

# **UNIT 5: Taking Action**

Responsible citizenship requires an attitude of caring for the common good; it requires an understanding of community issues; and it requires knowledge of local government. But why do we need these attitudes, knowledge and skills? To what end? The goal is community improvement, and to begin working to improve our communities, we have to marshal all these attitudes, knowledge and skills to take action.

## **Community service or public policy?**

In general, there are two ways to begin looking at how to take action on a community issue: engaging in community service projects or influencing public policy. Community service involves an organized effort to improve an aspect of one's community. Examples of community service projects include working at a soup kitchen, cleaning up a neighborhood park or organizing an after-school club. These projects are designed to address a specific need of the community in which they are carried out. Today, young people are engaged in volunteer activities more than ever; and, when effective, community service has the potential to improve the image of youth in their communities, broaden the perspectives of young people and make real changes in the community.

A public policy is essentially a decision, most often made by public officials, the outcome of which affects the communities that they serve. Examples of public policies include city bus schedules, local curfew ordinances and decisions of how to spend public funds. Influencing public policy is another way to make improvements in the community. In this way, young people can advise public leaders to provide a youth perspective. However, this avenue of change is comparatively underused by young people. Two ways to influence public policy are writing a petition and writing a policy brief. These two documents provide a space for citizens to inform and persuade public officials regarding issues of interest. Petitions can be used to influence public policy by demonstrating to decision-makers that there is public support for a particular action on an issue. The goals of the policy brief are to provide an outline of a community issue to underscore its importance and to put forth

recommendations as to how to approach this issue from a policy standpoint. Guides for writing a petition and a policy brief can be found at the end of this unit.

### **Principles of Citizenship:**

- Community-Based Service Learning
- Public Policy

## **Not “either-or” but “both-and”**

While young people are volunteering at a high rate – as mentioned above – their voter participation is low; they are less interested in public issues; and their political and civic knowledge are lacking. This indicates that community service alone may not be sufficient in teaching youth to be participatory citizens. To truly foster good citizenship, exposure to public policy issues and thinking about the “big picture” should be incorporated into youth activities. Community service is designed to address a specific community problem, but in order to fully understand and address that problem, knowledge of governmental structure and public policy is necessary. For example, volunteering in a soup kitchen may help the homeless in the short term, but to effectively explore the issue of poverty and homelessness in the community, the issue must be examined at a bigger level – the policy level. Avenues for influencing public decision-making include writing petitions and policy briefs, public education and advocacy campaigns, nonviolent public demonstrations, resource development, attending local government meetings and voting. By influencing public policy, we address the foundation of public issues and work to make lasting change.

## **Adult partnerships**

A key part of connecting youth with the political process is forming relationships with adult groups who have an interest in their particular cause. The reasons for such partnerships are threefold. First, by successfully working with adults, youth have the opportunity to transform their image in the eyes of adults into one of capable, responsible citizens with an important voice to be heard. Second, a respectful working relationship between adults and youth can serve to instill a greater degree of confidence in young people regarding civil society,

# Five-Step Community-Based Service Learning Model

## Step 1: Assessing Needs

Gathering information to assess or determine if the project is needed.

## Step 2: Planning and Preparing

Using the information gathered, to plan the tasks, responsibilities, due dates and other “nuts and bolts” types of components in a community-based service learning project.

## Step 3: Experiencing Meaningful Service

Moving into action to carry out the projects

## Step 4: Reflection

Taking what was learned about the process of carrying out the project either as an individual or a group and reflecting on what was learned in the experience. There are many ways to do this step, including group discussion, journals and web pages. Think of ideas for building this in before, during and at the end of the project. Reflection can be broken down more specifically to include:

- **Sharing:** Discussing what happened. Sharing what actually happened during the event with positive interaction and learning from group members.
- **Processing:** Thinking about and sharing what was learned and what was important, including what problems or issues occurred, similar experiences of the group members and how they felt about the experience.
- **Generalizing:** Doing more in-depth reflection and having the group members think about what life skills they learned during the experience.
- **Applying:** Applying what was learned to other experiences. Young people think about how they can use the life skills and knowledge they have learned in other situations in their lives with their peers, their families and in their community. For example, in most group service projects, young people learn to work as team members. This life skill can be used in the classroom or on a job. However, to understand this they need to reflect on their learning.

