

Service-learning: Thinking Beyond Community Service



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Service-learning is . . .

According to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, service-learning is a method whereby participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that

- Is organized in and meets the needs of a community;
- Helps foster civic responsibility;
- Enhances the educational component of the community service agency; and,
- Provides structured time for participants to reflect on the service experience.

In short, service-learning is community service that teaches volunteers about themselves and the world around them.

Service-learning is **NOT** the same as . . .

- **Volunteerism** — a term used to refer to people who choose on their own to perform some service for others without pay
- **Community Service** — volunteering done in the community (sometimes done through a court order or sentencing program)
- **Youth Service** — an umbrella term for all approaches to involving youth as resources in the community
- **Experiential Education** — a broader term for various educational approaches that emphasize learning by doing

Types of service:

- **Direct Service** — Volunteers work directly with community members or those being served.
- **Indirect Service** — Volunteers work on an issue from a more “behind the scenes” approach.
- **Advocacy** — Volunteers work to advocate for the alleviation of a community issue.

“Service-learning is a form of experiential learning where students apply knowledge, skills, and wise judgment to address genuine community needs.”

~ Jim and Pam Toole

Source: *Points of Light Foundation Youth Outreach*



Elements of Service-learning

Youth Voice and Planning

Listening to and engaging youth in the service-learning process provides more ownership and greater learning opportunities for the young people.

Community Need and Voice

Service-learning projects should meet real community needs. To truly solve problems and provide authentic learning opportunities for youth, actively engage the community in identifying needs.

Learning Objectives

Youth should understand what they are expected to learn through their service. Outline objectives of what youth will learn on a personal, social, and intellectual level.

Orientation and Training

To provide effective service and maximize the learning experience, youth must understand all aspects of the project: issues, organization, expectations, atmosphere of service site, date and time, personalities of beneficiaries, legalities, skills for any equipment they may use, what could go wrong, etc.

Meaningful Service

A successful service experience requires thorough planning of goals, resources, supervision, transportation, logistics, and risk management.

Reflection

Youth should employ critical thinking skills to examine the service experience. This process helps youth to grow on a personal, social, and intellectual level.

Evaluation

Throughout the service experience, youth and adults should analyze the process (what was done) and the impact (results) of the service.

Celebration and Recognition

Youth should always be recognized and celebrated for providing valuable service to the community. Celebration can bring closure to the project and reinforces the value of the young people's connection to what they accomplished.

Adapted from materials by Points of Light Foundation Youth Outreach



Learning Objectives

Learning objectives should outline what young people will learn through the service-learning project. There is no one time to think about developing learning objectives. You can take a look at broader program goals, develop learning objectives, and then re-evaluate them once the group comes up with project ideas. Or the group can identify project ideas, then identify what participants can learn from that activity, and link that with overall program goals. What is important is to make sure that learning objectives match up with the learning opportunities provided by the service-learning project. Remember to include young people in developing learning objectives!

Below are questions that can be helpful in thinking through developing learning objectives.

Identify what young people can and/or want to learn.

It is often helpful to think about learning objectives by completing the sentence, “Young people will . . . “ or “Through this service-learning experience young people will be able to . . .” It can also be helpful to brainstorm topics, information, or skills young people could gain through the program.

Build the objective.

After identifying some initial thoughts it is important to put those thoughts into a learning objective. Some questions to think about to help the group move from the ideas to the learning objective include the following:

- What will be done? In what service activities will young people engage? What skills/experience will be improved?
- What will change as a result of the activity?
- What tools/methods will you use to measure the change?
- How much change will indicate success? Over what period of time? How many beneficiaries will achieve this level of change?
- How many people will directly benefit from this activity?

State the learning objective as a sentence.

