Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

How to manage an academic
service learning project

Created by-
Nicole Nagy
Former Michigan Campus Compact AmeriCorps*VISTA
Office of the First-Year Experience
Madonna University

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Introduction

Dear Reader—

So, you've agreed to teach a course with a service learning component— you probably have all kinds of questions such as: How do you begin to plan a project like this? What are the benefits of service learning to myself, my students, my institution and my community? How do I select a community partner and/or project? Where will I find the money? What do I need to do in order to be sure that my project is meaningful for everyone involved?

This document has been created to help guide you through the questions that you may have throughout the process of developing, implementing and evaluating your academic service learning project. It will be most beneficial if you take the time to scan/read through this guide in it's entirety before taking the first steps in planning your project. Take note of the list of resources on the final page for further reading on the subject of service learning and various organizations that may be helpful to you along the way.

I wish you the best of luck in your service learning endeavors!

Nicole Nagy
2009-2010 Michigan Campus Compact AmeriCorps*VISTA
Office of the First-Year Experience
Madonna University

Table of Contents

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Overview of Service Learning
and Why it is Important
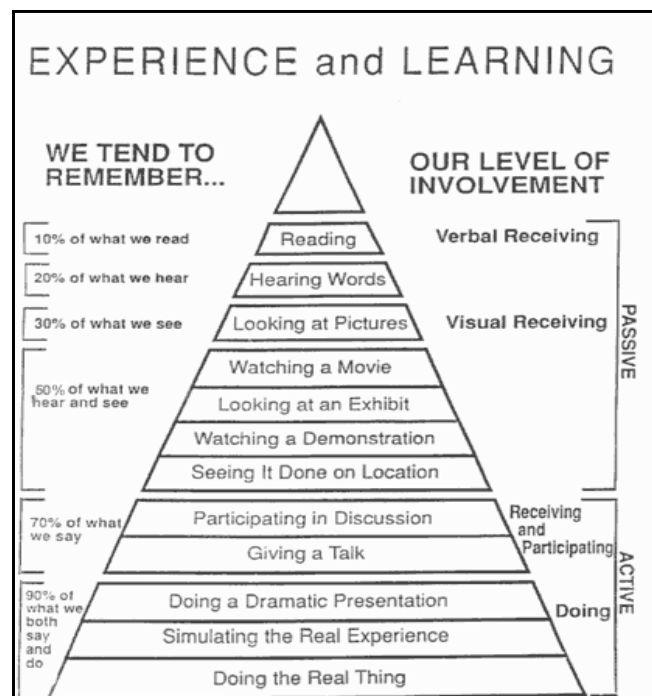
What is service learning?

The California Department of Education CalServe K-12 Initiative has formulated a great definition of what service learning is and the components necessary for a meaningful experience: "Service Learning is a method whereby participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that:

- is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;

- is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community;

- helps foster civic responsibility;

- is integrated into and enhances the [core] academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and

- provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience."[1]

A well-designed service learning effort addresses each of the previous points. It is a deeper, richer experience connecting course content to community needs with reflection. Service learning differs from volunteering in it's slope and depth.

Why is it important?

Research shows that students retain the most of what they learn by teaching others and participating actively in their learning experience. On the right, the chart "Experience and Learning"[2] shows the relationship between what people tend to remember from a learning experience compared with the level of involvement that the person has in their experience. If students were to only read the text of what they are suppose to be learning, they tend to only remember 10% of the information. But if students were to do the real thing by simulating a real experience, they tend to remember 90% of what they say and do when it comes to their learning. It is clear that the more students get to participate in their learning, the more they retain. This is what makes service learning such a vital learning experience for all students to take part in. The following page describes many ways how engaging students in service learning benefits the students, faculty members and the community involved.

EXPERIENCE and LEARNING

WE TEND TO REMEMBER...

OUR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

10% of what we read	Reading	Verbal Receiving
20% of what we hear	Hearing Words	
30% of what we see	Looking at Pictures	Visual Receiving
50% of what we hear and see	Watching a Movie / Looking at an Exhibit / Watching a Demonstration / Seeing It Done on Location	PASSIVE
70% of what we say	Participating in Discussion / Giving a Talk	Receiving and Participating
90% of what we both say and do	Doing a Dramatic Presentation / Simulating the Real Experience / Doing the Real Thing	Doing / ACTIVE

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Benefits of Service Learning

_____

The follow tips were adapted from the "Service Learning Faculty Information Guide" created by the Service Learning Center at Grand Rapids Community College.

