

What's Your Why?

Youth-Led Service Project Toolkit



Purpose of this Toolkit

Volunteer Iowa and its youth volunteers have created this toolkit to help young people discover their potential to create change through designing and implementing their own service projects. This toolkit will walk individuals through investigating a need, planning a service project and building partnerships, implementing their service project through diverse ways, reflecting and assessing their experience, and demonstrating what they've learned and developed with others.

Process for Creating a Service Project

The five-step process for creating a service project is known as IPARD. It stands for: Investigate, Plan, Act, Reflect, Demonstrate. This toolkit will breakdown each step of this process and provide tips for how to engage in the IPARD process successfully.

Step 1

Investigate a local, statewide, national, or global issue to address. If you need help identifying a need, a great resource is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Consider how these goals are relevant to where you live.

Tips for Investigating Needs

1. Research: Define your community and research data and news stories about the area. The US Census is a great resource to start building a community profile which will help you identify needs.

2. Community Map: Understanding what exists in your community and what doesn't will benefit you in identifying needs. Are there any nonprofits locally? Are there organizations requesting volunteers? Are there any municipalities who could benefit from service projects? Remember that your relevant entities in your community are not limited to non-profits. Businesses and organizations with expertise in certain areas may be well-versed specific issues relevant to their work. For example, a cafe may know how much plastic is consumed in their business. A library may know how many individuals lack internet access. Creating a full picture of your community will also help later on, when you identify potential partners for developing your plan to address the need.

3. Surveys, Focus Groups, & Interviews: Once you define your community, one way to discover need is simply to ask. Conduct surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc. to hear directly from individuals on what is impacting them.

Benefits of Service

- Gain valuable professional skills in areas of interest
- Increased likelihood of graduating college (19%) and being hired (23%)
- Decreases incidences of negative social behaviors
- Strengthens sense of self and ability to effect change
- Enhances one's personal identity and interests
- Grows professional networking pool
- Promotes mental health and wellbeing
- Provides physical health benefits
- Increases overall social well-being of community

Other Resources

- [Youth Service America Youth Changing the World Toolkit](#)
- [National Youth Leadership Council](#)



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Consider What's Your Why

After investigating a need and identifying the issue you would like your service project to address, it's time to start brainstorming projects to address the need. You may connect with potential partners you identified in your community map to discover how you can support their work, expand upon an existing service project, or already have a million ideas in your head.

It's now important to take a pause and reflect on what you would like to gain from your service project experience. Consider what you love to do, such as painting, sports, comedy, music, etc. and consider if you would like to gain professional experience in a personal interest of yours. Consider your unique set of skills and knowledge and what it may bring to a service project. Unique service projects can stem from identifying your "why." For example, an individual who loves baking could sell goods at the local farmers market and donate sales to a cause. An individual who loves photography may create a blog with animal profiles for a local pet adoption shelter.

Before deciding on an action strategy, also consider if it's currently being done, or has been done recently, and how effective it was. Avoid duplicative work to ensure your action is meaningful.

Step 2

Plan your service project to address your need and implement your action strategy. Planning may take up a majority of your service project. It's best to work backwards from your goal.

Consider:

- What resources do I need?
- How will I obtain resources I need? Donations? Fundraising?
- Will I need volunteers to assist with my project? How will I recruit them?
- Are there any partnerships with organizations I could form to help in implementing this day or obtaining resources?
- Will I need an event space for my project? Do I need approval to use that space?
- Do I need to promote my service project?

It is also important to develop a timeline for yourself to know when you need to meet certain goals throughout the project. For example, you may need to create pitch to garner investments for your project if you need funds to purchase resources. One step must be completed before you can move on to the next.

Utilize community partners you identified in your community map to provide assistance, feedback on your project, resources, volunteers, etc. Partners may serve as mentors to you and are a valuable connection as well as increase the likelihood of success for your project.

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Step 3

It is now time to act, or implement your service project. This step is the execution of your plan. It may be completed in short or long time span, with several tasks or a few. Discover the diverse ways you may engage in service below.

Direct Service



Direct service occurs when you have face-to-face interaction with who or what is being served.

- Examples include:
- Providing a meal at a shelter
 - Walking a dog
 - Visiting a nursing home
 - Reading to children

Indirect Service



Indirect service is not in the presence of who or what you are impacting.

- Examples include:
- Stocking shelves at a pantry
 - Running a nonprofit's social media
 - Writing a letter to the editor on an issue

Philanthropy



Philanthropy focuses on collecting & donating financial & in-kind support.

- Examples include:
- Selling tickets to an event & donating the funds
 - Organizing a silent auction
 - Donating old clothes to a thrift store

Awareness



Awareness educates others about a cause. Share information and teach others about an issue you are passionate about.

- Examples include:
- Presenting to elected officials
 - Driver safety campaign
 - PSA video campaign

While creating your own service project is a fun challenge, there are also many volunteer opportunities already available within communities across the state of Iowa. In fact, there is an increasing need for more volunteers. Instead of duplicating existing work, you can support work that is already being done to address a need.

Find volunteer opportunities near you on Volunteer Iowa's statewide volunteer database [Get Connected](#).

GET CONNECTED

volunteer
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Step 4

The fourth step of your service project actually should occur throughout the process. Reflection should be incorporated from beginning to end.

At the start of your service project, ask yourself what you hope to learn, discover, create. Throughout the process, reassess your answer to those questions. What do you like doing? What don't you like?

After implementing your service project, ask what was a success? What wasn't? What would you do differently? What do you now know that you didn't at the start of the process?

Consider keeping a diary, record videos of your experience, take a pre- and post-survey, etc. to facilitate reflection.

If you utilized partners for your project, engage them in reflection as well. They may fill out evaluation or assessment questionnaires which will help you identify best practices and the possibilities for future service project opportunities.

Step 5

The fifth and final step of your service project is demonstrate. Demonstrating your work will solidify your learning, emphasize the importance of your contribution, and further engage your community. It also allows you and your partners the chance to celebrate your work!

Demonstrating can be done through videos, posters, social media, public service announcements, service fairs, podcasts, articles, etc.

Demonstration will also help you begin to translate your experience into resume, cover letter, and college applications. Consider the skills you gained and now have experience in. When able, use numbers to articulate what you did and the change your actions created.

For example, you may say you contributed 100 hours planning a community clean-up where 50 individuals picked up 2,000 pieces of trash.

Volunteer Iowa also hosts a number of recognition programs, such as the What's Your 50? campaign, Governor's Volunteer Awards, and the Presidential Volunteer Service Award you may qualify to receive.

Get Involved

Volunteer Iowa is happy to connect and offer guidance to individuals interested in creating a service project. Please reach out to info@volunteeriowa.org to learn about what resources we offer.

Interested in having Volunteer Iowa speak to young people in your community? Send us an email and we will try to accommodate your requests.

Volunteer Iowa also leads the Youth Service Committee. This committee consists of youth leaders from across Iowa. The committee meets once a month and provides insights and knowledge on volunteering barriers and best practices in Iowa. They also may serve as mentors to other youth volunteers. Individuals below the age of 25 are encouraged to apply at this [link](#).