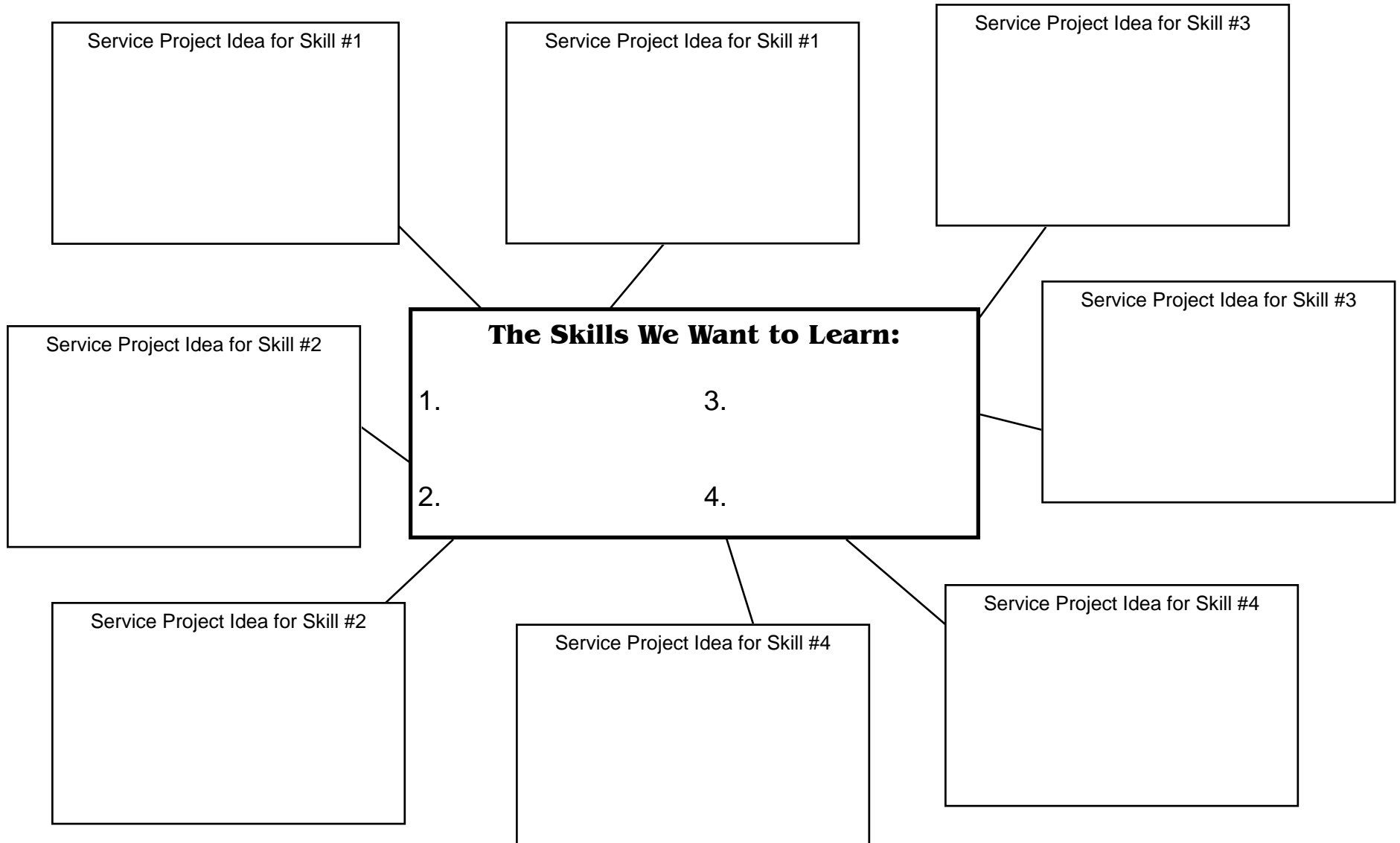
Based on all the information above, restate your learning objective as a sentence. Your learning objective should

- be a declarative statement;
- describe a future state, as opposed to an activity or process; and,
- be realistic.