Benefits to Students

Service learning:

- Enriches student learning of course material by moving them from the margin of the classroom experience to the center. It "brings books to life and life to books".
- Encourages realization of the relevance and importance of academic work in their real life.
- Broadens perspectives and enhances critical thinking skills through real life experiences and application of knowledge.
- Improves interpersonal human relations skills which are increasingly viewed as important skills in achieving success in professional and personal spheres.
- Provides guidance and experience for future career choices.
- Provides experiences for a student's resume and future college applications.
- Develops student's network of support and professional contacts.
- Allows students to "make a difference" through their active and meaningful contribution to their communities.

Benefits to Faculty Members

Service learning:

- Enriches and enlivens teaching.
- Changes the role from the expert on top to the expert on tap. With this change, faculty enjoy a new relationship with students and a new understanding of how learning occurs.
- Increases awareness of current societal issues as they relate to their academic areas of interest.
- Increases opportunities for professional recognition and reward while also introducing new areas for research and publication.

Benefits to the Community

Service Learning:

- Provides the community with the talent, energy, and enthusiasm of our college students to meet its educational, human, safety, and environmental needs
- Creates a democracy of participation as many students commit to a lifetime of volunteering after this experience.
- Creates a spirit of civic responsibility that replaces the current state of dependence on government programs and altruism by the experts. Results in a renewed sense of community and encourages participative democracy.

Selecting a Project: Initiating & Maintaining Relationships with Community Partners

Careful consideration and planning are necessary to create a successful learning experience. In chronological order, here are the steps you should take in order to select a project:

1. First of all, think of causes that you are passionate about. Service learning goes above and beyond basic classroom planning and learning, so you want to be sure it is something on which you want to spend your time. No one wants to work on something they don't enjoy— so be sure to keep this in mind when choosing a project. The more you love the cause, the more energy you will bring to your students!

2. Determine if you have resources/funds to provide transportation for students to a project— this may affect where you choose to do service!

3. Are already existing partnerships between organizations and your institution that your project can maintain? Check with different offices on campus like: Advancement, Civic Engagement, Service Learning, Student Activities, Student Life, your Volunteer Center and/or the Deans of departments you are working with. If no relationships with community partners exist in relation to your project idea, research organizations in the area you desire to work to find a reputable community partner that would benefit from such a project.

4. Research your specific course topic as it relates to the community. Is there a specific need that needs to be met in your community that you can work to address?

5. Meet with the community partners to assess their needs and see if a partnership on a service project would be beneficial to both parties. Be specific about what your students can provide (i.e. 10 hours of service on two Thursdays, etc.)

6. If time permits, gauge your student interest in various projects by presenting a few options to the class and find out which one they would most like to participate in.

7. Consult with your Office of Service Learning/Advancement if necessary before agreeing to partnerships to make sure the mission of the organization aligns with the mission of the university.

Selecting a Project: Initiating & Maintaining Relationships with Community Partners

(continued from page 6)

8. Select community partner that can benefit from project based on initial meetings

9. Have meeting to discuss needs of both parties on a more detailed level and plan dates for project. Confirm details in writing— including hours of service, location, number of meetings and volunteers, etc.

10. Work with partner to plan an orientation to area and project for students prior to starting the project. If one already exists through your university or community partner— take advantage! Your students will always want more information than what you plan on giving them, it's the comfort factor! Providing students with an orientation will help alleviate fears that the service location may be threatening or unsafe. After familiarizing themselves with the project, students can then focus on completing the actual service.

11. Maintain the relationship! Prior to your service project (one week or more), send a friendly reminder to the community partner to verify that your class will be there. This reminder should include items like: what time you will arrive/need to leave, how many students will be with you, etc. This is both reassuring for you that the community partner is ready for you, and to the community partner that your class is still planning to attend the project. Within two weeks of the project, obtain the following formation from your community partner and provide to your students:

    ♦ Directions to agency, Where to park, On-site contact etc.

