Leveraging the Potential of

Youth Service

John P. Dugan, Ph.D.
The Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity

Kristan Cilente Skendall, Ph.D.
The Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity

Greg Weatherford II
The Allstate Foundation

This document and funding to support the work of the Youth Service Fellowship are generously provided by:

Allstate Foundation

© 2024 The Allstate Foundation and Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO). All rights reserved. This document, including but not limited to content, design, data, and reporting, is the shared intellectual property of the Foundation and CELO and/or is used with permission, and is for pedagogical, professional development, and research purposes only. Information may not be reproduced in part or whole without the express written permission of the Foundation and/or CELO.

The Allstate Foundation empowers youth to serve and improve communities. The Foundation does this by providing youth with opportunities and resources that enable them to serve and preparing adults to support their service journey.

The Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO) is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that opportunities for learning and growth are distributed as equally as the abundance of talent in our communities. We accomplish this by integrating the science of learning and cutting-edge research with program innovation and community co-creation of learning solutions.

CELO
CENTER FOR EXPANDING
LEADERSHIP & OPPORTUNITY

This publication is available in PDF format at www.expandingleadership.org.

Dugan, J.P., Skendall, K.C., & Weatherford II, G. (2024).
Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service: A Call to Action.
The Allstate Foundation and the Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity.

A New Approach to Service

In Helena-West Helena, Arkansas, a 21-year-old coordinates a food drive serving more than 1,000 of her rural neighbors experiencing food scarcity. On the West Side of Chicago, a 14-year-old serves as a tutor and mentor for kids in science and technology through a community organization introducing them to new possibilities for their future. And in Las Cruces, New Mexico, a 9-year-old visits with her elderly neighbor each week helping her with household chores that have become a burden.

All across the United States, the approximately 90 million youth under age 25 are finding ways to give back to their communities. From formal, year-long service programs to informal, everyday acts of service, youth are making a difference. As this report will show, youth today are engaged in service at unprecedented rates around a diverse array of issues. They represent the single most important investment our country can make in its future.

The Allstate Foundation works to help communities thrive by empowering youth, working to advance racial equity and disrupting the cycle and prevalence of relationship abuse. We also invest in nonprofit leaders. Because we believe in better for all.

The Allstate Foundation's youth empowerment pillar is grounded on the principle of elevating the voices of young people by providing them with the opportunities, skills, and resources needed to turn their dreams into reality. Over the next decade, we will invest in young people directly as well as the adults and organizations most proximate to youth, supporting efforts that drive youth-led, youth-driven service. Our goal is to increase the number of young people engaged in meaningful service that strengthens their communities and builds their capacities to lead now and in the future.

This report reflects a year-long process of engaging with youth, community stakeholders, service organizations, educational leaders, and advocates. Together, this intergenerational, multi-sector group reviewed existing scholarship, policy,

and practice along with conducting listening sessions with youth across the country and surveys with youth, parents, and educators. The results introduce a new definition, model, and design considerations to guide the next decade of youth-led, youth-driven service.

We hope you find inspiration and optimism for our collective future in this report. We also hope you'll consider joining us in this journey to engage, equip, and prepare rising generations.

Greg Weatherford II
Program Officer | Youth Empowerment
The Allstate Foundation

Associate Editors

Milan Balinton, African American Community Service Agency
Rachel Bruns, America's Service Commissions
Tiana Day,* Youth Advocates for Change
Andrea Delbanco, *TIME*
Nakia Douglas, Transition Resource Action Center
Kayla Foster,* New York University; Center for Justice Innovation
Natalie Furlett, Campus Compact
Sonny Garg, Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity
Alexa Guloy,* University of Nevada Las Vegas, Office of Service Learning and Leadership
Sky Harper,* Drexel University; Cobell Scholarship Program
Zoë Jenkins,* Kentucky Student Voice Team
Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Tufts University CIRCLE part of Tisch College
Joshua Kearns, Education Week
Brianna Koerth, Social Sphere
Katharine Kravetz, American University
Todd Laudino, National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
Tania Mitchell, University of Minnesota
Marissa Moore, Roadtrip Nation
Abrianna Morales,* National Organization for Victim Advocacy
Julie Owen, George Mason University
Sydnee Patterson, Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity
Danielle Walker, Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity
Christian Previlma,* Wellington Collegiate Academy
Connor Schoen,* Breaktime
William Southerland, Northwestern University
James Stillwell, Do Good Institute, University of Maryland School of Public Policy
Frederick Walker,* City Year & Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship
Stephanie Wu, City Year
Allison Zuel, America's Service Commissions

** Indicates a Youth Fellow*

Voices of Youth

"Service is important because it's the driving force for change and innovation. There are so many problems we face on a daily basis that can easily be changed and even more that can't easily be changed unless we put in the time and effort. If we aren't putting in the effort, who else will?"