Adapted from materials by Points of Light Foundation Youth Outreach

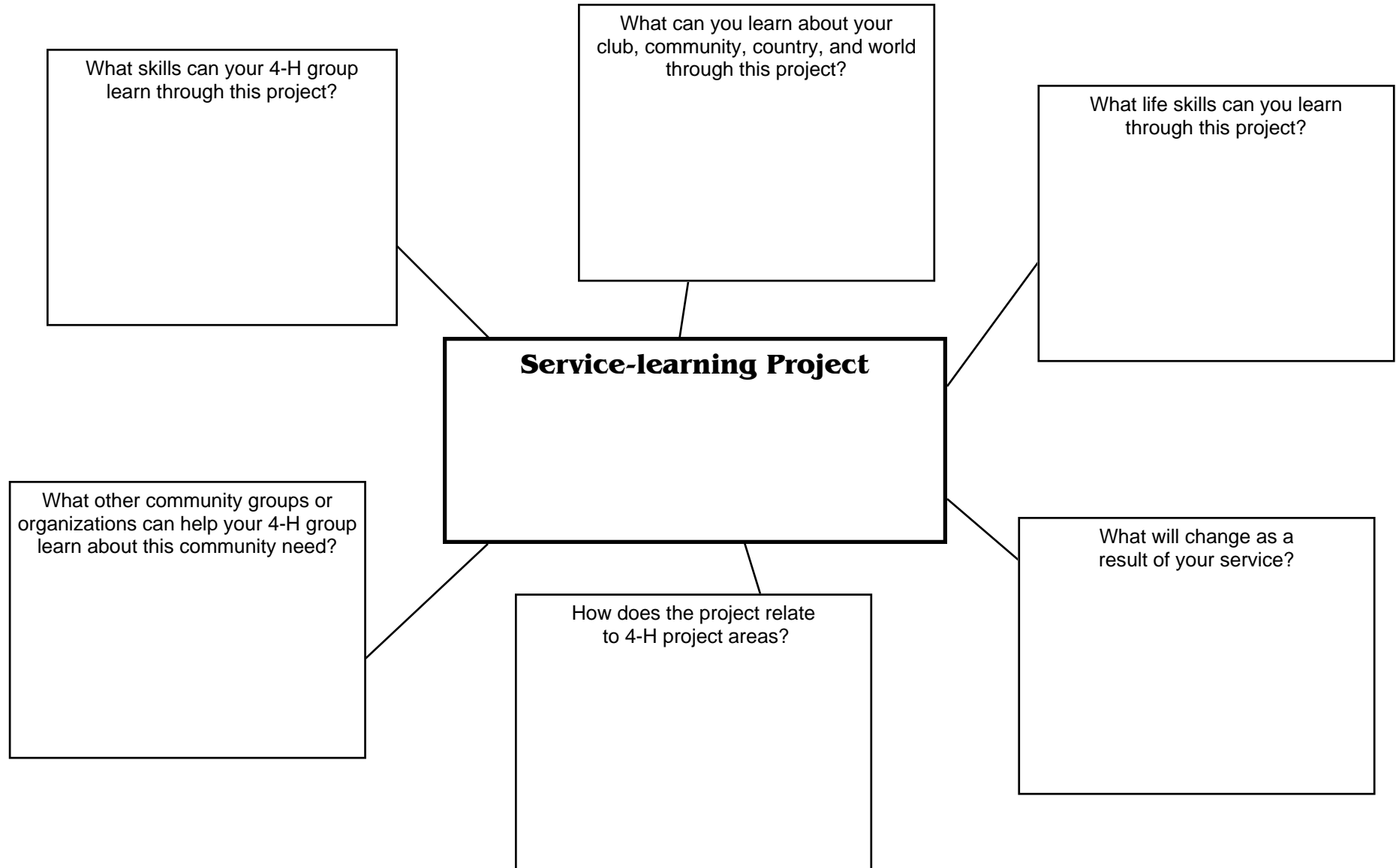
What can we do?

