

PLANNING YOUR SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM

BGCA recommends beginning with one-time service experiences for youth of all ages. Service Recipe Guides located at www.BGCA.net/service include a range of fun, 30- to 60-minute activities that foster service and leadership skills. From these experiences, youth may show a great interest in pursuing a more in-depth service experience. Youth from Torch and Keystone Clubs are great candidates for the service-learning program as they are grounded in a deep understanding of service and have experience in teamwork. You can determine whether service-learning is a good fit based on the size of your Club/ Youth Center; the number of youth you serve; and your capacity, resources and staff availability.

SELECT TWO TEEN LEADERS

Youth voice and choice are central to the service-learning experience. The Teen Leader is an important component of the leadership structure. This position raises the visibility of youth leadership and enhances peer-to-peer learning. When youth see people who look like them in leadership roles, they are more inclined to listen and stay engaged. You may have Club members in mind who would be a good fit for this role. A few guidelines may be helpful as you reach out to youth to co-lead the project. Keep in mind also that although two participants will serve as Teen Leaders, every youth in the service-learning team is considered a leader and should be supported.

- ▶ **Designate Teen Leader Responsibilities.** The Teen Leaders' primary responsibility is to take a leadership role in the service-learning process. Their responsibilities should be mutually agreed upon by youth and staff. Keep in mind that any tasks should be aligned to youths' passions, skills and strengths. This fosters engagement and makes it a fun experience. Some of the key tasks may include:
 - ▶ Take initial leadership in the community builder and reflection activities.
 - Examples include providing a positive quote or thought to close each activity, as well as taking the lead by being the first person to participate in the community builders.
 - ▶ As the process progresses, it's important that all youth have an opportunity to take leadership in these areas, but it is helpful if the Teen Leaders set the foundation.
- ▶ Be willing to be one of the first voices in the circle when questions are asked or feedback is requested – active participation is key.
- ▶ Help lead group work sessions to focus on specific tasks.
- ▶ Serve as an ambassador for the service-learning project – be visible in the project's leadership and outreach to family, friends and community members.
- ▶ Review the service-learning activities and provide feedback on how it could be improved or modified to speak to youth.
- ▶ Lead a portion, or all, of an activity as agreed upon by staff and Teen Leaders.
- ▶ Meet with staff and other Teen Leaders before each activity to connect and determine each person's responsibility. See the Teen Leader Tip Sheet (page 18). Also set up other times to check in about how the process is going and address any challenges.
- ▶ **Review time commitments.** Since youth lead busy lives, it's important to have a transparent conversation about the time commitment. Design a leadership structure that works for both staff and Teen Leaders. For example, it may work best to schedule a longer block of time (on a weekend, or spread over several afternoons in the Club) to check in, or meet 15 minutes prior to or after each activity. Be creative with the time structure. It's important to designate time for regular check-ins.
- ▶ **Consider necessary skills.** Active and aspiring Teen Leaders who show an interest in maintaining

the commitment are great candidates for the Teen Leader role. The youth who will bring great value are those who have demonstrated skills to take initiative, modeled respect and listened actively, while working effectively with peers. If you have a seasoned leader in your Club, you may want to pair him/her with an emerging leader. Consider the balance of skills and experience of each person. It's also important that each Club member has an opportunity to choose this role, rather than having this role forced on them.

- ▶ **Collaborate with Club staff and each other.** Perhaps one of the most important roles of the two Teen Leaders is to collaborate with each other and Club staff to facilitate the service-learning experience. As a pair, the Teen Leaders will work together, share responsibilities for leading activities in each session, initiate conversations by going first, and engage their peers to do the same. Teen Leaders and Club staff will establish a meeting or check-in prior to and following each session to ensure each person is comfortable with the next session and role, and set up a process for ongoing communication.

RECRUIT THE SERVICE-LEARNING TEAM

Because service is a foundation in Clubs/Youth Centers, there are likely many youth who will show interest in the service-learning group. Youth from Torch and Keystone Clubs are great candidates, as well as youth seeking their next level of leadership engagement. You can reach out to interested youth in a few ways:

- ▶ Have one-on-one conversations to explore initial interest
- ▶ Ask youth to reach out to their friends who either express interest in, or are in leadership roles in their school
- ▶ Create and post a flyer advertising the program
- ▶ Conduct an orientation – and make it a party!
- ▶ Make it an item in your regular weekly announcements
- ▶ If you have already identified Teen Leaders, ask them to organize a creative way of advertising

HOST AN ORIENTATION

An orientation is a great kick-off event to begin your service-learning program. It should be fun and interactive. Incorporate youth voice by including Teen Leaders or other youth who champion service. It can be designed for youth who have already committed to the program or other youth who are interested.

Consider the following topics:

- ▶ **Goal of the Program**
Summarize the objective of the program – to explore passions, skills and strengths, identify a community need and work with a team to develop a project that makes a positive difference in our community.
- ▶ **Leadership Skills and Benefits**
Review the following leadership skills that youth will have an opportunity to discover or strengthen:
 - ▷ Discover who you are
 - ▷ Explore your passion
 - ▷ Leverage your voice
 - ▷ Practice active listening
 - ▷ Work in a team
 - ▷ Include others
 - ▷ Set personal goals
 - ▷ Exercise your citizenship
 - ▷ Discover your purpose

Share also that the program is co-created by all youth who participate – the diversity of the group contributes to an exciting and engaging experience.