## Step 5: Celebration

Taking time to celebrate the completed service project.

There are various models that explain the steps for community-based service learning projects; one five-step approach places a greater emphasis on the reflection component of the steps to community-based service learning.

and the adults with whom they work can be strong positive role models. Third, the potential to achieve one's goals is substantially increased by teaming up with likeminded people, and by working with other groups, youth will be more likely to see results and effect change.

Relationships with other groups should be actively cultivated. Once we know what our issue is and what our goal is, it is important to explore what organizations are similarly working toward that goal. Inviting members of such organizations to speak at meetings or, likewise, attending their meetings is an effective way to reach out to likeminded groups. The following is an example of one youth group's – the Ingham County Youth Commission – partnership with their county board of commissioners:

*The Ingham County Youth Commission was established to advise county commissioners and other county officials on youth-related matters. One area of commission involvement is recommending the best way to use millage money to deal with delinquent and troubled youth. Commission members have gone beyond a strictly advisory role to organize a teen forum where young people can exchange ideas on world and local issues, and participate in and recruit volunteers for the Hawk Island Park playground construction project. This fall, they plan to conduct a voter registration drive and hold mock elections in their schools. The commission consists of between 12 and 15 young people aged 12 to 18 who live in Ingham County. Students apply for membership and go through an interview procedure with the board of commissioners – the same as applicants for any other advisory board.*

This is an excellent example, not only of adult-youth partnerships, but also of the variety of ways a youth group can take action on a community issue. Indeed, by engaging youth in decision-making and leadership positions in the organization, youth are more likely to feel a sense of empowerment and commitment to make change.

Here are some other adult groups that may be valuable partners in working on your issue:

- **School and teachers' associations** — to discuss the importance of highlighting community issues, citizenship and civic engagement in the formal curriculum;
- **Community groups, including faith-based groups** — to collaborate on addressing issues and problems through local action;

- **Non-profit organizations** — to learn more about public issues and/or engage in service. Many large non-profits have regional offices that may be active in your area. Non-profits can also be great resources for information regarding social issues.
- **Local and community media (TV, radio, newspaper and other media)** — to encourage them to give attention to community issues, in general, and your project, in particular.
- **Government officials and elected representatives** — to help address local issues at a public policy level.
- **The business community** — to learn how businesses are civically engaged, what issues they support, and how you may be able to cooperate.

## Resources

Michigan 4-H Youth Development's YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service Learning Guide (4H1553) is a free online resource guide for planning and executing service learning projects. Download the curriculum at: <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cyfl/youth/commserv/yeacurriculum.html>

The San Francisco Department of Public Health's Community Action Model Curriculum is an excellent web-based resource for taking action. The content is specific to issues of public health, but the form of the activities can be applied to any domain of interest. The web address is: <http://www.sfdph.org/chpp/cam/CAMweb-TOC.htm>. Specific activities from the Community Action Model Curriculum that are relevant to taking action are:

- "Spectrum of Prevention," which details potential approaches to taking action: [http://www.sfdph.org/chpp/cam/Step\\_4/spectrum%20of%20prev/Spectrum%20Prevention%20complete.pdf](http://www.sfdph.org/chpp/cam/Step_4/spectrum%20of%20prev/Spectrum%20Prevention%20complete.pdf).
- "Using the Media for Advocacy," which contains information about effecting change via the media: [http://www.sfdph.org/chpp/cam/Step\\_4/media%20advocacy/mediaadvocacy%20complete.pdf](http://www.sfdph.org/chpp/cam/Step_4/media%20advocacy/mediaadvocacy%20complete.pdf).