    ♦ What items they need to bring with them (ex: photo ID, medical insurance card, work clothes, work gloves, water bottles, lunch, coolers, tools, garbage bags to protect car floors if muddy, etc)

    ♦ If you will need to check-in (this can take quite a bit of time so you need to plan for it), etc.

    ♦ (from your students) Obtain everyone's cell phone number and give your students a number where they can contact you

Selecting a Project: Initiating & Maintaining Relationships with Community Partners

Important tip about working with Non-Profit Organizations & Community Partners:

In case you have not had the opportunity to work with many non-profit organizations, there are a couple things that you should be mindful of when working with them. Unfortunately, non-profit organizations are usually understaffed and overworked and this can be challenging when trying to keep in contact with them or to solidify any projects with them. Not hearing from an agency can be construed as them being unreliable or uninterested, when in reality it could just be there are not enough people to do everything that the organization needs to do on a day-to-day basis. To combat this, make sure that you are persistent when contacting for any project confirmations and when sending friendly reminders prior to your project. It is best if you can establish a relationship working with one or two dedicated contacts from the non-profit. This will promote communication and clarity in goals so that it is less likely your project will fall between the cracks of miscommunication. Also, make sure to get everything in writing!

Selling & Articulating the Importance of Service Learning to Students

Preparing to and Presenting the Service Project to Students

No matter what your service project will be, the way you initially tell your students about the project will make a lasting impression on their thoughts towards the project for the rest of the semester. It cannot be stressed enough the importance of presenting the project to students with confidence and enthusiasm regardless of any personal feelings towards the project. <u>If you go in front of your students to talk about the project, and are visibly nervous, anxious, showing lack of confidence, are unprepared, etc, your students will react accordingly.</u> This can result in your students not having confidence in you, your community partner, your project, etc. Students need to see that you are prepared and excited about the upcoming project so that they can, in turn, feel the same way. Even if the students do not have a particular interest in your specific project, they can still get excited about helping others and having time to bond with you and their classmates if you can demonstrate authentic desire and enthusiasm in the project.

Be ready to answer students' questions after presenting the project including: Why is this important? Why are we doing this project there? How is this really going to help the community?, How is this project going to help me become a better nurse/teacher/etc, Why am I paying tuition to volunteer?, etc. Although you can't prepare for all questions they might have, be sure to play devil's advocate and think of questions they will ask before you put yourself in a situation where you don't know how to respond. This will also be the point in time where you will distribute the pre-flection, used to capture what students are feeling towards the project between the time you tell them about it and when the project starts (more will be explained on page 14 of this document). This information will help you figure out what your students are feeling and what they are concerned about.

Hence, you need to be adequately prepared to present the service project to your students in order to get the best reaction from your students and to be sure that the information you present to them does not cause them to be unnecessarily uneasy or anxious. Be sure that you have completed the following steps to prepare before presenting the project to your students:

1. Research the location in which your students will be working so you can provide students with some background information about the history of the neighborhood or agency, the people in the area, and how this affects what they will be doing.
2. Research the community partner that you will be working with in order to give the students background on the organization, what they do and how the students will be helping them towards their goal/mission. If possible, have someone from the organization provide a brief presentation/welcome to students at the site of service.
3. Have a general idea of what the students will be doing for the project: the more information you can give them, the better! They may be entering an unfamiliar neighborhood, with people they don't know very well, doing something out of their normal comfort zone— so you want to prepare them as much as you possibly can. Know if your students will be working alone, in groups, with students other then those in their class, etc— so they can prepare for what will occur once they are at the service site.
4. Provide concrete examples of how students efforts could have an impact—but be realistic! Students often under or overestimate the impact their service will have. Example— Building a house in one day/week like they may see on TV. This is unrealistic and they need to realize that.

Completing these steps prior to presenting your project to the students will help to alleviate any uncertainty regarding the nature or location of the project ; thereby letting the students focus on the project itself.

Logistics of Planning a Service Learning Project

Looking at the big picture, as well as the details, is very important when you are setting out to plan a service learning project. There are so many different components that must be considered. Creating a timeline is essential to make sure you complete everything in a timely fashion and do not forget any critical parts of the project. The timeframe recommendations are suggested and may need to be adjusted to your specific project. If you need to plan your project in a shorter amount of time, make the adjustments necessary. (See page 15 of this document to find this timeline in checklist form.)

