

# Create Your Own Service Project



# Toolkit



This toolkit will give you the basics to recruit a team, organize your own service project, and make an impact in your community!



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# Background



**Corporation for National and Community Service** – The Corporation was created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation. The mission of the Corporation is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and encourage community involvement through service and volunteering.



**Learn and Serve America (LSA)** - As part of the Corporation for National and Community Service, LSA provides resources to schools and community-based organizations to engage young people in service. Each year more than one million students participate in service-learning projects that combine community service and classroom learning.



**National Learn & Serve Challenge** - The Challenge, sponsored in part by the National Service-Learning Partnership, is a concentrated week of special events spotlighting service-learning successes around the country in order to build awareness of the value of students' contributions to their communities; spread effective service-learning practices; and inspire other schools and communities to launch their own service-learning programs and projects.



**National Service-Learning Partnership** – The Partnership is a nationwide network of members advancing service-learning as a core part of every young person's life and education.



# Introduction

Millions of young people across America are learning about the problems facing the world and working together to solve them. Whether they are leading energy conservation projects or playing a critical role in helping at-risk youth stay in school – today’s youth are on the frontlines of shaping our nation’s future. The need is great – and our nation’s youth are a critical part of the solution. Help your community by starting your own service project, either on your own or with a group of friends! This toolkit will help you get started.

Section 1 of this toolkit introduces the five basic steps for creating your own service project. Section 2 has information for specific projects in six target areas – education, healthy futures, economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, veterans and disaster services. If you have trouble planning or carrying out your own project from scratch, you can use the information from Section 2 to complete the five steps of Section 1.

## *Did you know?!*

- The most successful way to improve the reading achievement of low-income children is to increase their access to print, and you can do this by reading to them regularly or starting a book drive! Learn how on pages 9 and 10.
- Community gardens provide access to traditional produce or nutritionally rich foods that may otherwise be unavailable to low-income families and individuals. You can help start and care for these community gardens to make sure people in your community are eating healthily. Learn how on page 11.
- You can easily help your peers avoid obesity and your elders keep active! Learn how to motivate others to lead healthy, active lifestyles on page 12.
- Many low-income children do not receive their recommended vaccines and are not able to regularly visit the dentist.<sup>1</sup> You can help make sure low-income children receive proper medical care by volunteering at your local clinic.
- Food banks rely almost entirely on volunteers. Commit yourself and a team of your friends and neighbors to help feed America's hungry – learn how on page 14.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics (2006)  
<http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/care.asp>.



# Section 1

## Five Steps to Create Your Own Project: I.P.A.R.D.

Alone, with friends or with a community group, take these five basic steps to create your own unique service project and make a difference in your community!

**1**

Investigate



**2**

Plan



**3**

Act



**4**

Reflect



**5**

Demonstrate/Celebrate







## Let's get started!

### Step 1: Investigate

Check out [serve.gov](http://serve.gov) to see what needs in your community aren't being met and which organizations you might be able to partner with. For some general project ideas visit our [YouthSITE](#) and the [CNCS Resource Center](#).



Brainstorm:

- Make a list of available resources in your community.
- Make a list of what your community needs most.
- Conduct a survey. Make a list of questions about the resources and needs of the community and ask community members to answer the questions.

### Step 2: Plan

- Set a regular meeting place and time. Consider appointing as leaders members who are committed enough to show up regularly.
- Use Worksheets 1-3 to help you build a team and organize meetings. You can find these in the Appendix at the end of the Toolkit.
- Set measurable group and personal goals such as timelines for progress and output expectations (number of students tutored, number of trees planted, etc.).
- Use Worksheet 4, the Progress Tracker, to help you set and carry out your goals. You can find this in the Appendix at the end of the Toolkit.

We're all naturally afraid when trying something new, but we learn much more from getting on the bike, falling off and trying again than we'll ever learn from talking about riding the bike.

#### Host Duties

##### Before

- Brainstorm a list of 50 people to invite.
- Call the people on your list to invite them to your meeting
- Post your meeting on [serve.gov](http://serve.gov) and invite local residents to attend

##### During

- Consider how you most want to serve your community.

##### After

- Thank attendees and get their pledge to serve along with their contact info
- Organize a follow-up volunteer leadership meeting with your new team to take next steps



## Step 3: Act

- Put your project into action!  
Regularly ask for suggestions and feedback on process
- Motivate people into action.
- Allow your team to make mistakes.  
Evaluate often so you can learn from your mistakes and successes.
- When you face problems and questions, ask for suggestions and solutions
- Be open and honest
- Stay positive, acknowledge challenges, and focus on solutions.

