national youth leadership council

Pathways to Impact: Service-Learning as a Catalyst for State Afterschool Networks

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Pathways to Impact: Service-Learning as a Catalyst for State Afterschool Networks

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INTRODUCTION

Service-learning centers youth voice, amplifies youth engagement, empowers youth to make real-world change, enhances program capacity, and grows youth as leaders within their community.

Since 2017, the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) has partnered with fourteen members of the 50 State Afterschool Network to integrate service-learning into afterschool programming; providing in-person and online trainings, curricula, coaching, grants, and resources.

This report delves into the transformative power of service-learning by examining how four members of the State Afterschool Network leveraged service-learning as a strategy to increase youth engagement. Through a comprehensive analysis of the networks, we provide lessons learned, case studies, and recommendations for networks seeking to enrich afterschool programs in their state.
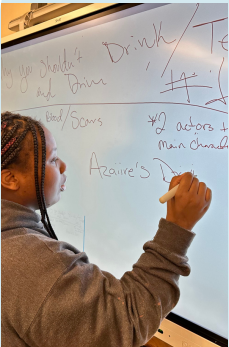
Afterschool programs play a vital role in the holistic development of young people. They provide a safe and supportive environment where students can continue their educational journey, explore their interests, and develop valuable life skills. However, the potential of afterschool programs extends beyond academic support and skill-building; they offer a unique opportunity to cultivate engaged, responsible, and empathetic citizens.

Service-learning has the transformative potential to not only engage students in programs but to create generations of engaged and informed citizens. As Rivka Burstein-Stern notes in United We Serve: Afterschool and Service-Learning, "[Service-learning] increases student engagement, improves educator efficacy, and develops powerful bonds among young people and their communities" (2009).

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NYLC defines service-learning as an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic and civic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs.

In contrast to community service or volunteerism, service-learning uses evidence-based process that intentionally connects to learning goals and leads students through the service-learning cycle of IPARD: Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration.

Service-learning empowers students to be involved in their own learning, to share their voice, and to care about their community. It is a flexible approach, easily adapted to different age levels, community needs, and program goals.

"Think of [service-learning] as a tool to accomplish many things--great PR, STEM, youth voice, career exploration, engagement of older youth, state education standards, policy, funding, and on and on...I think there's no wrong door... it's how you get all of these other pieces done."

~Mary Graham, Director
Tennessee Afterschool Network

In this report, each of the four partner Afterschool State Networks (Tennessee Afterschool Network, TXPOST, OregonASK, and Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network) are at different stages of advancing service-learning as a strategy for youth engagement. Their lessons learned, stories, and recommendations are meant to help you explore how to tap into this powerful youth engagement strategy.

We recommend utilizing the worksheet provided on page 21 while reviewing this report to document your thoughts, reflections, and initiate the journey towards advancing service-learning within your own Network.

LESSONS LEARNED

To leverage service-learning as a strategy for youth engagement in afterschool programming, assess your status and consider these actions.

ORGANIZE & STRATEGIZE

Consider your state's needs and motivations for combining learning with service. What's your specific "why"? Who are your internal experts and champions (including youth)? Who has an interest in partnering?

DESIGN THE SYSTEM

Design the 'customer journey' from awareness to adoption, building program-level capacity. Use natural structures (e.g. annual conference, website) to reach dual audiences: program leaders who need to buy in, and program staff who will implement.

TRAIN & SUPPORT

Foundational and ongoing training is vital to implement service-learning with fidelity to standards. Meet programs where they are in terms of length and skill. Offer recurring opportunities and one-to-one coaching.

PILOT COHORTS

Recruit cohorts to implement on the same cycle to create a learning community. Financial incentives and CEU's are important, but grants alone will not guarantee implementation. Build in actionable deliverables.

ALIGN & INTEGRATE

Service-learning does not need to be a standalone initiative and can build off of current priorities. Review your goals and objectives, identify possible entry points, and target a place to start.

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Identify current and potential service-learning practitioners, mentors, and advocates to build a learning community. Think about readiness for youth voice and engagement. New programs or sites are great places to start.

PROVIDE TOOLS

'Plug and play' curriculum, handbooks, and samples in familiar formats give program staff tools to rely on or adapt. State and local examples lend relevancy and reinforce service-learning's accessibility.

TELL THE STORIES

Boost your education and advocacy efforts for afterschool along with youth leaders demonstrating their learning through public speaking, videos, and newsletters. Recognize youth leadership and program achievements.

WALK THE TALK

Sustain efforts by tapping into youth leadership at a systemic level. Engage or create a youth board and invest in youth-adult partnerships for the long-term.