— **J'Lynn R.**, *Norfolk State University*

Table of Contents

The State of Play for Community Service	05
A New Vision for Youth-Led, Youth-Driven Service	14
Design Considerations	19
Recommendations and The Path Forward	28
References	34
Appendix: Research and Methods for Report	35

The State of Play
for Community Service

To be part of something bigger than ourselves, to contribute to the world, to provide support in times of need and crisis, and to demonstrate care for those around us are threads that make up the fabric of American culture. Despite increasing polarization, economic and political uncertainty, and growing threats to national security, the United States remains a nation of hope. That hope is manifested every day through innumerable acts of service between and among community members, the tireless work of countless service-based organizations, and engagement in the civic life of our communities. Indeed, a culture of service is what holds us together.

Nowhere is service more important than in the lives of young people as they begin to add their own unique threads to our cultural fabric. Service is so important that the federal government enshrined its purpose and value into federal law via the National and Community Service Act of 1990. Since then, the research and practice that drives service expanded to meet a growing demand for clear pathways into service opportunities. Yet, changes over the past decade necessitate a more deliberate agenda that places youth at the center.

This section synthesizes three core themes from our analyses of service policy and scholarship, extant research, original research, and more than 30 hours of design thinking among youth and adult leaders across sectors. Examining the state of play for community service paints an important picture of how we position our collective work to drive impact and ensure rising generations' abilities to participate, learn, and contribute to their communities.

The past 30 years have seen an expansion and differentiation of service-related terms from volunteering and civic engagement to advocacy and service-learning. Each term carries with it a specific focus and set of priorities, which at times are put into competition with one another in terms of relative value. Indeed, conceptualizations of service vary across an almost infinite number of factors (e.g. region, identity, sector, impact focus, time, and geography). For example, one person's advocacy could be another's volunteering. Similarly, someone might view voter registration campaigns as a form of civic engagement when conducted for a political group that they affiliate with but simply a job when done for an opposing group.

The comprehensive literature review conducted for this report adopted a multidisciplinary approach reviewing publications since 1990. Results yielded three core themes:

1 Over-Reliance
on theories and models built in the 1990s with limited updates to reflect contemporary audiences and contexts;

2 Over-Emphasis
on service-learning that constrains insights by narrowing the audience to those in the educational pipeline; and

3 Under-Representation
of scholarship on the impact of service on communities, employers, and other constituencies.

An added layer of complexity comes from how concepts of service are studied and by whom. Too often, how we define service is determined by adult-driven research and practice rather than through insights of rising generations experiencing and redefining what constitutes service in real time.

What is clear, however, is the need to focus on areas of commonality and overlap in the terminology of service. We need a definition expansive enough to support multi-sector, multi-disciplinary, and intergenerational understandings yet specific enough to offer differentiation in practice. Stating an over-emphasis on service-learning scholarship — particularly in higher education — is not a suggestion to reduce or eliminate scholarship on this form of service. Rather, it is a call to be more expansive in our scholarship.

Approximately 60% of youth in the United States pursue a college education, creating a gap in the literature when service-learning is tied explicitly to educational contexts. We encourage researchers to consider additive approaches that offer insights into service experiences beyond those tied to the educational pipeline.

Benefits of Service

Participation in service is about far more than just altruistic intention but an understanding that youth have the agency and power to effect positive change in the world. Increasingly, youth report participation in service as a vehicle for building relationships, creating proximity to people who hold different world views, and finding ways to work together to address issues that they face.

Research also demonstrates the profound impact that service can have across a variety of domains:

Character & Social Responsibility: Participation in service is associated with gains in a wide range of learning outcomes from leadership development and character formation to personal responsibility and social skill development (see for example: Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Schmidt, Shumow, & Kackar, 2007).

Academic Outcomes & Workforce Readiness: A number of studies link participation in service with higher academic performance, standardized test scores, and school engagement. Additionally, a record of participation in service is linked to higher rates of hiring and job promotion (see for example: Celio et al., 2015; Astin & Sax, 1998; Michelsen, Zaff, & Hair, 2002).

