



Since the 19th century and the time of one-room schoolhouses, the purpose of American public education has been the development of an informed citizenry able to function effectively in a democracy. The teaching strategy “service-learning” – an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic and civic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs – is an engaging way to achieve these goals.



Because service-learning as an inquiry-driven teaching method, civic outcomes for students are clear. From their first-hand assessments of community needs, to their analysis of the root causes underlying those needs, students apply a range of communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills before taking informed action in the public sphere.

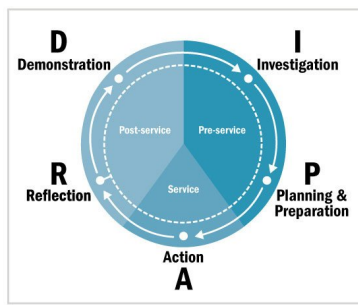
Educators shape these experiences by identifying youth outcomes, and formative and summative ways to assess learning, before stepping back for youth leadership of the experience.

Whether the experience is direct (as in registering voters) or indirect, as in advocating for greater equity in access to STEM classes, service-learning helps young people experience and understand governmental systems that directly affect their lives. Throughout the process, students and educators alike reflect on their experiences, gaining first-hand knowledge that informs their understandings of community needs and public solutions.



For more information and resources on service-learning visit nylc.org





Service-Learning/ Civic Education Crosswalk

Service-Learning Step	Service-Learning Example	Civic Outcome (from the College, Career & Civic Life Framework = C3)	Sample "Educating for American Democracy"* Outcome
Investigation	(ES): Walk Across Oklahoma: Elementary students learned math skills by calculating their Body Mass Indexes anonymously, then aggregating them to assess the relative health of their student population -- doing some primary research before they recorded their aggregate walks to schools and elsewhere in an effort to lower their collective BMI. Ultimately, they proposed state-level legislation that was successful, and built out a website to track Oklahomans walking toward a healthier future.	Dimension 1: Develop questions and plan inquiries. Dimension 2: Apply civics tools and concepts. Dimension 3: Gather and evaluate sources. Dimension 4: Communicate conclusions and take informed action	K-5: #1, Civic Participation Participate in a community through building relationships, making change, and problem-solving. Define components in a community through the same activities.
Preparation and Planning	(MS): Raising Urban Bees: Middle school students in a suburban area of Minneapolis were concerned about the decline in bee populations. They knew that some parts of the city allowed for urban bee-keeping and learned that their municipal code would have to change to allow for local apiaries. So, they set up a meeting with City Council members and planned a collaborative presentation that emphasized the advantages and ways to control for possible mishaps.	Dimension 1: Develop questions and plan inquiries. Dimension 2: Apply civics tools and concepts. Dimension 3: Gather and evaluate sources. Dimension 4: Communicate conclusions and take informed action	6-12: #1, Civic Participation Engage as active community members and examine the tensions between personal interests and civic responsibilities. #2, Changing Landscape Analyze the impact of people, policy, and cultural norms on landscape and climate.
Action	(HS): Education Equity: High school students at a public magnet school in New York City realized that all races were not proportionately represented in their student bodies. They considered the student assessment process and identified weaknesses that allowed for majority white student populations, then held a public rally, contacted media, and secured a meeting with the Chancellor.	Dimension 1: Develop questions and plan inquiries. Dimension 2: Apply civics tools and concepts. Dimension 3: Gather and evaluate sources.	9-12: #1, Civic Participation Analyze strategies and examples of civic participation including instances by those without full political rights. Engage as active community members and examine the tensions between personal interests and civic responsibilities.
Reflection	(MS): Wetland Watchers: Middle school students in New Orleans who'd reclaimed land that had been damaged by repeated hurricanes reflected on the difference their actions had made through haiku they wrote on-site. They now offer tours of the coastal restoration project that has become a nature center, reflecting on their progress as they share their stories.	Dimension 1: Develop questions and plan inquiries. Dimension 4: Communicate conclusions and take informed action	6-12: #1, Civic Participation Analyze strategies and examples of civic participation, including instances by those without full political rights. Engage as active community members and examine the tensions between personal interests and civic responsibilities.
Demonstration	(HS): YouthBuild: Alternative high school students taking construction trades had built a home for women in transition from abusive relationships, in partnership with the local housing authority. They shared their experiences of learning math skills and construction codes — while also learning about local social services — with educators attending the annual National Service-Learning Conference.	Dimension 1: Develop questions and plan inquiries. Dimension 2: Apply civics tools and concepts. Dimension 3: Gather and evaluate sources. Dimension 4: Communicate conclusions and take informed action	6-12, #1, Civic Participation Engage as active community members and examine the tensions between personal interests and civic responsibilities. Build civic friendship through informed civil dialogue and productive disagreement.

*"Educating for American Democracy" is an inquiry framework that states, local school districts, and educators can use to transform the teaching of history and civics to meet the needs of a diverse 21st century K-12 student body. (<https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/>)