PROFILE TAN: PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Since its inception, The Tennessee Afterschool Network (TAN) has integrated service-learning into its strategic plan, grown partnerships, built internal capacities, and "tooled-up" those in the program field.

Formed in 2014, TAN is committed to serving the unique demographics of the state's population comprised primarily of rural counties, outside of four distinct urban areas. Today, the network serves more than 1,700 members statewide including afterschool programs, summer programs, youth serving nonprofits, state agencies, corporate partners, teachers, school board members, principals, superintendents, and interested citizens.

The United Ways of Tennessee serves as fiscal agent and host for the state network. President of both TAN and United Ways of Tennessee, Mary Graham staffs the network centrally with the support of consultants on communications, accounting, and training. In addition, Graham oversees eight local United Way offices that run programming with part time staff.

From its inception, TAN integrated service-learning as a key strategy to engage youth in afterschool programming with the support of Volunteer Tennessee (the state service commission) as a key partner. The two committed leaders, Mary Graham and Volunteer Tennessee Director Jim Snell, championed the power and impact of service-learning and were instrumental in educating other members and partners about its potential benefits.

TAN elevates youth voice and strengthens youth impact through service-learning by aligning it with STEM, career exploration, academic standard mastery, and its other priority areas. The primary audience for its service-learning programs are middle school students.

"*Every* service-learning project we've [supported] has been STEM related. Every one. And that's not us telling them they had to be."

~Mary Graham, TAN Director

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Student outcomes include character development, 21st century skills, substance mis-use prevention, academic achievement, social emotional health, and youth leadership. Service-learning has also been an effective strategy for STEM engagement. For example, TAN incorporated service-learning into two large-scale state programs, Tennessee Career Awareness and Preparation System (TN Caps) and Learning Blade.® Both include career exploration modules, with TN Caps linking students with local employers and Learning Blade giving youth a stepping stone into service-learning experiences while mastering state educational standards.

Exploring Careers While Meeting Standards

TAN trains program providers who facilitate Learning Blade's career exploration online modules (tied to state academic standards, completion of modules counts as mastery of the standard) with youth in summer programs.

Modules present hypothetical challenges that students must solve, while learning about the contributions and approaches of different professions. For many of the challenges, a service component is a natural extension.

TAN worked with NYLC to train facilitators in service-learning and provided a curriculum extension to turn a hypothetical cyber-hacking crisis or a food insecurity scenario challenge into local action, using service-learning's IPARD cycle to create solutions.

Armed with examples and service-learning know-how, educators may now expand on any of the modules to achieve the benefits of youth-led service-learning.

Connecting with existing priority areas like STEM and career exploration has been crucial to successful integration. Programs have little time to start something new given current staffing shortages. Service-learning has been a proven way to meet existing goals and priorities.

To promote high quality service-learning implementation on a large scale, TAN provided both funding and training as well as technical assistance to programs across the state. During the pandemic, they piloted with 14 programs, and after the pandemic, they focused on four middle school programs, rolling out two pilots a year for two years.

Additional sites received free technical assistance to grow their own initiatives. These included STEM learning modules that focus on applications to solve community problems, mastery of state educational standards, career exploration, and youth voice. The students engaged in service-learning by building their own projects and reflecting on their learnings and experiences.

Training and "tooling up" programs has become a mainstay of TAN's strategy. TAN invested in a full day training of state network leaders, recorded the sessions, and created four shorter (1-1.5 hour) recorded trainings that remain available on their website.

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As reflected in the Lessons Learned, TAN found that while training builds staff's understanding of service-learning, there needs to be funded staff time to attend trainings as well as for ongoing support. Training alone did not result in a substantial increase in program implementation nor did it make service-learning sustainable. To address this, TAN began to split grant payments into two parts, requiring completion of all deliverables to receive the full support. This process incentivized the sustainability of the training outcomes into ongoing programming.

The time of year was also found to be a factor in the successful integration of service-learning. Focusing service-learning in summer programs led to greater acceptance and implementation since summer offers more time for meaningful activities. The key time to engage summer programs in training is early in the year (January); training in March was too late. And, they found that providing short trainings in the morning, with a video option, is a good way to reach summer staff.

As TAN has evolved as an organization, they have expanded their support to include things like advanced training sessions and conferences; kits, tools and resources; standards; sub-grants; networking opportunities; and highlighting successful service-learning efforts through awards, newsletters, social media, and their website. They continue to distribute quality resources available through NYLC, and in 2023 co-hosted the Annual National Service-Learning Conference.

TAN strives to understand and adapt to the realities of afterschool programs. They plan to develop a fundraising tool for programs to raise their own resources. The tool is on a temporary hold due to the current staffing crisis. Meanwhile, TAN continues to seek support which led to receiving a grant for youth engagement in building digital literacy and access for seniors.