## Step 5: Demonstrate/Celebrate

Gather a group of friends, family and/or community members and share your experience and successes with them through a presentation – perhaps create a slideshow with pictures and explanations of your project activities at different stages. Remember to:

- Tell your story of service.
- Try to answer any questions they may have.
- Direct them to the resources in this toolkit.
- Encourage them to create and participate in projects of their own!

## Step 4: Reflect

Discuss and record your progress as you continue to complete the different stages of your project.

- Which goals have you met?
- What have you accomplished?
- How have you impacted your community?
- Who has your project affected?
- Is there anything you can do differently or better moving forward?



**Don't forget the five steps of I.P.A.R.D:**

**Investigate. Plan. Act. Reflect. Demonstrate/Celebrate!**



# Section 2

## Specific Project Guidelines

In this section of the toolkit you will find a handful of detailed project examples to help you plan and carry out a service project if you need some ideas to help you get started. Use the resources and information from this section along with the steps from Section 1 to customize your very own project.

### Education Projects

- Read with Children
- Organize a Book Drive



### Healthy Futures Projects

- Support Community Gardens and Encourage Healthy Diets
- Start a Walking Team
- Promote Back to School Health



### Economic Opportunity Projects

- Support Local Food Banks
- Organize a Clothing Drive

### Environmental Stewardship Project

Maintain Public Lands



### Veterans Project

Connect with Veterans

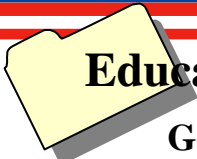


### Disaster Services Project

Prepare For Disasters







## Education: Read with Children

**Getting Started:** Call and ask your [national and local literacy organizations](#) about volunteer opportunities. If no literacy organizations exist in your community, contact local child care centers, libraries, and/or summer camps to begin a reading club.

### General Tips



Make checklists for the children's accomplishments for a visual representation of their progress.

Use age-appropriate books

When a child doesn't understand something, you have to find a better way to explain it. "This is a hard book. It's O.K. We'll work through it together."

Ask the children about their interests and hobbies and bring in books that relate to their responses.

If a child is having continued difficulty understanding, move on. Focusing on one point makes the child anxious, and children learn best in an environment they perceive to be safe.

Have a plan and communicate it. Give the child the opportunity to add to the plan. "We have three books to read today. Which one do you want to start with?"

When a child is pressing your buttons, be an actor and don't let on. Once you are in a power struggle, you have lost - even if you might win.

## **Additional**

[Selecting appropriate books to read with children](#)

[Recommended Reading Lists for All Ages](#)

[2010 Parkway Summer Reading List for Elementary School Students](#)

[Guides for working with children 3-5 years Old](#)

[Guides for working with children K-3](#)

[Guides for working with middle school students](#)

## **Resources**





## Education: Organize a Book Drive

By collecting books and donating them to low-income children through a book drive you can help increase other students' achievement levels! Search [national book donation organizations](#). Identify organizations in your community that need books. Next, search for [local libraries](#) that need your help, and call your preschool, high school, or community group and ask how you can help there as well.

### What you need:

- Boxes
- Storage space for collected books
- Flyers with info about your drive

### Good locations for collecting:

- Offices
- Small retail businesses
- Local schools

Each team member can choose one location to target. At each location ask for approval and place boxes in a highly visible area.

A typical book drive lasts two-to-three weeks

**Spread the word** - In person, on the phone, using flyers, through social networks, etc.

### Kick-off your book drive with an event!

Host a party and ask each attendee to bring a book.

### Motivate your friends and community members to donate!

Start a competition or organize a raffle. Use certificates or awards to recognize individuals and locations that contribute the greatest number of books.

### Additional resources

- American Library Association provides a [guide to national book donation organizations](#).
- [Delicious](#) connects you with local organizations in need of books.
- American Library Association [Books for Soldiers](#)
- [Operation Paperback](#)
- Most libraries accept donated books. Search for your [local library](#).
- [Heart of America](#) offers tips for book drives at schools and accepts donations from across the country.
- [Page Ahead](#) offers book drive tips for schools and offices and accepts donations in Washington State.
- American Library Association's [notable books for young adults](#).
- American Library Association's [recommended reading lists](#).

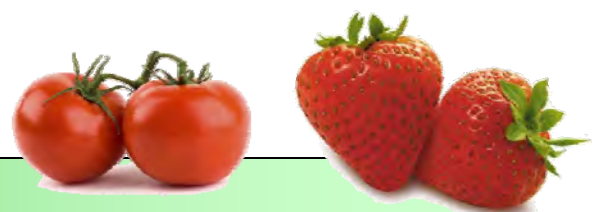




## Healthy Futures: Support Community Gardens and Encourage Healthy Diets



Find the [garden near you](#) and get involved. Adopt a plot and volunteer your time, or call and ask the people who run the garden how new volunteers can get involved. For first time gardeners, a ton of information is available [online](#).