**A non-profit organization is an organization whose objective is to support a public or private issue without concern for monetary profit. Non-profits are engaged in a wide range of areas: social issues, education, healthcare, politics, sports and others. Some examples of non-profits are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Red Cross and Goodwill Industries.**

The Civics Institute has a web-based collection of Michigan-specific, high-school level lesson plans relating to local government: <http://www.civicsinstitute.org/curricula/high/index.html>. Try the lesson entitled "Get Involved!" for material on taking action.

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development at <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org> has a variety of resources on the subject of youth and civic activism. Included are profiles of successful youth activism projects that can serve as effective models for new projects.

## References

- Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.
- Flanagan, C., & Van Horn, B. (2003). Youth civic development: A logical next step in community youth development. In F.A. Villarruel, D.F. Perkins, L.M. Borden, & J.G. Keith (Eds.), *Community youth development: Programs, policies, and practices* (pp. 273-296). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ford, R.E. (2005). *Written Criteria for Policy-Briefs*. Retrieved December 4, 2006, from <http://resweb.ltu.edu/rford/courses/ESSC500/minipapers.html>.
- Killian, E., Donohue, G., Garner, L.P., & Henderson, D. (n.d.). Promoting your 4-H Afterschool program. In M. Kroll (Ed.), *Designing workforce preparation programs: A guide for reaching elementary and middle school youth after school* (pp. 44-46). Chevy Chase, MD: 4-H Afterschool.
- Leach, H. (2004, August 20). Panel of youths seeing results in Ingham County. *Lansing State Journal*, p. 3A.
- Mohamed, I.A., & Wheeler, W. (2001). *Broadening the bounds of youth development: Youth as engaged citizens*. Chevy Chase, MD: The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and The Ford Foundation.



## **ACTIVITY:**

# **Board Meeting**

### **Description:**

By attending a meeting of the local governing body at the county, city, township or village level, youth learn how the local government public policy process works. This activity should be performed after the group has decided what issue(s) it wants to focus on. The meeting they attend will be determined by which unit of government has jurisdiction over the chosen issue(s).

### **Participant Age:**

Ages 13–19

### **Activity Objectives:**

The participants will:

- Attend a meeting of a local governing body (for example, county board of commissioners).
- Learn how public policy is made at the local level.

### **Learning and Life Skills:**

Responsible Citizenship; Decision Making; Cooperation

### **State of Michigan Social Studies Standards:**

Standard III.I Purposes of Government;  
Standard III.3 Democracy in Action;  
Standard III.4 American Government and Politics

### **Materials, Equipment, Handouts:**

- Handout: "Public Policy"
- Handout: "Local Government Decision-Making Process"

### **Time:**

Varies according to length of meeting.  
Allow 20 minutes before and after the meeting for introducing the activity and debriefing.

### **Setting:**

Site of local government meeting

### **Procedure:**

#### **Before the meeting:**

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print enough copies of the following handouts for each participant: "Local Government Decision-Making Process" and "Public Policy."
- Determine with the group the unit of government that has jurisdiction over the issue(s) that they are interested in.
- Contact the administrator's office for the unit of government that the group has selected. This contact information can be found on the internet or in a local phone book. Make arrangements for the group to attend a meeting of the legislative body for that unit of government (for example, county board of commissioners, school board).

#### **During the meeting:**

1. Either immediately before attending the legislative body meeting or at a previous date, gather the group together to introduce the activity.
2. Explain to the group that they will be attending a meeting of the legislative body of the unit of local government that deals with the issue(s) they have identified. Explain to the group that one way to take action on an issue is to influence public policy. Distribute the handout, "Public Policy," and give the group a moment to read it over. Ask the group to give examples of public policy. If the group is primarily speaking of federal and state policies, ask them to think about some examples of local policies, too.
3. Ask the group what they know about how decisions are made in the federal and state governments (for example, how bills become laws). Tell them that one of the purposes of attending the legislative meeting is to see how decisions are made in local government units.
4. Distribute the handout, "Local Government Decision-Making Process." Explain to the group that this handout can be used to help them understand the decision-making process of the legislative body. Ask them to take notes at the meeting, focusing on (a) how ideas are introduced and who introduces them, (b) how ideas are discussed or debated, (c) how decisions are made on issues and who makes them and (d) how decisions are implemented or put into action. Ask participants to fill in the handout and keep it for future reference.
5. Attend the legislative body meeting of the chosen local government unit.

