

Getting Started in Service

Ten Steps to Successful Service Projects

1. Research your project.

Choose an issue that concerns you, and then come up with a project related to that issue. Consider these questions:

- What would I like to do?
- What might benefit the most people?
- What might make the biggest difference?
- What can I afford (in terms of time, money, etc.)?
- What is really possible for me to do?
- What _____? (Add your own questions.)

2. Form a team.

If you don't want to go it alone, or if the project seems too complicated to do by yourself, invite others to join you.

- Choose people who share your interest in the project and who are likely to stay with you until it is completed.

- Look around at your family, friends, school, neighborhood, or community for possibilities.
- Don't limit your group to people your own age. Invite younger kids to get involved. See if college students and seniors in your area want to help.

3. Find a sponsor.

Ask a responsible adult (teacher, parent, neighbor, community youth leader, etc.) to act as your sponsor. This can give your project credibility with other adults whose help and/or permission you might need.

4. Make a plan.

- Decide when and where to meet. You'll want to meet frequently to discuss your project, decide who will do what, identify any problems, and report on your progress.
- Decide how you will get to the meeting place and service location. Will you need cars, buses, adult drivers? You might need permission slips from your parents. Can you walk or bike there?
- Define your goal. What do you hope to achieve?
- Set a schedule. How long will your project take? How much time will you spend each week on your project? When is the date you want to be finished with your project?
- Estimate your costs. How much money will you need? Make a list of everything you can think of that might or will cost money. What about transportation? Materials? Equipment? Supplies? Photocopying? Postage? Donations? What else?
- Think hard about your project. Is it realistic? Is it too complicated? Too simple? How could you improve it?

5. Consider the recipient.

Make sure that the people you plan to serve really want your help. What's the best way to do this? Ask! Then find out as much about them as you can. For example:

- What are their needs? (They may be different than you think, and you may need to revise your plan accordingly.)
- When are they available? During what hours on what days?
- Are there any limitations or restrictions? What about special diets? Physical limitations? Allergies? Other health issues?

6. Decide where you will perform your service.

Will you go to the people you plan to serve, or will they come to you?

- If you go to them, be sure to visit the location ahead of time. Is there enough room to do your project? Does the location have everything you will need? If not, what will you have to bring? How will you get it there? Will you have a place to store things?
- If they come to you, make sure that your location has what you need.

7. Get any permissions you need to proceed.

Depending on your project, you might need to get permission from:

- your principal
- your teacher(s)
- school district personnel
- your youth leader
- your parents
- your neighbors
- community organizations
- owners of any facilities you will want to use
- anyone else?

8. Advertise.

Let other people know about your project.

- Make a one-page flyer (see pages 134–135).
- Or create a public service announcement (see page 139).
- Or send out a press release (see page 136).

9. Fundraise.

Do you need start-up money for your service project? Will you need to buy equipment or supplies? If you need to print 150 flyers at your local print shop, who will pay for the printing? If your project will cost anything beyond pocket money, you'll need to fundraise (see pages 146–147).

10. When your project has ended, evaluate it.

Reflect on your experience. Discuss it with your team, family, teachers, friends, and neighbors. Talk it over with the people you served. Describe it in a journal or an online blog. Write a poem, story, essay, or play about it; create music, dance, or art about it; make a video or audio recording. Try to address questions like:

- What did you learn?
- What did you accomplish?
- What were your feelings, fears, joys?
- Would you do it again?
- How could you improve it?
- Will you repeat it? When? How soon? (You might use your poem, story, essay, play, video, etc., to inspire others to join you.)

Using the Internet in Your Service Project

The Internet can be your best friend when doing service projects.

Go online to:

- find out about volunteer opportunities in your community or elsewhere
- locate the names, addresses, and contact information for businesses and organizations
- send out query emails, press releases, and other materials (see page 136)
- distribute online petitions (see page 135)
- connect with other volunteers via blogs, chat rooms, and other social networking sites
- promote your cause at your school's or organization's Web site
- create your own Web site, blog, video, or slideshow to promote your cause and to share your service ideas and experiences with others

As you read this book, keep in mind ways that you can use the Internet to enhance the projects you undertake.