### Donate harvested food to local food banks:

Find a [local food bank](#) and [enlist others](#) in planting a row for the hungry.

### Start your own garden:

For a step-by-step guide for creating your own garden, visit the [American Community Garden Association](#) or the [United States Environmental Protection Agency](#).



Consider starting a [community notebook](#) to share successes and identify best practices, or create an [e-newsletter](#) outlining opportunities for service and issues for advocacy.



Fundraising can pay garden rents, buy new tools, support service projects and keep the garden growing. [Online resources](#) can help you navigate the world of private foundations, individual contributors, and old fashioned

Visit the [Kid's 5 Simple Steps to Success](#) page on First Lady Michelle Obama's health and fitness movement website [Let's Move!](#) Use the steps featured on this webpage to keep a healthy diet.





## Healthy Futures: Start a Walking Team

You could start a walking team within an existing group you are part of, or consider calling your local senior center, community center, or Parks and Recreation Council center. It will be helpful to provide background on the local service landscape to the attendees of your meetings.

Where will the group walk?

How many times per week will the group walk?

What time will the group meet and how far will it go?

### Decide with group members



You might want to scope and map out several different routes. You can increase the distance as you go along.

### Keep your team motivated with the following:

- Invite a local speaker to talk about fitness and healthy eating.
- Give your team a name and have T-shirts or visors made.
- Enter charity walk-a-thons, community parades, or 5K
- Organize an all-day or weekend walk to explore a new place (a historic site, big city, part of the Appalachian Trail).
- Organize a community walk to get others interested in walking. You can partner with a local hospital or other community organization to increase support and participation.
- Recognize group members who have lost weight or improved their health.

### Advertise

Post flyers in local public areas. Use free calendar listings in local newspapers or newsletters. Give people a day, time, and public place to meet. You can include a telephone number for people to contact you.



### Check out these other cool activities and events!

#### AARP Links

- [Staying Motivated](#)
- [Get Fit on Route 66](#)
- [Step Up to Better Health](#)
- [10-week walking program,](#)
- [Program Coordinator's Guide](#)

#### More Links

- [Rails-To-Trails](#)
- [American Volkssport Association](#)
- [Information on mall-walking programs](#)
- [Find a The Sierra Club chapter near you](#)
- [The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information](#)

Visit the [Kid's 5 Simple Steps](#) to Success page on First Lady Michelle Obama's health and fitness movement website [Let's Move!](#) From this website you can access tips and resources like: [The Healthy Family Calendar](#); [The President's Challenge](#); and [Physical Activities to Break-up TV Time](#)





## Healthy Futures: Promote Back to School Health



### For Starters:

Search for [local clinics](#) serving children and local organizations working to promote children's health.

Search for local groups that provide athletic activities, like the [YMCA](#), and [Boys and Girls Club](#) and ask how you can help.

### Volunteering at a health clinic or non-profit

Before you go to a health clinic or a non-profit that promotes children's health, research the organization and the community it serves so that you can learn about the challenges faced by the children. The easiest way to do this is to talk with the leadership and/or other volunteers who work at the agency.

Include parents and guardians in all decisions and activities.



### Volunteering at back-to-school health drives

Contact your [local clinic](#) see how you can help. Offer to distribute flyers, work a booth, or fundraise for the cause.

Immunizations are critical to keeping kids healthy and in school. Contact your local [American Academy of Pediatrics chapter](#) and see how you can help.



### Encourage kids to keep active!



A major disease kids face today is Childhood Obesity. Visit the [Kid's 5 Simple Steps to Success](#) page on First Lady Michelle Obama's health and fitness movement website [Let's Move!](#) Use and share with friends the steps featured on this webpage to help fight Childhood Obesity!





## Economic Opportunity: Support Local Food Banks



### Where to Start



Search for [local food banks](#) and [local volunteer opportunities](#).

Call your local faith group or community center and ask if they have a food service program.



**Support a virtual food drive: Because food banks typically handle truckload size donations of food, a virtual food drive is one of the most efficient ways to help get more food to more hungry Americans by maximizing the dollar.**



Create an account at the [Feeding America food drive](#)

#### Benefits of a virtual food drive:

- Stretch your dollar by shopping in bulk. For every dollar you donate, Feeding America can provide 7 meals to men, women, and children facing hunger in our country.
- Ensure the Food Bank gets the food items it most needs.
- Reduce distribution and sorting costs.
- Help your food bank acquire the food they need to feed your community.

Kick-off your virtual food drive with an event! You can host a party and ask each attendee to sign a pledge or donate money.

Motivate your friends and community members to donate. Start a competition or organize a raffle. Use certificates or awards to recognize individuals.



