



Public Health & Service-Learning

Service-learning is a teaching approach in K-12, higher education, and community-based settings that can be used to support and promote public health organizations and initiatives, enhance public health professional education, teach about issues of health and wellness to students and communities, and can be used as a health intervention to promote health and prevent disease. This resource gives an overview of service-learning and provides a list of resources and research on service-learning and public health.

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. As students participate in service projects, actively meeting the needs of their communities, they develop practical skills, critical thinking, self-esteem, and a sense of civic responsibility which can last a lifetime. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that bridge the gap between the classroom and the larger world.

With service-learning, students:

- Connect academic subjects to the real world
- Meet real community needs
- Grow as leaders, decision makers, and problem solvers
- Gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them
- Develop as active members of society

But students aren't the only ones that benefit. An essential aspect of service-learning is that the student, the community, and public health organization all benefit from the partnership. Here are just a few of possible benefits:

- The opportunity to expand your mission and reach out (without substantially increasing costs) by engaging a cadre of competent, motivated young people.
- New energy, ideas, and enthusiasm as well as specialized skills that young people can bring to your organization.
- Increased public support and visibility as students become ambassadors for public health and wellness issues.
- New partnerships and resources.
- A new generation of volunteers and future public health advocates.

Service-learning and public health can intersect in several different ways:

- Service-learning can be a component in public health professional education. Examples: Students in a pharmacy course may provide vaccine and post-care information at a flu clinic. Nursing student volunteers at a cancer hospice gain experience in providing companionship and support the terminally ill. MPH candidates might answer calls to teen sex advice line, providing information on sexuality and sexual health.
- Service-learning is used to support public health organizations. Examples: Computer science students may help develop a website for a local women's health center. High school students in a

Spanish class can develop, deliver, and evaluate a brochure targeted to the Spanish-speaking immigrant community to make them aware of health services available.

- Service-learning is used as a health intervention. Example: Service-learning has been shown to be an effective tool against teen sexual risk-taking, pregnancy, and STDs.
- Public Health organizations play the role of community partners in service-learning by teaming up with schools, universities, and other community-based organizations to meet shared goals and initiatives, like lowering childhood diabetes rates in a community, providing healthy nutritious food in a local soup kitchen, or increasing health literacy.

6 Steps to Building Partnerships for Service-Learning

1. *Identify potential partners.* Contact your local schools or universities to see if there is a service-learning coordinator or program or community service efforts already in existence. If not, see if you can speak with teachers and administrators to explain your program and determine if your partnership could provide a curriculum-driven, hands-on educational opportunity that could benefit students.
2. *Identify organization or community needs.* Identify needs at your organization or in the local community and work with students and educators to see how they could fulfill those needs while meeting academic objectives.
3. *Determine individuals who will serve as primary liaisons in the planning and implementation process.* These individuals should include members of public health profession or organization, students, and educators.
4. *Negotiate and agree upon roles and expectations.* Pledge the time to work with and understand the academic and practical needs of teachers and students who will benefit from gaining the knowledge your resource can provide. Discuss the roles and expectations for the preservation organizations, students, and schools/educators.
5. *Determine best method for on-going communication and evaluation.*
6. *Periodically, redesign relationships based on changing needs and circumstances*

Selected Resources: Service-Learning as a Health Intervention

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Stevens, C. (2008). *Service learning for health, physical education, and recreation: a step-by-step guide*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

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Stewart, C.M Jr. (2005). A model human sexuality-HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention service-learning program. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 10(3), 83-64.

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Selected Resources: Service-Learning in Public Health Professional Education

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Chambers, L.W., Hoey, J., Underwood, J., & Bains, N. (1998). Integration of service, education, and research in local official public health agencies. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88(7), 1102-1104.

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Champagne, N. (2006). Increasing advocacy skills for entry-level health educators through service learning. *Journal for Civic Commitment*, 7.

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Cohen S.S., & Milone-Nuzzo P. (2001). Advancing health policy in nursing education through service-learning. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 23(3), 28-40.

Connors, K.M., Cashman, S., Seifer, S.D., & Unverzagt, M. (2003). *Advancing the Healthy People 2010 objectives through community-based education: a curriculum planning guide*. San Francisco, CA: CCPH.

Gelmon, S.B., Holland, B.A., & Shinnamon, A.F. (1998). *Health Professions Schools in Service to the Nation: Final Evaluation Report*. San Francisco, CA: CCPH.

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Norbeck, J.S., Connolly, C., Koerner, J., & Zlotkowski, E. (1998). *Caring and Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Nursing*. Herndon, VA: Stylus.

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Seifer, S., Connors, K. (1997). *Community-Campus Partnerships for Health: a guide for developing community responsive models in health professions education*. San Francisco, CA: CCPH.

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Selected Resources: Service-Learning Addressing Issues of Public Health

Academy for Educational Development. (2007). *Youth mapping health literacy*. Washington, DC: AED. www.servicelearning.org/library/lib_cat/?library_id=7478

Bassi S., & Caldrello L. (2008). Tobacco-free service-learning pilot project. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 47(4), 174-178.

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Cashman, S., & Seifer, S. (2008). Service-learning: an integral part of undergraduate public health. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 35(3), 273-278.

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Youth Service America. (2008). *Malaria: prevention, awareness, and fundraising through youth service*. Washington, DC: Youth Service America. www.servicelearning.org/library/lib_cat/?library_id=7565

For more information

Campus Compact
www.compact.org

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health
<http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/>

ETR Associates
www.etr.org

Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.servicelearning.org