Shades of Development

Sixth through eighth grade students at SHADES of Development's programs in Tennessee worked to explore the Learning Blade Hack Attack mission through service-learning.

After completing the simulation, students investigated needs within their school community concerning cybersecurity and safety. They developed and recorded a public service announcement on the topics and shared it with more than 200 students, parents, and staff in the program community.

Students collaborated as a team and received positive reinforcement from the community. Their experience serves as the catalyst for future service to the SHADES community.

PROFILE TXPOST: FOCUS ON READINESS

TXPOST champions service-learning as high-quality afterschool programming — a key component of a functioning educational ecosystem. They are building a strong foundation for service-learning sustainability statewide.

The mission of TXPOST is to convene, educate, and advocate to improve the quality and increase the availability of out of school time (OST) opportunities for Texas youth. Founded in 2011, TXPOST is committed to fostering and facilitating strategic collaboration and public investment.

TXPOST is a non-profit organization serving OST programs throughout the state's geographically and culturally distinct regions that are addressing the needs of more than 5 million school-age children, most of whom are in school districts with fewer than 5,000 students. To extend its reach, TXPOST collaborates with statewide alliances like the Boys & Girls Club and YMCA as well as regional intermediaries in the larger metropolitan areas of Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio.

TXPOST knows that with a small staff and a big mission, initiatives that don't align to organizational goals are not successful. From the outset, they integrated service-learning into their other priorities, seeking to embed service-learning principles into their on-going work and offering technical assistance to partners to ensure high-quality implementation. Through this integration, TXPOST both positions service-learning as a model for OST and promotes sustainability and efficiency within the organization.

"[E]mpowering kids' voices .. that community engagement and exploration piece … resonates for so many."

~Jenna Courtney, Executive Director, TXPOST

TXPOST identified their "why" for service-learning right from the start. Advocacy is a major focus area for the organization, and in this regard, service-learning was a winning strategy. As CEO Jenna Courtney explains, "Setting aside all of the great things about service-learning for kids and programs, it's a really tangible way to speak about what can happen in afterschool and in summer in a way that will resonate. … Empowering kids' voices, that community engagement and exploration piece, resonates for many." In addition to meaningful student and community outcomes, service-learning is a powerful demonstration tool to help TXPOST drive awareness and engage new stakeholders.

TXPOST began its service-learning advocacy journey with ambitious goals including to provide training at the regional and local levels, support pilot cohorts, gather and promote program stories to demonstrate the impact of service-learning in OST, track and analyze youth self-assessment, and employ service-learning as a strategy to empower youth voices and align with school day objectives. However, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted afterschool programs significantly which then led to significant modifications to their goals. With people staying at home, program participation plummeted with many programs seeing as much as a 60% decrease in participation. TXPOST saw these challenges as an opportunity to pilot a virtual service-learning program that empowers students to work on community health issues.

Two programs in Dallas incorporated service-learning into their activities with great success, serving as proof for what students can do through service-learning. The nonprofit, For Oak Cliff added a service-learning 'filter' to their youth ambassador program resulting in a new function and role for youth within the organization. Jubilee Park and Community Center based their Pipeline to Success teen club agenda on NYLC's Health and Wellbeing service-learning curriculum resulting in youth club members sharing powerful mental health messages with their peers through social media.

TXPOST recognizes the numerous benefits of service-learning, particularly that the service-learning process necessitates youth leadership which is significant and relatively unique. Youth leadership and youth voice are fundamental to quality service-learning instruction. When program administrators, staff, parents, and the youth themselves discover the power of youth voice, service-learning flourishes.

TXPOST encountered surprisingly significant challenges to the recruitment and participation in a pilot program. To develop their own capacity to champion service-learning, TXPOST focused on its own readiness as well as program readiness. Working with NYLC, they developed a suite of materials such as an Intro to Service-Learning slide deck, MOU templates, a media release template, and a Program Readiness Checklist.

The aspect of readiness TXPOST found most challenging was the integral nature of youth voice. Youth voice can be both service-learning's superpower and possibly its greatest challenge. Youth voice makes service-learning work, but educators must be ready and willing to let go of knowing exactly how the program will roll out. As a result, TXPOST is taking steps to intentionally work on this mindshift. Through trainings, they are adapting their approach to meet educators and afterschool professionals where they are. They are breaking down service-learning into 'bite-sized pieces' that build towards student success.

Executive Director Jenna Courtney advises State Afterschool Networks who are new to service-learning to start small, set realistic goals, and contextualize service-learning in context with existing program content.

