Find out what resources they can offer, what types of projects they can support and what needs they have. Talk about what age and size group you are thinking about using and possible subject area tie-ins.

Every affiliate is unique in its size, geography and the types of projects it is undertaking. Don't feel offended if an affiliate doesn't jump at your first suggestion – work together to come up with ways that both the students and the homeowners will benefit. Some affiliates may have a staff person who is ready and willing to work with you, others will have to find a volunteer who can help out.

Step Two: Planning

Once you have come up with some possible projects and know how to incorporate the project into your lesson plans, introduce the project to your students. This may include classroom lessons, films, site visits, research or meeting with Habitat families. Students

should help play a role in determining the community need they want to address and in helping come up with the project or what role they can take in the project.

Step Three: Service

At this point, students know what their goal is and have prepared for the service activity. During the activity, teachers are role models and coaches, helping to make sure that the project is a success and that all the students get involved.

Step Four: Reflection

Take the time to reflect on the service experience – what students saw, did and felt, how it relates back to the lessons they learned in the classroom, what questions they still have and what they want to do next.

Step Five: Showcase

It's time for students show off their hard work and what they've learned. This can be an awards ceremony, a school presentation, or an advocacy event. Students educate others on what they've learned and celebrate their new talents.

Habitat for Humanity Youth Programs can help you with any of these stages. Our Web site includes activities and curricula for all age students. We're also here to answer your questions, help you pair up with affiliates – and to hear about your successes!

Service Learning project ideas

These are just a sample of possible projects you and your students could undertake.

Please note: It is Habitat policy that only students 16 and older are allowed on active work sites.

A math class uses their geometry skills to determine how much paint is needed to cover different rooms of the house and how much this will cost, then organizes a fund-raiser (possibly partnering with an art class) to buy the paint.

Age level: Any

A math class calculates statistics such as average income, average house cost, average apartment rent, etc for their community and then presents the information in graphs for an advocacy display.

Age level: Any

An art or photography class works with Habitat homeowners to create an advocacy display on issues of poverty housing in their community. They could also partner with a history class to look at the history of the community or a government class to look at laws that affect housing and poverty.

Age level: Any

An art class creates portraits of family members for their new home.

Age level: Any

An art class creates decorations for a fund-raiser or for the house itself.

Age level: Any

A math class develops materials to help Habitat homeowners learn how to budget, how to balance a checkbook or how to calculate interest for a savings account.

Age level: Middle-High school

A math or economics class helps determine all the costs involved with financing a house and works with an affiliate to find the cost effective solutions.

Age level: Middle-High school

A shop class designs and builds smaller items (lamps, cutting boards, key holders) or furniture for the house or ReStore to sell.

Age level: Middle-high school

A home economics class develops a healthy, low cost cookbook for Habitat homeowners.

Age level: Middle-High school

A home economics class designs and creates curtains for a Habitat house.

Age level: Middle-High school

An English or government class interviews Habitat families to write their biographies to create an advocacy display.

Age level: Middle-High school

A history or geography course compares Habitat houses in different countries, looking at the house structures, the environment and the history of the country, leading up to fund raising to build a house overseas.

Age level: Middle-High school

Any class, or club, tutors Habitat children. Foreign language classes could assist with ESL students.

Age level: Middle-High school

An economics class designs and runs a ReStore for their local Habitat Affiliate. They could work with a marketing class, as well as art or shop classes to produce items to sell.

Age level: High school

An economic class looks at the impact and effectiveness of microcredit and microloans, and helps develop a policy or start a fund for the community.

Age level: High school

An art or marketing class helps an affiliate develop new materials for advocacy or fund raising.

Age level: High school

An environmental science class helps plan and build a garden for the Habitat homeowner, testing the soil, determining which plants are suitable for the region, easy to care for, etc.

Age level: High school

A computer science class helps an affiliate organize their database or create spreadsheets for keeping track of finances or volunteers.

Age level: High school

A computer science class helps an affiliate update their Web site.

Age level: High school

A drafting class works with an affiliate to design a Habitat house or draft the plans.

Age level: High school

A history or government class uses Habitat in their community as a case study of economics and looks at patterns of gentrification and urbanization.

Age level: High school

Resources

The following resources may be helpful to you as you plan your Service Learning project.

www.learnandserve.org - Learn and Serve America

learningindeed.org - Learning In Deed

www.ysa.org - Youth Serve America

www.civicyouth.org - The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE)

www.seanetonline.org - The State Education Agency K-12 Service-Learning Network

www.nylc.org – The National Youth Leadership Council