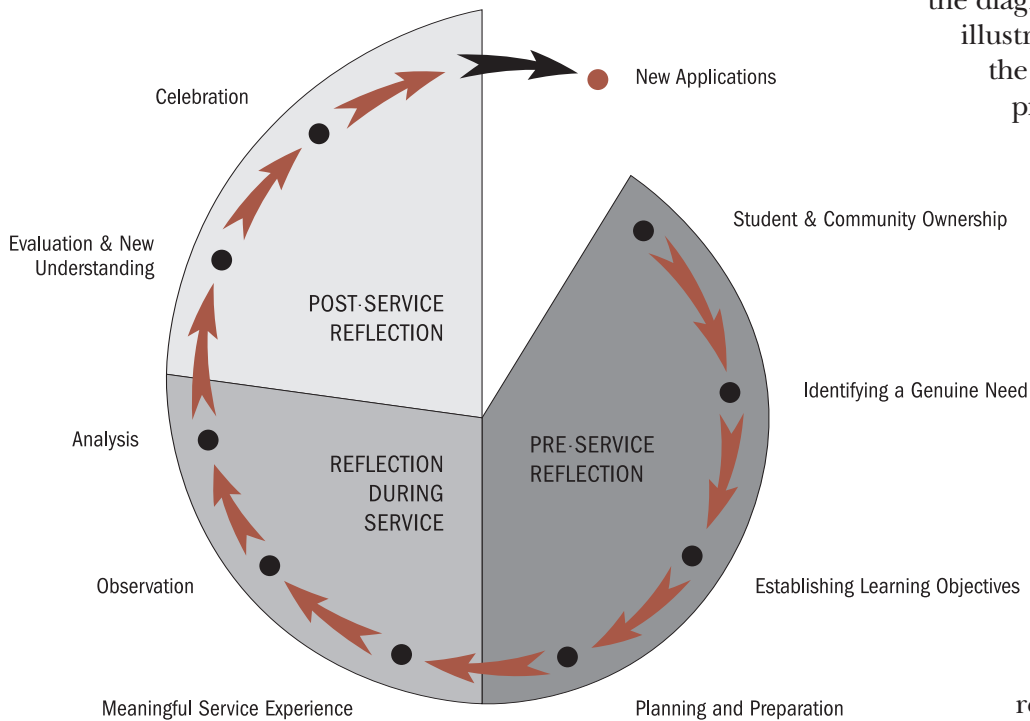# The
Service-Learning Cycle

Service-learning is best thought of as a cycle, where each step in the process leads to the next. As the diagram of the Service-Learning Cycle illustrates, the process doesn't end with the completion of the service activity. A project may be completed, but service-learning is a transformational process, where young people, practitioners, and communities continue to grow.

Every part of the cycle is rich with learning and growth opportunities, many of them happening as young people are guided through the process of identifying, planning, and carrying out service activities. It's important for practitioners to recognize the learning potential in each phase of the process and get students reflecting so that real learning takes place.

Celebration

New Applications

Evaluation & New Understanding

Student & Community Ownership

POST-SERVICE REFLECTION

Analysis

Identifying a Genuine Need

REFLECTION DURING SERVICE

PRE-SERVICE REFLECTION

Observation

Establishing Learning Objectives

Meaningful Service Experience

Planning and Preparation

WHAT? • SO WHAT? • NOW WHAT?

With each step in a service-learning project, discussing three deceptively simple questions with the participants helps everyone understand what they've accomplished, learned, and need to do next:

What
What has happened? Take stock of what participants did, saw, and felt. Get their initial observations of what has happened.

So What?
What's the importance of all this? Discuss what participants are thinking and feeling about the experience. Ask them what they've learned and how things have changed.

Now What?
What should we do next? It's time to decide how best to channel this new understanding into continued action and transformation.

See next page for a detailed explanation of the cycle.

Pre-Service

Reflection

Students get the most out of the service experience when they carefully examine their prior knowledge of and opinions on issues raised by the project.

Student & Community Ownership

The project belongs to the participants. Young people and community members should work together to identify community needs, plan service activities, and evaluate the impact of the project.

Identifying a Genuine Need

A "genuine need" is one that's important to the young people *and* the community. To identify the need, young people must recognize relevant issues, assess resources, and seek out the thoughts and concerns of those being served.

Establishing Learning Objectives

Clear learning objectives distinguish *service-learning* from *community service*. When students make the connections between their service activities and studies, it deepens their understanding of the curricular material, how it's used, and why it's important.

Planning & Preparation

No project succeeds without careful planning and preparation, and service-learning projects are no exception. Be sure to assess needs, collect all relevant information, engage in the necessary training, build vital partnerships, and develop an action plan.

During Service

Reflection

This is a chance to discover where young people are in the learning process, and give them a chance to voice concerns and share feelings.

Meaningful Service Experience

By investing themselves fully in service activities that address genuine community needs, young people find meaning in the project and grow to understand its value.

Observation

To truly understand the impact of the service, young people should take time to observe the impact of the project on different participants. This process may involve exchanging ideas with peers and community partners, looking at the implications of cultural and diversity issues, or viewing the project in civic or political terms.

Analysis

As young people use their observations to recognize the significance of the service experience, they assess their own learning and the impact of the project on the community being served.

Post-Service

Reflection

Young people take time to assess the meaning of the service experience; integrate their new understanding; and propose further action, projects, or enhancements to the current project.

Evaluation & New Understanding

Evaluating their learning and the results of the project allows young people to discover new and different perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

Celebration

All involved should enjoy the fruits of their labor and respect the accomplishments of other participants. This reinforces the positive achievements, sense of accomplishment, and personal growth attained through the service-learning experience.

New Applications

The project may be completed, but participants continue to use their new knowledge and skills to make decisions, solve problems, and grow as caring, contributing members of their communities.

www.nylc.org

Available from the NYLC Resource Center at www.nylc.org.