### **Reflection Activities and Ideas:**

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. What are your thoughts on how decisions are made in this government unit?
2. How can a citizen advocate for change through this government unit?

3. What concrete steps must a citizen take to influence decision making?
4. Why is it important for a citizen to understand the policy-making process in his or her community?
5. How is influencing policy different from doing community service?

### **Try This, Too:**

- Ask a local government official to join your group to explain how decisions are made at the local level (steps 3 and 4 in the above procedure). This official can also give examples of specific policies that have been enacted.
- A recommended extension of this activity is to engage the group in writing policy proposals – either individually or as a whole – using the knowledge and experience that they gained from attending the legislative meeting to inform the writing process. If possible, give the group the opportunity to advocate for their drafted proposals to the legislative body of the appropriate unit of local government. This can be accomplished either by arranging for the group (or select members) to attend another legislative meeting or by arranging for local government officials to meet with the group in an unofficial context.
- If the group writes policy proposals around identified issues, organize the proposals into a professional-looking publication. Ideas of what to include in the publication are: information about the group and group members, activities in which the group has participated, the process by which the group identified key issues and problems in their community, the group's vision for their community, research the group has done on key issues and recommendations the group has for how to approach key issues and problems in the community.



Adapted with permission from "What's Your Opinion?" by Elizabeth Moore, in *Developing Community Leadership*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2005.

## HANDOUT:

# Public Policy

**pol•i•cy** – noun - a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions.

-Merriam-Webster's On-line Dictionary

“Public policy is a combination of basic decisions, commitments, and actions made by those who hold authority or affect government decisions. The policy-making process weighs and balances public values.”

“Formally adopted policy generally takes the form of a governing principle, plan, or course of action. In the public sector it generally evolves from a deliberative process, and is adopted by an ordinance or resolution. Legislative bodies make public policy decisions; others perform the administrative task of implementing those policies. The decisions could be the adoption of a vision for the community, a comprehensive plan, a budget, or a policy relating to a specific issue, such as allowing or prohibiting local gambling activities.”

-Municipal Research & Services Center of Washington. (1999). *Local government policy-making process*. Seattle, WA: Author. Retrieved July 9, 2007, from <http://mrsc.org/Publications/polmakpro.pdf>

**HANDOUT:**

# ***Local Government Decision-Making Process***

**How are ideas introduced and who introduces them?**

**How are ideas discussed or debated?**

**How are decisions made on issues and who decides?**

**How are decisions implemented and put into action?**

## **GUIDE:**

# **Writing a Petition**

Petitions can be used to influence public policy by demonstrating to decision-makers that there is public support for a particular action on an issue. The right to petition is one of the five freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. A petition includes a statement of purpose, or what the petition hopes to achieve. This includes a clear description of the issue at hand, as well as what you would like to see done about the issue. The second part of the petition is a list of names, addresses and signatures of people in the community who support the purpose of the petition. This is a way of communicating to public officials the

wants and needs of the communities that they serve. Naturally, the more signatures on the petition (and the number of signers of voting age), the more likely it is to influence the decision-making of public officials.

The process of getting signatures must be a resourceful one. Signatures can come from members of the group sponsoring the petition, members of community organizations that have a mission similar to your group, members of your school or family or even passers-by on the street. Be creative about finding signers for your petition, and remember – the more, the better.

**(The following sample petition form can be used as a guide for writing petitions concerning the issues in which a group is interested.)**

## **Sample Petition Form**

(TITLE OF PETITION)

A petition of \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of group or individual sponsor of the petition)

Addressed to \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of official or group for whom the petition is intended)

We, the undersigned would like to bring to your attention the following issue, with recommendations:

(Statement of the petition: Briefly state the issue and your group's recommendations for addressing the issue.)