Service-Learning in District-Run Afterschool

Program leaders at Calhoun County ISD sought to integrate service learning into their new afterschool program to better engage students and help educators and program staff meet Texas' educational standards—Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

As with all afterschool programming, alignment between in and out of school goals is paramount to a high-quality experience for youth, their families, and staff. By aligning service-learning with the TEKS, youth outcomes remained the primary focus in the district.

As leaders and staff delved deeper into quality service learning instruction, they realized the profound shifts in mindset they would need in order to make implementation successful. This readiness factor for CCISD proved key not only for their efforts but also for TXPOST's work in championing service-learning throughout the state.

PROFILE OREGONASK: THEMATIC PLANS

Oregon Afterschool & Summer for Kids Network (OregonASK)'s began integrating service-learning six years ago. They take a "thematic approach" to service-learning with a focus on career exploration, health, and the arts.

OregonASK relies on strong partnerships to meet its mission to "support, expand, and educate on quality expanded learning opportunities for children, youth, and families throughout Oregon." Founded in 2005, the network serves rural, urban, and suburban communities across the state. OregonASK is a critical connector for afterschool programs whose importance was amplified during the pandemic.

OregonASK is served by fiscal agent and partner Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children (OAEYC) but plans to become a freestanding nonprofit soon. The organization is staffed by Executive Director Beth Unverzagt and 7.5 FTE's (including VISTAs) who are located across the state. Their primary focus areas include policy, partnerships, and professional development. They host two annual conferences per year, quarterly partner meetings, and frequently update members with news and resources.

Training and technical assistance contracts with the City of Portland as well as school districts are a major source of revenue for the organization. However, a new federal earmark for the arts supports OregonASK's service-learning work. By using service-learning as a strategy, they are meeting the identified goal of increasing arts exploration through youth service.

Recognizing the quarterly nature of many of their programs, OregonASK adapted the service-learning process into 10-week "process-based arts" curricula entitled: Prysm and CoLab Service through the Arts.

> "[A]fterschool is a space for not only youth voice to thrive, but also to be able to do that low risk experimentation [as found in service-learning] that allows for youth to be able to really get excited about learning and enrichment.
>
> ~Rachel Kessler, Learning Design Coordinator, OregonASK

These resources are shared with programs regardless of their structure (drop-in, mixed age groups, clubs, camps, etc.). Programs participate in a cohort comprised of 5-6 other programs serving upper elementary and middle school students.

Like with their other curricula, each program staff receives two hours of training and additional one-on-one coaching. Training is offered on a quarterly schedule to support program staff changes. OregonASK staff emphasize the unique strengths and needs of each program, acting as facilitators to build on a programs' best practices while working toward sustainability and growth.

As Learning Design Coordinator Rachel Kessler shares, "Those who have continued to do service-learning with us over many years have done so because the enthusiasm among the youth has meant that they were able to maintain programming despite staff turnover." They also find that once afterschool staff have completed a service-learning program, they're willing to build on it. Several partners have done multiple iterations of service-learning with youth, and have significantly contributed to the learning community. They have increased internal expertise and added to OregonASK's body of knowledge and adaptation of resources.

About ArtsNow: CoLab and Prysm Service-Learning Curricula

ArtsNow outlines the steps to service-learning that is youth led, supported by an adult facilitator.
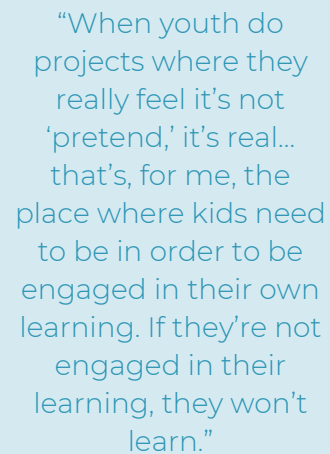
- 10-unit curriculum
- Offers different means of brainstorming and other facilitator practices.
- Youth participants think about their concerns and interests.
- They think about who they would like to speak to (artists and arts organizations).
- OregonASK facilitates a connection to an organization.
- Youth interview or do field trips and then take that information to inform project development.
- They conduct service from a creative lens, so they may make a video, film, posters, or other art projects, or even teach art in other communities.

Improving resources for programs is a focus for OregonASK. In response to cohort members, an asynchronous learning system is under development as well as short-form video-based professional development to reinforce skills and strategies.

Cohort recruitment comes primarily through their widely-read newsletter. Over the years, OregonASK has built an audience that takes a keen interest in their wide array of offerings, which focuses on fidelity and prioritizing youth voice.