——

Timeline:

Key:
(P)— Planning (emails/phone calls/research) initiated by faculty member
(M)—Meeting between faculty member and community partner
(C)—Activities to be completed by students during normal class time in classroom setting
(S)—Activities taking place at service site (orientation, project itself)

Two months prior to first visit with students to service site:

- **(P)** Research ideas for project

- **(P)** Investigate community partner relationships

- **(P)** Choose community partner to work with

- **(M)** Meet with community partner to: discuss needs; pick project; plan orientation to area; plan number of visits to service site and what will be completed each visit

One month prior to first visit with students to service site:

- **(P)** Plan transportation for trips to orientation and service trips

    - Tip: Traveling to and from projects is important for so many different reasons. It takes a lot of pressure off of students (particularly first-year students) if you travel together to the project in one vehicle: they don't have to worry about paying for gas, getting lost in an unfamiliar area, not arriving on time, etc. Also, it gives your students the opportunity to bond with each other and gives you the opportunity to pose reflection questions on the way back from the project so you are able to get student's initial reactions. Not only do the students get to bond with each other, but with faculty! Traveling together also takes the cost of gas and/or lack of vehicle into consideration— thinking about those students who may share a family car, take public transportation to school, or live on campus without transportation.

Two weeks prior to first visit with students to service site:

- **(C)** Service learning orientation for students

    - What is service learning? Why is it important?

    - Ask students to share their previous service experiences

    - Tell students about community partner

    - Tell students about project and dates! Be confident!

    - Assign students to discover things about community partner and bring to class

- **(C)** Have students complete Pre-flection (more about this in later section of manual)

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Logistics of Planning a Service

_____

Timeline (continued):

Two weeks prior to first visit with students to service site:

- **(C)** Have students complete Risk Release Forms (& Photo Release forms, if necessary)— it is important to do this two weeks ahead of time to catch students who may miss class the week before project and it provides students time to get information such as health insurance, etc.

- **(P)** Decide on Reflection Timeline [activities to take place in between visits: questions asked in van rides, journal, online-course software (ex: Blackboard) posts, activities outside of class, etc?]

> **Key:**
> **(P)**— Planning (emails/phone calls/ research) initiated by faculty member
> **(M)**—Meeting between faculty member and community partner
> **(C)**—Activities to be completed by students during normal class time in classroom setting
> **(S)**—Activities taking place at service site (orientation, project itself)

- **(P)** Let marketing department and/or school newspaper know about project in case they would like to come and take pictures, interview community partners, etc.

First visit with students to service site:

- **(C/S)** Orientation to Service Area: History of area, organization, people, etc

In between visits to service site:

- **(P)** Follow up with community partner to:

    1. Confirm details of next visit

    2. Inquire about service provided by students: was it adequate? Were they professional? Need to make any adjustments for next visit?

- **(P)** Send reminders to students a few days before each trip to remind them of where to meet, what time, what to bring, etc.

Visits to service site with class:

- **(C/S)** Service trips!

    - Tip: Three trips to the service site seems to work well for service learning trips (especially if you only have 10 or so hours to complete): orientation and two trips where service is actually performed.   These three visits plus an in-class closing celebration/reflection makes for a well-rounded service experience, especially for first-year students.

Week following last visit to service site:

- **(C)** Reflection for whole project (Online survey, activities, pros/cons)

- **(M)** Follow up with community partner— results, thank you notes, etc.

- **(P)** Take care of any payments necessary (renting vans, etc)

- **(P)** Create a report including what students accomplished and send to marketing department, university administration, service learning office, and any other stakeholders or supporters.

M A D O N N A   U N I V E R S I T Y

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Getting Support for your Project: Monetary & Personnel

Support for your service learning project is an essential piece of planning. Monetary support can be used in many different ways depending on your project. Some things that money can be used for include: transportation, supplies for actual project, cameras, giveaways, etc. Even if you think that your project does not require any monetary support, personnel support is just as important. Here are some things to consider when it comes to getting support for your project:

- Grants: There are various grants available to fund service learning projects. A few good places to start: National Service-Learning Partnership, Learn and Serve America, Michigan Campus Compact Venture Grants, Corporation for National and Community Service, among many others. Do some research online and/or through the community partner you plan on working with to find grants that make sense for your project. Grants usually have to be applied for months ahead of your actual project, so keep that in mind.