Agreed upon by the following individuals:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Signature</b>
1. John Doe	123 Main St., Anytown	John Doe
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

(Add as many lines as necessary)

## **GUIDE:**

# **Writing a Policy Brief**

*(The following handout can be used by the group as a guide for writing and presenting policy proposals – or “briefs” – concerning the issues in which they are interested.)*

The policy brief should be written with local decision makers as the intended audience. The goals of the brief are to provide an outline of a community issue to underscore its importance and to put forth recommendations as to how to approach this issue from a policy standpoint. That is, the brief should try to convince decision makers to reevaluate how their unit of government is addressing a problem. Writing the brief will draw on knowledge, attitudes and skills developed during the previous units.

The brief should be short, concise, practical and persuasive. You probably have a lot to say about the issue, but you will have to make your comments to-the-point. Remember that you are not debating, but rather educating decision makers so that they might make an informed decision on this issue and take action on it.

## **Use the following format when writing a policy brief:**

1. **Title of the paper.** The title of the brief should be catchy and compel the reader to continue reading.
2. **What is the issue or the problem?** The first part of the brief is to clearly state the issue to be addressed. Be clear and concise.
3. **Why is it important?** This is an opportunity to explain why you have chosen the issue at hand. What makes it important? It is helpful here to include specific information and statistics about the issue to support your case. Testimonials from the community are also valuable. You need to show here that you have done your research. It will help to revisit concepts from Unit 2, “Diversity and Inclusion” and Unit 3, “Issues Identification.”
4. **How did the problem get this way?** Include background information about the problem. Give a brief history of how the issue has evolved. This requires research and interviewing of people familiar with the issue. Again, activities from the “Issues Identification” unit can help to provide this information.
5. **What are the different views on this issue?** Present all sides of the issue here, and don’t be one-sided. Use what you have learned from researching the issue and what you have heard from people in the community. Brainstorm other possible viewpoints on the issue, as

well. Here the idea is to show that you are aware of various perspectives, and that you have considered these perspectives in thinking about how to deal with the problem.

6. **Present recommendations.** This is your chance to present your ideas for how the issue should be addressed. What changes in action or strategy should the decision makers consider? “Should” is the key word here; these recommendations should be persuasive and supported with reasons for why this is the best course of action. Provide specific, practical steps for how your solution can be achieved. Be confident. Stand up for what you believe in, and make your point convincingly!
7. **References and further reading.** Add an extra page that cites the sources that you consulted in researching the issue. You can also provide citations to books, articles, websites, etc. that you would recommend for finding further information on the issue.

## **Presenting**

Two means for sharing a policy proposal with decision makers are to schedule an appointment with a local government official or to attend a local government meeting. The first step is to determine which officials or which governmental bodies have jurisdiction over your issue, that is, figure out who has the power to make the changes that you are seeking.

If you elect to make an appointment with an official, look for his or her contact information either online or in the phone book, and schedule an appointment; it may be easier if multiple members of your group attend. During the appointment, politely present your policy proposal and be prepared to answer any questions the official may have. At the conclusion of the meeting, ask for a commitment from the official to support your proposal.

If you elect to attend a local government meeting, call the administrator’s office of the local government unit to determine the date of the next meeting and to get your group on the agenda for the meeting. At the meeting, present – individually or as a group – your policy brief and be prepared to answer questions from the audience.

## **GUIDE: Writing a Policy Brief, continued**

### **Sample Policy Brief**

#### **HEALTH IS WORTH MORE THAN LEARNING: RESTRICTING VENDING MACHINES IN DISTRICT SCHOOLS**

Childhood and adolescent obesity are serious public health concerns both in our nation and in our community. Obesity is associated with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis. Vending machines in schools provide young people easy access to unhealthy, high-calorie foods and drinks; and they send the message that the school approves of these eating habits.