OregonASK emphasizes that providing resources and training for facilitators that make a clear distinction between community service and service-learning and emphasizes learning goals has been a 'game-changer.' Kessler notes that the Service to Careers and ArtsNow curricula have made it possible for programs to feel they have a "really useful recipe for success that they feel comfortable following. And then they grow their willingness to be more and more creative and offer more and more youth voice opportunities as they move along."

When youth are engaged through meaningful service and are able to directly see the impact of that service, the impact multiplies exponentially. OregonASK anticipates more service integration, including with their upcoming Jobs Now and entrepreneurship initiatives. Following the service-learning process, and its intentional focus on reflection and learning, is a great way to engage even more young people in high-quality programming.

> "When youth do projects where they really feel it's not 'pretend,' it's real... that's, for me, the place where kids need to be in order to be engaged in their own learning. If they're not engaged in their learning, they won't learn."
>
> ~Beth Unverzagt, Director, OregonASK

CASE STUDY PSAYDN: ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN)'s approach to service-learning includes agency-wide "organic" incorporation into all of its initiatives and sees promise in a new alternative pathway to graduation for struggling students.

Founded in 2004, PSAYDN plays a unique role in bridging the capacity needs and programming perspectives within the out of school time sector in the state. PSAYDN serves nearly 3,000 members and is managed by the Center for Schools and Communities (CSC), a statewide training and technical assistance division of Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit. CSC is also one of the state's regional education service agencies.

Funders of PSAYDN include the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Labor and Industry. Their partners include Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers', providers to the Workforce Development Board Youth Council, as well as school-age childcare technical assistance organizations.

PSADYN has four staff positions located throughout the state, as well as AmeriCorps VISTA positions to assist in capacity building. Their primary focus areas include providing training & technical assistance, an annual statewide conference, advocacy, quality measurement, and curricula.

Since 2017, PSAYDN has intentionally advocated for and grown service-learning experiences across the state. Their staff are well versed in service-learning and can articulate to afterschool staff why they should integrate service-learning into their programming.

"Look for programs that are already doing the work to support your efforts in recruiting other programs...

These ambassadors not only have archivable evidence as examples, but also provide support to establish a growing learning community"

~Alison Shugart, OST Professional Learning & Instruction Coordinator, PSAYDN

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Alison Shugart, PSADYN's Professional Learning and Instruction Coordinator, shared their reason for service-learning "is to provide students with the ability to connect the classroom to the real world in a meaningful way. Service-learning is a perfect ingredient for an academic recipe because its design process aligns with so many academic processes. The what, so what, and now what of service-learning is a universal strategy to [solving] any problem."

PSAYDN's approach includes agency-wide "organic" incorporation of service-learning into all of its initiatives, including student leadership, STEM, and financial literacy projects, as well as entrepreneurship. Staff also see potential growth for future Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives and art programming. For STEM programming, PSAYDN supports service-learning by offering resources including training, stipends for implementation, and ongoing support and coaching.

Leveraging the autonomy of summer OST programs, PSAYDN has recruited cohorts of up to 15 programs sites with a summer-only camp format, or summer through fall, 1-2 days/week (club model). Cohort members had a NYLC led introduction to service-learning training and have access to tools, resources, discussions, announcements, and peer to peer conversations in a Google Classroom. The classroom outlines the service-learning process through a 6-week guided service-learning experience.

PSAYDN staff share service-learning in their routine interactions with member programs and others, and develop relationships to prime those who may be interested in joining a future cohort. Finding those who are already doing service-learning, whether they identified it as service-learning or called it by another name, helped to build a cadre of leaders within the state.

For example, the Harrisburg School District has been implementing Passion Projects, building on individual students' passions and encouraging action on their issue. Students who completed passion projects were invited to present at the 21st Century Community Learning Center Conference and are participating in the Summer 2023 project. While not originally called "service-learning" this project met the definition of quality service-learning and allowed the school district's design team to weave the concept deeper into their programming.

PSAYDN attributes its successes to training and follow-up conversations. They have provided training to more than 650 providers/schools and impacting more than 6,000 students as of 2022.

While all service-learning programming supported by PSAYDN acts as a bridge between in-school learning and out of school learning, the state of Pennsylvania has made it easier to cross that bridge.

Service-Learning as a Pathway to Graduation

Act 158 was signed into law in 2018, and provides alternatives to Pennsylvania's statewide requirement of attaining proficiency on three end-of-course Keystone Exams for a student to graduate. One of the evidence-based options listed in the Act is a student service-learning project.

Through PSAYDN's partnership with NYLC, PSADYN was excited to offer an accredited 1.5-hour virtual introduction to service-learning for Pennsylvania OST staff, educators, faculty, administrators, and other interested youth development professionals.