Think about what your 4-H group would like to learn—life skills, project skills, etc. Make a list in the center box. Then, brainstorm service project ideas and list them in the other boxes on the project web.



What can we learn?

Think about your 4-H group's planned service-learning project and what you want to learn through the activities. Then, follow the directions in the boxes below.





Defining Reflection

Reflection is the key to service learning. It's what makes service learning different from community service, because it is the part of the process where volunteers take the experience and examine it for lessons learned, skills gained, and application to the future.

Reflection should take place throughout the service process and continually guide youth to look at the service experience, what it means to him/her personally and to the community, and how s/he will use the knowledge and skills gained through the experience.

Reflection activities should be varied to suit the interests and abilities of the participants, but they should always help volunteers answer three main questions:

"Reflection is the act of reviewing events with an eye to extracting meaning."

~ Suzanne Goldsmith

What?

Look back on the experience:

What did I do? What did I see, touch, smell? What did I experience for the first time? How did the experience make me feel? How did I deal with those feelings? What funny, serious, planned, unplanned things happened?

So what?

Interpret the experience:

What did the service mean to me? Why was it important? What did I learn from the experience—about myself, about the world, about a life skill, about particular subject matter? What is the reality of this situation? What are the connections between what I saw and the reasons for larger social issues? What is being done to deal with the problem and its causes?

Now what?

Explore the possibilities for change and get ready for the next time:

What can/will I do with what I learned? How will I use the skills and knowledge to continue to meet this or other community needs? How can I continue to be involved in the community? What should our next project be?

Source: Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Leaders and Educators and National Dropout Prevention's Reflection: A Guide to Effective Service Learning, and Search Institute's An Asset Builder's Guide to Effective Service Learning



Reflection Ideas

- Using Play-dough, describe what you have learned from the project.
- **Pile:** Have each person select an object from the pile and tell how the project (or what they have learned from the project) is like the object. Examples include light bulb, ball, rubber band, toothpick, candy, spices, toys, pens, q-tips, cotton ball, penny, etc.
- Draw a cartoon that shows what you have gained from the project
- Write a poem describing what skills you gained from the project.
- Create and perform a dance that reflects your experience during the project.
- Create a song describing what you learned from your experience during the project.
- Using the **KWL Chart**, list 5 things that you know about the project, 5 things you wanted to learn from the project, and 5 things you have learned from the project. (See attached sheet.)
- Apply the **Debrief Wheel** to the project. (See attached sheet.)
- Create bookmarks with pictures, written reflections, funny memories, or quotes about your service experience.
- **Quick Snap:** Using your bodies to pose for still pictures, show “Polaroid snapshots” of your service project. Show what happened, what you remember, what you enjoyed most, what you plan on doing differently, etc.
- **Word/Sentence Reflection:** Write one word associated with the project. Write the word in capital letters going down the page. Pass the paper to the person on your left and have that person write a sentence that begins with the next letter of the original word and that expresses his/her feelings about the subject

Source: AmeriCorps*NCCC, “Reflection: The Key to Service-learning,” 2003 National Service-learning Conference



More Reflection Ideas

- **Acting Out:** Give participants time to think about their answer to a reflection question; then have them act out their answer while the others guess what they're trying to convey. Debrief by allowing them time to ask each other questions to clarify or expand on their thoughts, feelings, and insights.
- **Tree Reflection:** Have each person draw a tree on a sheet of paper. Have them label the roots as the values, people, beliefs that influence them; the bark as issues/causes they are passionate about; and the branches as steps they will take to act on these passions or address the needs they identified. After everyone is done drawing, discuss by sharing your trees and how these different areas will help you in your service. (This is also a great way to “community map” based on participant interest.)
- **Guided Imagery:** (This activity is great either before or after a project!) Have volunteers get comfortable, close their eyes, and listen to a story. The leader should get creative and lead the group through a narrative of the day. Describe what is happening and the people there. Ask the volunteers what they're experiencing by being there.