The vending machines at the schools in our district contain candy, chips, cookies, soft drinks and other sugary and fatty foods. There are few healthy alternatives for students. Indeed, a recent national study showed that 71% of purchases that students make at school vending machines are sodas and other sugar-sweetened drinks. This is consistent with our school district, too. In one district high school, 80% of the drinks in vending machines are sugary drinks (soda, juice with less than 50% juice, sports drinks) and 90% of the foods are candy, cookies, chips, snack cakes or pastries. This is having a negative effect on students' health. One local pediatrician said: "We see an alarming number of young people here with weight problems and the negative health consequences that come with it." Students take health classes as part of their curriculum in which they learn about healthy diets, but in school they are surrounded by unhealthy food options.

District schools began installing vending machines in the late 1980s. Since then childhood obesity has become a bigger and bigger issue. Presently, 20% to 30% of American children are overweight or at risk of becoming so. The schools have a contract with commercial vendors; in exchange for letting the vendors set up vending machines in the schools, the vendors pay a fixed fee to the school for using the space. A local high school official claimed that this year his school received approximately \$10,000 in contracts with vendors.

Schools naturally value this additional money, particularly in these times of financial hardship for area schools. Every little bit counts, and \$10,000, for example, goes a long way toward taking some pressure off of school administrators. Students, too, value their autonomy. Few teenagers want to be told that they cannot eat junk food. One district high school student remarked, "We're old enough to decide for ourselves if we want to eat candy and drink soda; taking vending machines out of schools won't stop us from getting these things." But there is a difference between actively blocking students' access to junk food versus promoting it by setting up vending machines in their learning environment. It is the school's responsibility to teach young people about healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating habits. A school can't stop young people from buying unhealthy foods in their communities, but it can take care of business in their own building, by promoting foods that are consistent with their health curricula. This sends a message to young people that schools are serious about students' health.

It is imperative that the school district rise up to meet the challenge of childhood and adolescent obesity by eliminating unhealthy food items from school vending machines. Many states have taken action to provide healthy vending machine alternatives to students. California, for example, has limited the sale of soft drinks in schools. If our district is serious about the health of its students, it needs to take similar measures. A ban on soft drinks and high sugar- and fat-content foods should be instated. Also, healthier food options should be given to students in school vending machines, such as baked chips, trail mix, fruit and cereal bars, water, 100% juice and soy milk. The added funds from vendor contracts are not worth our students' health. Besides, taking a preventative approach to student health would save significant money in health care costs for area families. With this money saved, the district could consider a millage to raise funds depleted by loss of vendor contracts. In any sense, our schools need to take leadership in ensuring a healthy future for our youth. Eliminate junk food; provide healthy alternatives.

#### **References and further reading:**

Hellmich, N. (2004, May 12). School vending rated as junk. *USA Today*. Retrieved August 28, 2007, from [http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2004-05-11-vending-machines\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2004-05-11-vending-machines_x.htm)



# **UNIT 6: Finishing Strong**

Reflection at the conclusion of a civic engagement project is a vital part of the learning experience for young people. It is also one of the most forgotten parts of the experience! By reflecting on their participation in a citizenship and civic engagement program, young people are more likely to truly incorporate the competencies and lessons they have learned.

## **Last but not least**

This post-program reflection and sharing process also serves as an evaluation to measure what has been learned through the experience of being an active and engaged citizen. Having young people share their conceptions of citizenship before and after participating in citizenship and civic engagement activities helps reinforce their learning. In this curriculum, the activity “What Is Citizenship?” in unit 1 is a great opportunity to assess youth participants’ ideas of citizenship prior to engaging in intentional learning experiences; the definitions of citizenship that participants produce can be saved and used as a comparison for post-program definitions. The following are some ways to evaluate post-program learning, provided by the Points of Light Foundation:

- **Journals** – This is among the most traditional forms of reflection. Ask participants to keep a journal of their experiences in the program, writing entries at intervals (for example, after every group meeting). Try using prompts for journal entries to which participants can respond, such as specific questions, hot issues or topics, readings or quotations. Another variation on the individual journal is a “team journal,” in which participants respond to one another’s entries.
- **Discussion groups** – Assemble all the youth that participated in the program into a large circle. Prepare a series of reflection questions to facilitate a discussion between members. Other ideas include inviting a government, non-profit or community representative to join and/or facilitate the discussion; having youth participants take turns leading the discussion and using media articles about the broader issue that

the group addressed to stimulate “big-picture” discussion. Consider videotaping the discussion to share with others.