- ▶ **Commitments for Participation**
Be upfront about the commitments for participation, (e.g., time requirements, attendance, arriving on time, following through on tasks, putting in additional work as needed, etc.). Ideally, have a working calendar that includes the dates and times for the service-learning sessions and the date for the service-learning project. Review the Club calendar and consider school holidays, major holidays and other community events.

- ▶ **Criteria**
Although there is no formal process for selecting the service-learning group, a core criterion is that youth express an interest, willingness and commitment to learn about their community and strengthen their leadership skills. Refer also to the commitments for participation described above.

- ▶ **Create Meaningful Change in Our Communities**
Help youth understand that their contributions matter and can make a big difference in the community. Make sure they see that that this program is for all interested youth.

It's a great idea to engage Teen Leaders or other youth who are passionate about service to help you design and facilitate the orientation. Also consider inviting parents/caregivers to the orientation meeting – it's an excellent way to involve them in the program and encourage support of their teens.





STAFF TIP

The service-learning team is intended to be a consistent group that meets over time. The service-learning process builds relationships among the team members as they get to know each other. The team works together as they build trust, learn new skills and take risks to try new things. Because of the foundation that is established and cultivated, it's not designed for youth to come in and out of the process. If there are youth who want to get involved once the team has been formed, suggest that they join a committee and/or participate in the final service-learning project.

INVOLVE PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Involve parents/caregivers as much as possible by keeping them informed about their teen's progress in the service-learning program and asking them to reinforce learning at home. Begin with these basic approaches:

- ▶ Schedule an information meeting with parents/caregivers to let them know about the service-learning program. If possible, schedule these after work or during lunch. You may also want to invite them to the orientation with youth participants.
- ▶ Encourage each Club/Youth Center member to discuss what they are discovering about leadership abilities with parents/caregivers.
- ▶ Maintain contact with parents/caregivers on a regular basis – through texts, emails or a parent newsletter – throughout the implementation of the service-learning program.
- ▶ Invite parents/caregivers to visit and observe the program in progress. Although parent/caregiver involvement is an essential element to help Club members thrive, not all parents will have the time or the inclination to be involved. Be sensitive to this, and provide additional encouragement for youth who do not have the support of family members.

INFUSE CREATIVITY AND FUN!

When it's all said and done, everyone wants to have a good time! Creativity and fun should remain at the forefront of everything you do in the service-learning process. Use your creativity and engage the service-learning team to do the same. Each Club member should be encouraged to step forward with ideas and insights that will make the process productive and fun.

A few guidelines may be helpful as you prepare for your project.

- ▶ Designate a regular space in the Club to conduct service-learning activities. Think about the arrangement of chairs, variety of comfortable seating, and creative enhancements such as photos, art work, fabric and color. Consider computer access and the ability to play music.
- ▶ It is ideal to have a consistent place to meet. If there are challenges to finding a regular meeting space in the Club, meet with your Club Director to see what is possible. It makes a difference if the team feels they have their own space.
- ▶ Ask Club members to make the space their own by bringing in special symbols or objects to personalize the space.
- ▶ Encourage Club members to be creative. At the end of each activity, there is an opportunity to offer a positive thought or quote. Each activity can also begin in the same way. Music is a wonderful way to open and close the activities. Creative enhancements should align with the topics covered in the sessions. Ensure that anyone who has a creative enhancement consults with you ahead of time.
- ▶ Everyone loves team gear, (e.g., T-shirts, buttons, key chains, etc.). See if you can find this in your existing inventory or reach out to local businesses that could help. Develop a team motto and advertise that in your gear.
- ▶ The service-learning experience can be fun, diverse and creative. Know your Club members and create from that!

PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITIES

One important concept as staff and youth embark on the service-learning process is the concept of partnering with communities. Volunteering and providing service to others is by nature a good deed – the intention is to help and contribute in a meaningful way. Recognize that as the group identifies the community need and explores it more deeply through the **P + P = P** process, there are opportunities to engage with the communities affected by these needs. People representing these communities have first-hand experiences and knowledge about what the needs are, as well as how they should be addressed. This information is critical and helps inform the project. In this way, our relationship with affected communities should be viewed as an equal partnership – each of us has something valuable to teach. Taking time to understand the community need and building relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect is a key element to the **P + P = P** process, so it's important that staff understand the significance of partnering with communities during this process.



SERVICE-LEARNING SESSIONS CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to help you prepare for your service-learning activities. Review the Get Ready section in each activity for other materials that you may need.



Flipchart paper (if not available, white board or poster board)

Index cards

Markers

Pens

Pencils

Folder/binder for each participant

Designate a space where the team will meet on a regular basis

Activities may need technology
(e.g., computer, laptop, cellphone, internet access, etc.)



TEEN LEADER TIP SHEET



Thank you for taking this leadership role. You will have an opportunity to learn about yourself, your team and your community. It's important to view each experience as a learning opportunity. Remember to talk with your staff, other Teen Leader and the team as things come up that may impact your ability to serve as a Teen Leader. Everyone is here to support you in this experience! Being a Teen Leader will support other youth in the group to become leaders and bring their voice to the conversations.

Here are a few tips. Feel free to add your own.

- 1.** Talk to your staff and other Teen Leader (if identified) before each session to make sure you are prepared to help lead the session. This may include leading a community builder, reflection activity or another portion of the session. Make sure you understand the specifics of your role.
- 2.** Understand the goals of each activity and how you will help your peers understand them.
- 3.** Be one of the first people to share your ideas with the group when you have large-group discussions.
- 4.** Ask questions if anything is unclear or you need more information. Chances are that other youth or staff may have the same question.

- 5.** _____
- 6.** _____
- 7.** _____