The NYLC training provided educators with the tools to create and support experiential, student-led service-learning projects while helping students achieve their academic goals and make positive impacts in their communities on their journey to graduation. Fifty programs and school districts attended the inaugural training in June 2023, representing formal and informal education throughout the state.

*While legislation was enacted in 2018, due to pandemic delays, the class of 2023 was the first class impacted by the pathway.

In 2018, Pennsylvania enacted Act 158, providing alternative pathways to the state's Keystone Exam requirements for graduation. With pandemic delays, the class of 2023 was the first to take the exams, and thus there is renewed interest in the alternative pathways. Act 158 supports evidence-based options, including service-learning. It creates a new opportunity for PSAYDN to connect school districts and OST providers to foster and support collaboration on behalf of students who struggle the most. Already, there has been interest from at least one nonprofit providing a large-scale summer leadership camp to make this connection. [See box for more detail.]

This effort has also prompted a collaboration with PennSERVE, the state service commission in charge of AmeriCorps programming and funding. PSAYDYN and PennSERVE plan to share out information on Act 158 and service-learning's potential. Currently, youth service is not part of the state service plan, but they intend to explore adding it to the new service plan that will be written in the fall of 2023.

While Act 158 impacts a particular group of students, PSAYDN sees this as a strong connector between classroom and out of school programming, serving as a model for future expanded learning opportunities.

BUILD YOUR PLAN

This roadmap serves as a compass for navigating your service-learning journey. Draw on your State Afterschool Network's unique qualities and opportunities to find what will work best, using these lessons learned, examples, and recommendations.

The following guide is a result of the eight-year partnership between NYLC and fourteen members of the 50 State Afterschool Network. The roadmap represents collective knowledge, experience, and lessons learned.

Organize & Strategize

Consider your state's needs and motivations for combining learning with service. State Afterschool Networks have a common purpose in increasing youth engagement, supporting quality afterschool programming, and expanding opportunities for youth.

➤ What's your specific "why"? Is your primary motivation to enhance leadership skills, improve social emotional health, engage middle schoolers, and/or improve state reading scores? Whatever your goals, start with identified outcomes to build a framework for success. This allows you to measure gains over time.

➤ Identify or create internal experts and champions – including youth. Some networks had staff experienced in service-learning while others had staff with some or little experience. If there is an existing youth board or council, engage them in the process.

➤ The resources and training each state received ensured everyone had a clear understanding of quality service-learning practice. Some states added capacity with AmeriCorps VISTAs or shared staff positions.

➤ Partner with like-minded entities. State Service Commissions and Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CLC's) have a vested interest in engaging youth in meaningful service and can be a great place to start. Service-learning is named specifically as a youth development support strategy for CLC's.

Align & Integrate

At the state level, as with individual programs, service-learning does not need to be a standalone approach. Rather, service-learning can be integrated into your existing initiatives. Review your organizational objectives, identify possible entry points, and target a place to start. See examples of service-learning's intersection with a variety of initiatives at https://nylc.org/afterschool or consider these options:

> 'Theme' service-learning by integrating it into a content or outcome area, such as the arts, career exploration, STEM, and more. STEM outcomes work well due to its hands-on approach and inquiry orientation, both integral to the service-learning process.

> 'Stretch' an existing program model by adding service to a project-based curriculum, or consider how to embed a service-oriented program within the service-learning framework.

> Integrate the service-learning process with existing initiatives. Consider how service-learning can meet state academic standards for any subject. See examples on the next page. View specific crosswalks for Design Thinking, Social Emotional Learning, and Civic Education in NYLC's Resource Library.

Design the System

From a brief overview to full introduction, training and ongoing support is essential. When training staff, consider the 'customer journey' from awareness to adoption, and how you will build internal capacity to create program capacity for high quality service-learning. Have clearly stated service-learning goals so you can measure success. Embed progress monitoring into your evaluation and data collection structures.

> Identify or build strong internal expertise to ensure sustainability, and create a strong foundation of training, ongoing professional development, and support.

> Use natural structures – your annual conference, quarterly training, website, and resource center – so that service-learning information is available to all where they commonly seek out information.

> The system needs to address adaptation on two parallel fronts: first, by securing commitment and fostering comprehension among program leaders, and second, by providing training for the program staff responsible for implementation.

> Establish partnerships for graduate credit or continuing education units to build interest and motivation from program staff.

Find Your People

The "build it and they will come" approach does not apply in this case. However, you are not starting from ground zero when identifying who will become your service-learning practitioners, mentors, and advocates. Here are some places to find or create ambassadors and early adopters for pilot cohorts.