- Collaboration: Many service learning projects can benefit from collaboration with other offices/departments on campus. Some offices that may be willing to collaborate include: Service Learning, Student Services, Diversity & Multicultural Affairs, Admissions, and/or other departments that are relevant to the project (specific majors/colleges/schools). For example, if you are bringing students to campus for a college visit as your project, the Office of Admissions is likely to be very willing to help out by providing promotional materials, access to campus tours, and Admissions Officers to answer questions. Think creatively when considering collaboration because the limits are endless.

- Fundraising: Fundraising can be used in a variety of different ways when it comes to a service project. Fundraising can be used to offset the costs of the service learning itself, or it can be used to raise money for a cause or the project that you are working with. For example, if your students are working with a wildlife refuge doing plantings— have them organize a bake sale to raise money for the refuge to augment the time they will be working at the refuge itself.

- Existing budgets: Obviously, use money that has already been set aside for your service project by your institution— if you are lucky enough to have it!

- Personnel: You want to make sure that you have support from students, faculty and administration for your service learning project. This comes into play mostly when thinking about collaboration or if you are trying to get monetary support from another office. Make sure that you are spreading the word as much as you can about your project— you never know if someone has a contact that can help you out! Make sure that you keep in communication with your marketing department because they can be very helpful in providing publicity for your project and letting the university and local community know about the great work your students are doing— which could lead to possible funding in the future!

MADONNA UNIVERSITY

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Entering/Exiting Service Gracefully

Making sure that your students are prepared to participate in a service project and helping them make connections between their service and the learning after a project can very well be the difference between your project being great or it failing.

Entering:

- Discussion Prior to Pre-Service Orientation: Directly before leaving for your first visit to the service project site (for orientation), it is good to have one final discussion with your students to prepare them for the experience of orientation. This is a good time to remind students that they are not only representing themselves, but they are a representation of their university. Students need to realize how important their behavior is, not only because it reflects back on them and their institution, but because they are serving as role models no matter where their service is being completed.

- Pre-Service Orientation: Before your students take part in any sort of service project, they need to have an orientation to the area in which they will be serving. This can include a meeting with the community partner to talk about the project, a tour of the neighborhood and service location, and/or obtaining information about the people that make up the community where you will be working.

    - For example, if you have students that are going to be working in a school tutoring children for their service project— your orientation could include going to the school where you will be volunteering; having a staff member give a tour and background information about the school; sitting down with the staff member to give your students the opportunity to ask questions; and possibly visiting classrooms.

    - It is best to discuss the idea of an orientation when you initially meet with the community partner. They do work like this all the time, so the idea of an orientation will not be foreign to them and it will most likely make them more comfortable with bringing your students in because you are taking the time to learn about where you will be serving.

- Use concrete examples of situations the students may encounter and the appropriate reactions to help solidify what behaviors they should/should not exemplify while at the service site.

- If travelling to the actual site is not possible, see if you can arrange for a representative of the community partner to visit your classroom. While it is preferable to take students to see the actual site/neighborhood/environment, it is important to provide any background possible.

Exiting:

- After the project, help students synthesize, verbalize and realize what they did and how it affects them/others/the community and how it relates to the course topic.

Resource: I Like My Service Well Done — by the Ginsberg Center at the University of Michigan

- Contains resources for incorporating education into co-curricular service and social action programs including educating students about the issues, entering/exiting communities respectfully, ideas for reflection activities and so much more.

Project Evaluation: Community Partner, Faculty & Students' perspectives

Evaluation is an essential part of implementing any service learning project. Without evaluation, you will not be able to gather data necessary to know whether your project was worthwhile to you, your students, your community partner, etc. Here are some of the essential evaluation tools you should consider using:

Preflection

- ◆ A Preflection is a series of questions that you have your students answer before they have completed any of their service learning. The answers to these questions are used to gauge your students attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes and what they may or may not be apprehensive about. Having this information also allows you to assist your students in progressing through their service learning experience. Examples:
  - ◆ Open-ended questions like: What do you think your service will be like?
  - ◆ Agree/Disagree statements like: I am comfortable working with cultures other then my own.
  - ◆ Listing words and having them circle the ones that describe their current feelings towards service learning (comfortable, uneasy, nervous, excited, etc).
- ◆ The information that you collect from the pre-flection can be compiled and then shared to the class to show the results.