Example: "Today you are going to serve meals to people who are homeless. Picture yourself arriving at the shelter. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear?"

If you are using this activity after the service, use actual events to get participants thinking about what they experienced.

Example: "We are walking into the nursing home in the morning. The patients are gathered in the community room. Who do you see? What are they doing? What do you smell? What do you feel? What are their reactions?"

- **Group Banners:** If you do service projects in teams or have students participate in the same service activity, break group into teams or small groups. Supply each team with a piece of banner paper and markers and ask them to depict their experience using a combination of words and pictures. Give them about 10 - 15 minutes. When completed, ask each group to share their banner with the whole group. Use their banners as a jumping off point for processing the experience.

Source: Center for Asset Development



Reflection Questions

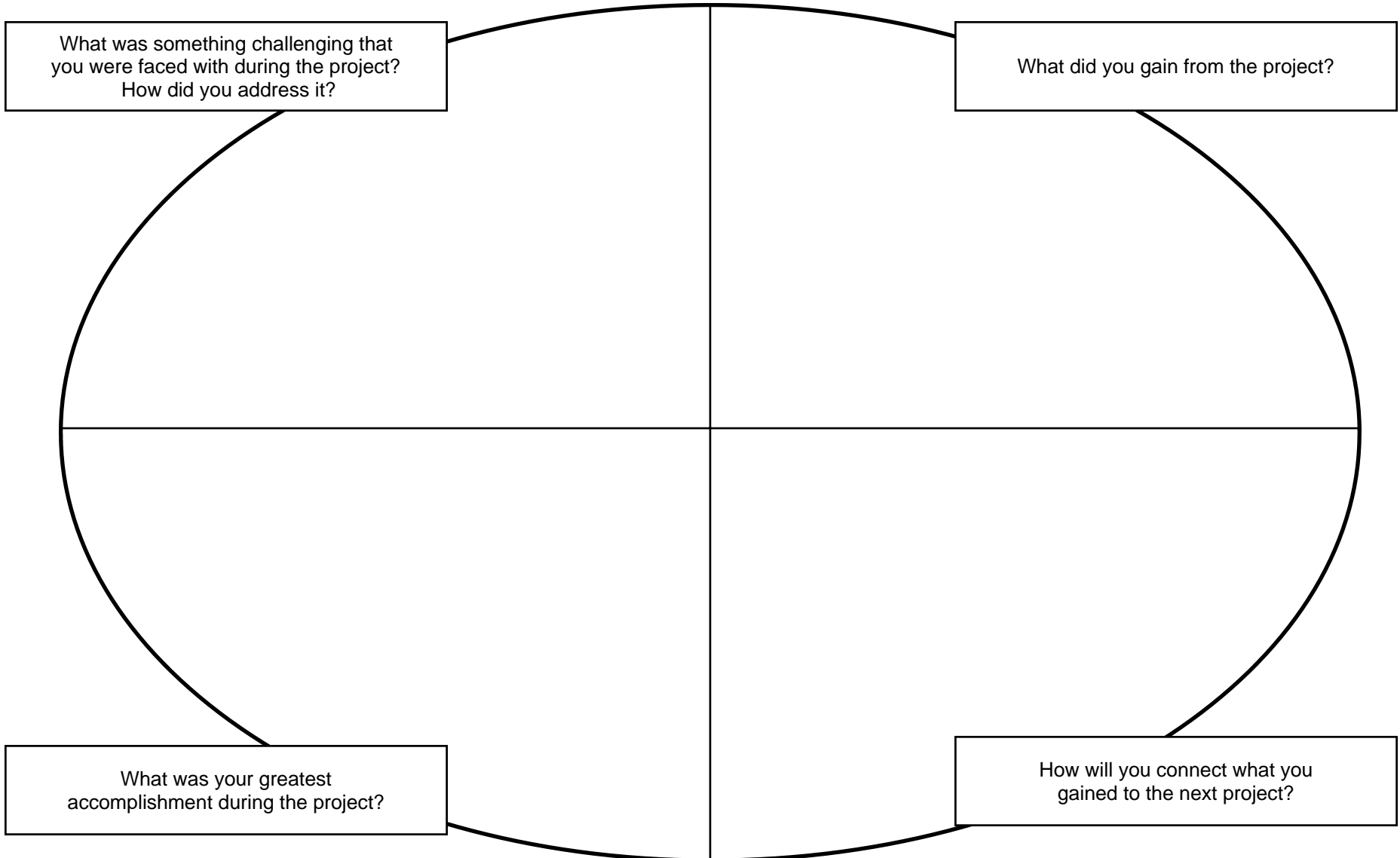
Below are some questions to use in facilitating the “Debrief Wheel” or other reflection exercises. Adapt the questions to fit specific situations and projects.