▶ Service-learning is currently practiced in all states within schools, community organizations, and colleges. Identify who is doing service-learning in your state among your current members, or outside your membership.

▶ Consider who is doing service-learning under another name. Service-learning is a strategy to get to civic engagement or build leadership skills. Look for others who support youth development and civic engagement.

▶ Identify who is already doing service without other aspects of the service-learning process. Often, this can be a good place to start expanding what's already in place to boost positive youth outcomes.

▶ Work with partners to start **new** afterschool programming. This is a great opportunity to start with service-learning as the core curriculum.

Overcoming Barriers

By far the greatest barrier mentioned by Networks in working with programs was staffing, including lack of experienced staff and high turnover rates. Program costs run a close second.

OregonASK's Rachel Kessler and Beth Univerzagt offer these suggestions:

See "non-specialist" staff as assets. While they may have little or no experience utilizing or adapting curriculum, the fact that service-learning is a youth-led process may make it less intimidating than for experienced educators.

If budget constraints are a concern, have students identify an issue in their own community to eliminate transportation costs. Encourage service where there is a relatively low (or no) cost for materials. Many STEM or arts programs require supplies. Integrating service-learning into existing programs also helps address costs.

Train & Support

Service-learning professional development is vital for program success. Maintain a focus and growth in the service-learning process and quality implementation (as distinct from community service) to ensure service-learning's positive outcomes for youth and communities.

▶ Offer training on a recurring schedule and with a virtual option, to fit within the realities of staff time and to onboard new staff. The use of asynchronous learning, videos, and online communities can be helpful. Build in ongoing coaching and assistance to overcome implementation barriers. Consider one-to-one support and/or group coaching.

- Meet programs where they are. Scale professional development for the level and skills of the participants. Most Networks started with a half-day or less of virtual or in-person training.

- Provide leveled training and resources to those beyond the startup phase. NYLC's *Equity in Service-Learning: Self-Assessment Tools for Community Engagement* can be used as a starting point or for program improvement.

Provide Tools

The Network profiles provide examples of resources and tools that they provided to program planners and staff. Provide tools that support this process-based, youth-led form of inquiry and action, to ensure that staff can easily implement a rigorous (yet flexible) program.

- 'Plug and play' curricula already exist through the efforts of many Networks, as well as <u>NYLC's Sustainable Development Goal-themed service-learning handbooks</u>. Create your own tools by integrating the service-learning process and standards into your materials. Let programs know how they can make it their own while adhering to good practice.

- Create templates such as sample MOU's, media releases, and a readiness assessment for programs.

- Customize resources for your members, using real-life examples from across the state and covering each region. Every network stated that national examples are good, but the more local they are, the more relevant and compelling they are to program leaders.

Pilot Cohorts

Some Networks have found that program cohorts work well, in lieu of recruiting and training individual programs. Recruitment can be a year-round activity through regular communication with members. Try these technicques to get to the tipping point for implementing a new model.

- Have program cohorts implement on the same cycle to create a learning community.

- Summer may offer more time for quality implementation which can lead to year-round programming. When summer staff are classroom teachers, service-learning can often extend into the school year.

- Monetary incentives allow for flexibility if there are needs for supplies, resources, or transportation. This may include mini-grants for the program, stipends for individual staff, and/or a per-student amount. It is always a good idea to include actionable deliverables, and make the final payment tied to reporting to ensure follow-through of the entire cycle.

Tell the Stories

Service-learning's results resonate with legislators, decisionmakers, and the public. The stories, photos, products, and youth themselves have a story to tell. Service-learning can boost your education and advocacy efforts for high-quality afterschool programming.

➤ The demonstration phase of service-learning, where youth share their work with others, can dovetail into marketing and PR for service-learning in afterschool. Newsletter spotlights, conferences, service fairs, live presentations, and video showcases can highlight youth service, learnings, and community impact.

➤ Encourage programs to showcase their service-learning achievements in their advocacy and fundraising endeavors, while keeping in mind that service-learning may not demand resources to the same extent as other initiatives.

➤ Name it. Celebrate it. Showcase actual examples of service-learning in your state to encourage programs to join a future cohort or to explore service-learning on their own. Regional and statewide events and annual awards will lift up youths' work as an example to others.

➤ Align with excellence nationally. Some State Afterschool Networks select teams to attend the National Service-Learning Conference as a reward and learning experience. You can also nominate them for NYLC's Youth Leadership in Service-Learning Excellence award and encourage adult and youth leaders to propose a workshop, Lightning Talk, or live Showcase at the Conference.