Reflection

- ◆ Reflections can be used in a variety of ways. Many organizations give reflections that ask the same Agree/Disagree statements that were asked in the Preflection to see how student/group has changed after completing their service learning project. Reflection is not just your students telling about what they did; it is them really thinking about the impact that they have made on the people/area they worked with and how they see this this service project impacting themselves as well.
- ◆ Reflections can be done in many other ways in addition to a formal questionnaire. There are many individual/group activities that you can facilitate in order to find out what your students are feeling towards the project.   These activities can range from journaling, working in small groups, answering discussion questions through online course software, doing a pro/con session about the project, or various other activities. A great resource that gives examples of reflections is I Like My Service Well Done by the Ginsberg Center at the University of Michigan.

360 degree evaluation

- ◆ A 360-degree evaluation seeks feedback from every perspective having to do with the service learning project. This would include faculty members, community partners, students, and any other stakeholder involved with the project. These types of evaluations are great because they get information from all involved parties, lowering the chance that someone's concerns/praise will be overlooked.

M A D O N N A   U N I V E R S I T Y

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

Service Learning Project
Planning Checklist

Two months prior to ideal first visit with students to service site:
- ☐ **(P)** Research ideas for project

- ☐ **(P)** Investigate community partner relationships

- ☐ **(P)** Choose community partner to work with

- ☐ **(M)** Meet with community partner to: discuss needs; pick project; plan orientation to area; plan number of visits to service site and what will be completed each visit

One month prior to first visit with students to service site:
- ☐ (**P**) Plan transportation for trips to orientation and service trips

Two weeks prior to first visit with students to service site:
- ☐ **(C)** Service learning orientation for students

- ☐ **(C)** Have students complete Pre-flection

> **Key:**
> **(P)**— Planning (emails/ phone calls/research) initiated by faculty member
> **(M)**—Meeting between faculty member and community partner
> **(C)**—Activities to be completed by students during normal class time in classroom setting
> **(S)**—Activities taking place at service site (orientation, project itself)

Two weeks prior to first visit with students to service site:

- ☐ **(C)** Have students complete Risk Release Forms & Photo Release forms, if necessary

- ☐ **(P)** Decide on Timeline of Reflection Activities

- ☐ **(P)** Let marketing department and/or school newspaper know about the project

- ☐ **(C)** Assign students to discover things about community partner and bring to class

First visit with students to service site:
- ☐ **(C/S)** Orientation to Service Area

In between visits to service site:
- ☐ **(P)** Follow up with community partner in reference to next visit

- ☐ **(P)** Send reminders to students a few days before each trip to remind them of where to meet, what time, etc.

Week following last visit to service site:
- ☐ **(C)** Reflection of whole project (Online survey, activities, plus/delta)

- ☐ **(M)** Follow up with community partner— results, thank yous, etc

- ☐ **(P)** Take care of any payments necessary (renting vans, etc)

- ☐ **(P)** Put together report on what students did and send to marketing department

Service Learning 101 for Higher Education Faculty

References

Page 4:

1. California Department of Education. http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/sl/overview.asp. CalServe, California Department of Education, 1996, from Learn and Serve America, Corporation for National Service, Pocket Guide to Service Learning, Marty Duckenfield and Jan Wright (eds), Clemson SC: National Drop-out Prevention Center, 1995.
2. California State University, Service Learning. http://www.servicelearningcourse.org/image/pyramid.gif

Page 5:

1. 1. "Service Learning Faculty Information Guide created by the Service Learning Center at Grand Rapids Community College.

Page 6:

1. Image from: http://www.pennylaneschools.com/sitebuilder/images/ClipArt_Community-1000x360.jpg

Resources

101 Ideas For Combining Service & Learning
    http://www2.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/ideas.html

Campus Compact
    http://www.compact.org/

Learn and Serve America's National Service Learning Clearinghouse
    http://www.servicelearning.org/

Michigan Campus Compact
    http://micampuscompact.org/

Michigan Community Service Commission
    http://www.michigan.gov/mcsc

Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning
    http://www.umich.edu/~mjcsl/

Service-Learning Ideas and Curricular Examples (SLICE)
    http://www.servicelearning.org/slice