- How was the community changed as a result of our project?
- What surprises have you or the group encountered?
- What were the members not prepared for?
- What have been pleasant surprises?
- Does the team/leader need to make any changes in their working methods?
- Is the member/team meeting the goals for the project?
- Is the member/team making sufficient progress toward these various goals?
- What skills are members learning?
- What issues relating to the project need discussing?
- Do we need to arrange for supplemental training or a speaker to address interests or issues relating to the project?
- What is the most rewarding, challenging, most important, and most difficult part about this project?
- What other projects can address this community issue/need?
- Have members come up with a question of their own for the team to answer.

*Adapted from materials presented by AmeriCorps*NCCC, “Reflection: The Key to Service-learning,” 2003 National Service-learning Conference*

The Debrief Wheel

Allow everyone 15 minutes to complete the questions. Then, take 20 minutes to discuss individual answers and how those answers may apply to the rest of the group. Make sure to have a recorder for the larger group discussion and a timekeeper.



What was something challenging that you were faced with during the project?
How did you address it?

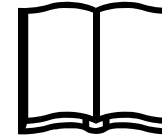
What did you gain from the project?

What was your greatest accomplishment during the project?

How will you connect what you gained to the next project?

Source: AmeriCorps*NCCC, "Reflection: The Key to Service-learning," 2003 National Service-learning Conference

KWL Chart



KNOW What you already know	WHAT What you would like to learn	LEARNED What you have learned

Source: AmeriCorps*NCCC, "Reflection: The Key to Service-learning," 2003 National Service-learning Conference



Additional Resources

Below are additional service-learning resources. Check them out for some great ideas on working with young people to make a difference in your community!

An Asset Builder's Guide to Service-learning — Search Institute (<http://www.searchinstitute.org>)

An Asset Builder's Guide to Youth Leadership — Search Institute (<http://www.searchinstitute.org>)

Communities as Places of Learning: Developing Effective Community-based Service-learning Programs — Points of Light Foundation Youth Outreach (<http://www.pointsoflight.org>)

Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Leaders and Educators — Julie Reed and Christopher Koliba (http://www.uvm.edu/%7Edewey/reflection_manual/)

Reflection: A Guide to Effective Service Learning — National Dropout Prevention Center (<http://www.dropoutprevention.org>)

Service-learning 101: An Educator's Guide — Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service (<http://www.state.tn.us/finance/rds/tnlearnserve.htm>)

Check out these other great Web sites too!

Do Something	http://www.dosomething.org
Learn and Serve America	http://www.learnandserve.org
Learning in Deed	http://learningindeed.org
National 4-H Council	http://www.fourhcouncil.edu
National Dropout Prevention Center	http://www.dropoutprevention.org
National Service-learning Clearinghouse	http://www.servicelearning.org
National Youth Leadership Council	http://www.nylc.org
Youth Service America	http://www.ysa.org

4-H Seeds of Service **<http://4h.tennessee.edu/sos>**