- **Skits** – Split the participants into groups of three or four and ask each group to portray their experience through a skit. Give each group 10 minutes to plan what they will do and up to five minutes to share their skit with the rest of the group. After each group’s skit have the whole group process reactions, give suggestions for effective future projects and give positive feedback to the actors.
- **Photographic journal or poster** – Individually or in groups, have participants take photographs documenting what they learned and accomplished. They can make a poster with the photos to represent and share what they have learned and accomplished throughout the course of the program.
- **Documentary** – If you have access to video equipment, have the group create a documentary that captures some of their activities during the program and also includes interviews with participants and community members in which they reflect on their experience.
- **Web site** – Have participants create a web site on which they can display information and things learned from the program. Many young people have the skills to put information up online, and there are a variety of services that help with web site creation.

## **Spreading the word**

Just as it is important for young people to reflect on their experiences in becoming engaged citizens, it is equally important for them to share what they have learned and accomplished with others. Promoting a group’s activities and experiences is a source of pride for youth participants, and it can help attract support from the government, academic and business communities. Furthermore, educating others about activities related to civic engagement is a form of civic engagement in itself. Letting other young people and their parents know how to get involved can start

a positive cycle of continued civic learning and practice. A democracy is only as strong as the citizens that make it up, so the more young people learning to be engaged citizens, the brighter our future. Sharing the products of the group's reflection process is a great way to spread the word. Here are some other ideas:

- **Draft a news release** documenting your activities and accomplishments and send it to local newspaper, newsletters and community web sites. Smaller publications, such as school, community and business newsletters are good targets that may be looking for stories.
- **Participate in community events** such as art shows, food festivals, farmers markets or parades. These are good venues for youth to share their experiences with others.
- **Contact radio and television stations** to pitch the group's program as a news story.

- **Give presentations** at community, school, government and business group meetings. This is also an excellent way to reach out to these groups as partners.

## Celebration

After all the hard work is done, celebration is in order. Organizing a social event or a ceremony to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of responsible young citizens is a way to conclude a project or program on a high note and reinforce positive feelings about being engaged in the community. Whenever possible, youth participants themselves should be involved in planning such a celebration – they are the experts! Providing music and food are typically good ways to add to the ambiance. Another great way to recognize young people is to furnish certificates for the completion of the project or program. This creates a source of pride and underlines the value of being a responsible citizen.

## References

Killian, E., Donohue, G., Garner, L.P., & Henderson, D. (2007). Promoting your 4-H After-school program. In Kroll, M. (Ed.), *Designing workforce preparation programs: A guide for reaching elementary and middle school youth after school* (pp. 44-46). Chevy Chase, MD: 4-H Afterschool.

Points of Light Foundation. (2002, December 3). *Communities as places of learning: Developing effective community-based service learning programs*. Paper presented at Points of Light Foundation Training, Traverse City, MI.



## **ACTIVITY:**

# **Put on Your Reflecting Cap**

### **Description:**

At the conclusion of the group's activities, participants carry out a reflection project – either in groups or individually – to reinforce what they have learned and accomplished in the course of their experience in learning and practicing citizenship and civic engagement.

### **Participant Age:**

Ages 13–19

### **Activity Objectives:**

The participants will:

- Plan a reflection activity to document and share their experiences.
- Present their reflections to the group and/or the public.

### **Learning and Life Skills:**

Critical Thinking; Service Learning; Planning/Organizing

### **State of Michigan Social Studies Standards:**

Standard VII.I Responsible Personal Conduct

### **Materials, Equipment, Handouts:**

- Handout: "Reflective Questions"
- Handout: "Reflective Activities"

### **Time:**

30 minutes. Extra out-of-meeting time for participants to complete their evaluation activities.

