

Service-Learning Tip Sheet

School-Business Partnerships

What Is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a teaching method that enriches learning by engaging students in meaningful service to their schools and communities. Young people apply academic skills to solving real-world issues, linking established learning objectives with genuine needs. They lead the process, with adults as partners, applying critical thinking and problem-solving skills to concerns such as hunger, pollution, and diversity. Many adult partners get involved through their places of employment.

Successful School-Business Partnerships

Either the school or the business may initiate the partnership; after that, both groups should be equally involved. Consider the following suggestions for a successful partnership:

- Engage both schools and businesses in the planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Outline the needs, motivations, challenges, and roles of each partner. Use these to design shared goals for the project.
- Learn the basics of each partner's culture. For example, businesses need to know the school calendar, and schools need to be aware of workday dynamics.
- Develop a common language. Spend time together learning about service-learning and its components. Include all partners in trainings, conferences, and meetings, to develop a shared understanding of the project.
- Don't view businesses merely as checkbooks. Explore partnerships where employees, students, and teachers work side-by-side. Ask if businesses provide their employees with paid time to volunteer.
- Be driven by curricular goals and learning objectives, and seek partners that can help achieve them.
- Don't forget small, local businesses.

Benefits for Businesses

- Employees, serving side-by-side with students, gain skills relevant to the workplace.
- Employees develop a better understanding of the community in which they live and work.
- Workplaces are enriched by team- and skills-building efforts.
- People from different areas of a business have opportunities to interact.
- Businesses establish a voice and role within educational establishments, reaching future members of the workforce.
- Corporate volunteers improve conditions in their communities.
- Community goodwill and customer loyalty grow.
- Employee loyalty increases and turnover decreases.

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Benefits for Schools

- Students gain credibility as community resources.
- Youths receive improved exposure to careers and opportunities.
- Students experience real-life applications of academic lessons.
- Student productivity and performance increase.
- Students see the relevance of academic standards.
- Schools gain access to broader resources and support.
- Schools connect with volunteers who can provide ongoing services and skills.
- School-community connections are deepened.

Examples of Service-Learning Partnerships

TraverseNet, an internet service provider, is a student-run business in Wheaton, Minn. Students lead all aspects of the internet service, in partnership with a telecommunications company.

Through SOLV — a nonprofit organization connecting government agencies, businesses, and individual volunteers to enhance the livability of Oregon — State Farm® works in partnership with kindergarten-through-12th-grade students. More than 120 school sites are now engaged. Local State Farm associates participate through their corporate volunteerism program, partnering with students on events such as beach and river clean-ups.

In Philadelphia and San Diego, State Farm convened an alliance with auto-industry partners and schools. Students learn auto-collision-repair skills and address a community issue by providing affordable transportation for Welfare-to-Work programs.

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