



Hey, it's
your world...
CHANGE IT!

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Five Critical Elements of Meaningful Community Service

To be effective and respectful in the community, it is important to incorporate the following five elements into any community service project.

Community Voice

Any community service project should make sure that the voice and needs of the community are included in the development of the project(s). The community (typically represented by agencies, schools, neighborhood groups, etc.) should define what they need done as opposed to participants defining it for them. Community voice is essential if we are to build bridges, make changes, and solve problems.

Orientation & Training

Information should be provided for volunteers about the community, the issue, and the agency or community group they are to work with. This information should be what the students need to act effectively and appropriately at their service site.

Meaningful Action

Meaningful action means that the service being done is necessary and valuable to the community itself. Meaningful action also makes people feel like what they did made a difference in a measurable way and that their time was utilized well. Without this, people will not want to continue their service despite the other four elements.

Reflection

Immediately after the service experience, participants should discuss reactions, personal stories, feelings, and facts about the issues. This may dispel any stereotypes about the group served, or address any individual's alienation from service. Reflection should also be used as an opportunity to place the experience into a broader context.

Evaluation

Evaluation measures the impact of the participants' experience and the effectiveness of the service in the community. Service participants should evaluate what they have learned or have experienced as a result of their work, and agencies should evaluate the results of the participants' contribution of time and effort. Evaluation gives direction for improvement, growth and change of future service efforts.

(Source: Into the Streets Organizing Manual, Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), 1999)