Learn more about the actions you can take to relieve hunger at Feeding America's [hunger action center](#)



## Economic Opportunity: Organize a Clothing Drive



Search [The National Coalition for the Homeless](#) and/or [The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans](#) to identify homeless service organizations within your community. Once you've identified the appropriate community-based organizations, give them a call to see how you can help. You can also contact your local faith group.

### What you need:

- Boxes
- Storage space for collected clothing/housewares
- Flyers with info about your drive

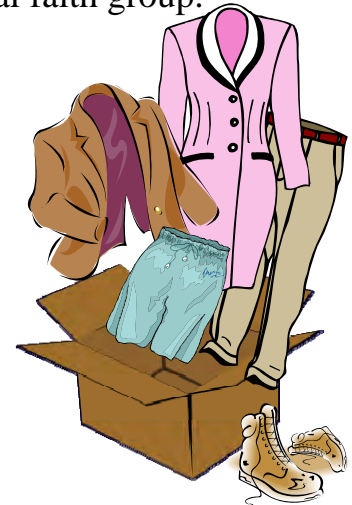
### Good locations for collecting:

- Offices
- Small retail businesses
- Local schools

**Spread the word** - In person, on the phone, using flyers, through social networks, etc.

### Kick-off your clothing drive with an event!

Host a party and ask each attendee to bring at least one appropriate item.



Each team member can choose one location to target. At each location ask for approval and place boxes in a highly visible area. A typical clothing drive lasts two-to-three weeks

### Motivate your friends and community members to donate!

Start a competition or organize a raffle. Use certificates or awards to recognize individuals and locations that contribute the greatest number of clothing/houseware items.



### Sort your items:

Go through your collections and sort the items according to the organization's guidelines. The [National Coalition for the Homeless](#) is a great resource for what kinds of goods are generally useful to collect and contribute.





## Environmental Stewardship: Maintain Public Lands

Search [national and local trails](#), and [hiking and public lands volunteer organizations](#). Ask them how volunteers can bring value. Or, contact your local or state natural resources or parks department to begin your own volunteer group.

### Adopt a Trail

Committing to clearing human litter, sticks and other large impediments to hiking is the easiest way to help keep our nation's trails usable. Your team can work with the agency responsible for the park and "adopt-a-trail" to clear.



### Clear Invasive Species

Invasive species damage natural habitats by crowding out native wildlife and disrupting the ecosystem. Help remove invasive species. Before removing invasive species, take the [US Fish and Wildlife Service's Invasive Species Training Module](#).



### Prevent water erosion and other natural damage

Storms can wash out trails and sever tree limbs, blocking a trail or making it unsafe for hikers. Help clear, construct and maintain trails so they're not ruined by water erosion. At a minimum, all trail construction or maintenance volunteers should review the [Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook](#) before participating in a trail project.



### FYI:

Some local trail groups may provide volunteers additional training tailored for their geography or climate conditions. If there are no groups in your area, more in-depth training is available at:

[Professional Trail Builders Association](#)

And

[International Mountain Bicycling Association](#)

**SAFETY:** Trail maintenance volunteering can be physically strenuous. Without the proper training and safety precautions it could be dangerous. It is crucial that before performing any trail work, all volunteers have been trained in the proper use of tools and safety equipment.

For another environmental service project, check out the [Let's Glean Toolkit](#)







## Veterans: Connect With Veterans



Search for your [local military families or veterans](#) organizations and ask them how volunteers can bring value, or connect online with your [local VA](#). If none of these organizations exist in your community, contact your state's [Veterans Affairs Office](#) to begin your own volunteer group to fit local needs.

### Stand Down for Homeless Veterans

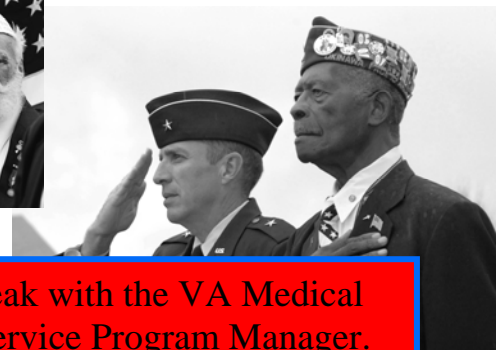
Stand Downs are one way in which the Department of Veterans Affairs provides services to homeless veterans. Typically one-to-three day events provide services to homeless veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other necessary services, such as housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment.

Donations: VA facilities may accept donations towards special programs like Stand Downs.



### Be a Friend at Your Local VA Facility

Like all medical facilities, Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics need volunteers. These volunteers are needed because many hospitalized veterans are disconnected from family or friends, and they are very far from



Contact your local [VA Medical Center](#) and ask to speak with the VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office or the Voluntary Service Program Manager. You can also submit this [email form](#) to your local VA Medical Center and a local Program Manager will get back to you. Or, find your local [DAV Hospital Service Coordinator](#) and inquire about volunteering.