Walk the Talk

Effecting a paradigm shift demands that adults transition into a facilitative role, relinquishing control over a predefined curriculum, a move that may evoke discomfort in many. To genuinely facilitate youth-led learning and service, the most effective approach is to actively engage young people in the design, execution, and assessment of the service-learning program. To ensure the sustainability of service-learning initiatives, implementing a tiered youth leadership model (cross-generational, enabling mentorship succession) can bolster longevity, even when faced with changes in program staffing.n increase sustainability, even in the face of program staffing changes.

➤ Engage with an existing youth board or council early in the process. Or recruit youth from service-learning programs to form one.

➤ As you gain traction within programs, develop youth leaders as program advisors and youth mentors, providing professional development parallel to adults.

➤ Lean on youth-adult partnership training and supports, but recognize that most often it's the adults who need to make a critical mindshift.

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YOUR TURN

WHERE ARE POTENTIAL POINTS OF STRATEGY ALIGNMENT/INTEGRATION?

WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED?

WHAT TRAINING AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES DO WE HAVE/NEED?

WHAT TOOLS WOULD HELP?

Checkboxes are for you to self-assess each category:

⚓ Current strength

⛵ Need for readiness

📍 Starting point

WHAT'S OUR "WHY"? WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

WHERE WILL WE INVOLVE YOUTH IN SYSTEM DESIGN & IMPROVEMENT?

WHAT STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES WILL MOVE US FORWARD?

HOW COULD WE START SMALL WITH PILOTS/COHORTS?

HOW CAN WE TELL THE STORIES?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

Service-learning is an evidence-based educational approach commonly referred to as a 'pedagogy,' within K-12 education. Consequently, the content and the precise activities engaged in throughout this process can be successfully aligned with content-driven objectives (such as STEM) or outcomes-centered goals (such as social-emotional learning initiatives).

Service-learning is driven by youth leadership which means you're not in charge of orchestrating the sequence of activities or defining the project's structure. The adult role involves establishing essential connections. Youth voice is both a pivotal input and an ultimate outcome of any service-learning initiative, so exercise caution not to overly influence its design.

Explore NYLC's Resource Center for 'crosswalks' that illustrate how service-learning aligns with specific methodologies such as Design Thinking, Civic Education, Social Emotional Learning, and more.

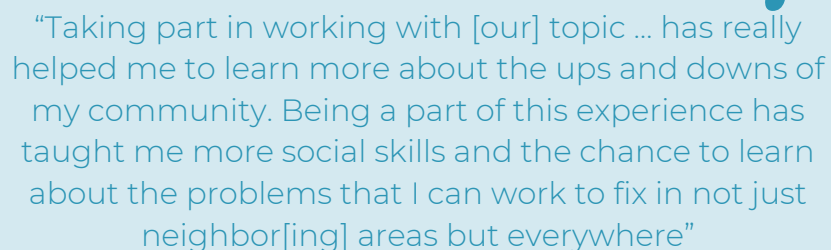| Existing or New Initiative	Service-Learning Intersections	Examples within the IPARD* Cycle
[SAMPLE] STEM Mentoring Initiative	[SAMPLE] We could extend simulated challenges with a real community problem, with youth completing the service-learning process to solve it.	[SAMPLE] • Add an Investigation of community needs after going through the smulation. • Existing mentors can be key informants during the Investigation and Preparation & Planning phases. • Projects can be showcased at our annual STEM Fair (Demonstration))
[INSERT YOUR INITIATIVE]		
[INSERT YOUR INITIATIVE]		
[INSERT YOUR INITIATIVE]		

*Investigation, Preparation & Planning, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration (IPARD) represent components of the Student Service-Learning Cycle.

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CONCLUSION

High quality service-learning is high quality afterschool programming, and a key tool in any State Afterschool Network's toolbox. As an effective engagement strategy, service combined with learning through a structured, evidence-based process can be the spark that supports youth to find their voice, explore career pathways, and so much more.

State Afterschool Networks that have implemented systems to promote the adoption of service-learning by programs have witnessed encouraging outcomes. Through continued support, the provision of tools, and the fostering of learning communities, service-learning naturally gains traction, thanks to compelling narratives and impactful youth achievements. From initiatives like youth-driven outdoor learning laboratories, watershed exploration using drones, to the development of culturally-relevant health messages for communities during crucial moments, young people can assume leadership roles today by collaborating with dedicated adult program leaders.

Service-learning is powerful youth engagement, involves youth in civic participation, creates a sense of empowerment, and deepens their connection to community. In the words of one youth participant:

> "Taking part in working with [our] topic ... has really helped me to learn more about the ups and downs of my community. Being a part of this experience has taught me more social skills and the chance to learn about the problems that I can work to fix in not just neighbor[ing] areas but everywhere"

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