### **Setting:**

Indoors

### **Procedure:**

#### **Before the meeting:**

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print out one copy of the handout, "Reflective Questions" and one copy of the handout, "Reflective Activities" for each participant.

#### **During the meeting:**

1. Introduce the concept of reflection with the following statements:

*We have used reflection in this group to process each activity that we have done together. It's important, too, to reflect back on what was learned at the conclusion of a civic engagement project or program. This helps reinforce the skills, knowledge and attitudes that we gain, and it also helps us gauge the effectiveness of our work in the community. What have you learned throughout this experience? What have you accomplished? What would you do differently? Thinking about the answers to these questions is a way of learning from your experience.*

2. Ask the group the following questions and allow several minutes for conversation:

- What have you learned from this?
- Will any of your attitudes, thoughts or behaviors change as a result of this program?

3. Next, break participants up into teams of three and give each team a copy of the "Reflective Questions" handout. Either have each team discuss and fill out the handout together or simply discuss the questions together. Allow about ten minutes for this step.

4. Distribute the handout "Reflective Activities." Have participants – working in teams or individually – choose a reflection activity to carry out on their own time. Give participants the option of creating their own reflection activity, as well.

### **Try This, Too:**

- Using some of the ideas provided in the unit introduction, find or create a forum for participants to share their reflections with the public.

Adapted with permission from "YEA Project Reflection Form," developed by 4-H Youth Development, in *YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service Learning Guide* (4H1553), East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2000.

**HANDOUT:**

# Reflective Questions

Group name: \_\_\_\_\_ Program dates: \_\_\_\_\_  
County: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of participants: \_\_\_\_\_  
Person filling out report: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did you expect to get out of this experience?
2. How did your definition of “citizenship” change as a result of this experience?
3. Have you become a better citizen as a result of this experience? Why or why not?
4. What have you learned about issues in your community?
5. What have you learned about ways to address issues in your community?
6. What issues did your group focus on? Why did you choose those issues?
7. Who is affected by the issues you addressed? Who benefited from the action your group took?
8. What were the challenges to taking action?
9. If you were to have this experience again, what would you do differently?
10. What are your thoughts and feelings about government? How do they compare to your thoughts and feelings before this experience?
11. If you were to draw a picture of “government,” what would it look like?
12. What makes a good citizen?

Adapted with permission from “YEA Project Reflection Form,” developed by 4-H Youth Development in *YEA! Youth Experiencing Action: A Community Service Learning Guide* (4H1553), East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2000.

**HANDOUT:**

# Reflective Activities

- **Discussion Groups** – Prepare a series of reflection questions to facilitate a discussion between group members. Additional ideas include inviting a government, non-profit or community representative to join and/or facilitate the discussion; having youth participants take turns leading the discussion and using media articles about the broader issue that the group addressed to stimulate “big-picture” discussion. Consider videotaping the discussion to share with others.
- **Skits** – In a group, portray your experience through a skit. Plan what you will do, and perform the skit for the rest of the group. After, have the whole group process reactions and give suggestions for effective future projects.
- **Photographic journal or poster** – Individually or in groups, take photographs documenting what you learned and accomplished. You can make a poster with the photos to represent and share what you have learned and accomplished throughout the course of the program.
- **Documentary** – If you have access to video equipment, create a documentary that captures some of your activities during the program and also includes interviews with participants and community members in which they reflect on their experience.
- **Web site** – Create a web site on which you can display information and things learned from the program. Many young people have the skills to put information up online, and there are a variety of services that help with web site creation.
- **Be creative!** – Come up with your own idea of how to reflect on and share what you’ve learned and accomplished!

What activity will you use to reflect on and share your experiences? \_\_\_\_\_

## Reference

Points of Light Foundation. (2002, December 3). *Communities as places of learning: Developing effective community-based service learning programs*. Paper presented at Points of Light Foundation Training, Traverse City, MI.





**Government  
Is Us!**