Sense of Belonging to School & Community: Service provides a critical point of connection increasing a young person's sense of belonging to their school and community. This often translates into a sense of generativity or personal responsibility for the welfare and future of one's community (see for example: O'Connor et al., 2011).

Health & Mental Well-Being: Service participation is linked to a variety of positive mental health and well-being concepts such as self-esteem and self-efficacy along with lower rates of depression, decreased alcohol and drug use, and a reduction in high-risk health behaviors (see for example: Ballard, Hoyt, & Pachicki, 2019; Ducharme, 2023; Lanza, Hunt, & Mantey, 2023; Wray-Lake, Shubert, Lin, & Starr, 2019).

Social Trust: Service participants report increased rates of social trust in peers including those from backgrounds and identities different from their own (see for example: Martini et al., 2023).

Democracy, Justice, & Community Engagement: Youth who participate in service report higher rates of civic engagement, voting behaviors, greater awareness about the society in which they live, and deeper understandings, beliefs, and commitments to take social justice actions (see for example: Celio et al., 2015; Compare & Albanesi, 2023; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Mitchell, 2007).

Supporting the multi-sector, multi-disciplinary research on the impact of service, survey results for this report conducted with youth ages 18-25 similarly indicated the powerful effect of service on youth.

And, if the personal and community benefits of service were not enough, service contributes enormously to the economics of society. AmeriCorps (n.d.) estimated that in a one year period, formal volunteers contributed more than 4 billion hours of service yielding nearly $123 billion in economic value. Furthermore, Independent Sector and the Do Good Institute at the University of Maryland appraised an hour of volunteer service at $31.80 in 2022, a rate that continues to increase year-over-year for the past two decades (Value of Volunteer Time, 2023).

The state of community service in the United States is at an inflection point. Our conceptualizations of what service is and how it is conducted grow more expansive with each generation. The scholarship on service also continues to grow, inviting new ways of conducting research that include youth in the process and address their more expansive understandings of service. Perhaps most importantly, youth rates of participation in service and its impact on their lives and the lives of their community appear exponentially greater than previously understood.

The question becomes: How do we usher in new scholarship and forms of meaningful service, while smoothing engagement pathways for youth to capture the momentum of this inflection point? The rest of this report offers recommendations and strategies along with a new model conceptualizing youth-led, youth-driven service.

Voices of Youth

"Starting at 12, I have been involved with Nebraska Special Olympics' services, which included unified athletics, unified music and theater events, and inclusion-based social events. I fell in love with the joy of inclusion and created meaningful connections with peers and adults that changed my leadership and my life. From my service through this organization, which then led me to take initiative in other inclusive everyday service acts, I developed a passion for disability advocacy, leading me to the career path in special education that I am now on."

— Myah A.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

To What Extent Has Engaging in Service Benefited You Personally?

Youth ages 18-25 were asked about their perceptions on the benefits of service in their lives. Results support the wide-ranging positive impact of service.

	NOT AT ALL	SLIGHTLY	SOMEWHAT	SIGNIFICANTLY	ENORMOUSLY	TOTAL POSITIVE IMPACT
Increased my sense of belonging in my community	6%	28%	36%	23%	8%	67%
Increased my belief that I can make a positive difference in my community	3%	18%	36%	31%	12%	79%
Enhanced my self-awareness	5%	17%	31%	32%	16%	78%
Enhanced my knowledge about social, political, and civic issues	7%	21%	32%	26%	13%	72%
Increased my leadership skills	6%	17%	31%	31%	16%	77%
Increased my ability to collaborate with others	4%	16%	33%	34%	14%	80%
Prepared me for my future career	10%	20%	31%	24%	15%	70%

**Note that percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and percentages may not total 100% as a result.*

Is It Service?

Youth ages 18-25* were asked to classify whether different types of behaviors were an example of service.
Results support a more expansive understanding of what constitutes service than is most typically reflected in scholarship.

82%	Worked with Others to Make the Campus or Community a Better Place
81%	Acted to Benefit the Common Good
78%	Involvement in Organizations that Address Social and/or Environmental problems
76%	Everyday Acts of Kindness (mowing a neighbor's lawn, etc.)
76%	Took Action in the Community to Address Social and/or Environmental Problems
72%	Involvement in Organizations that Address the Concerns of a Specific Community
72%	Acted to Raise Awareness about a Campus, Community, or Global Problem
68%	Worked with Others to Address Social Inequality
54%	Communicated with School and/or Community Leaders About a Pressing Concern
52%	Took Part in a Protest, Rally, March, or Demonstration

*percentages indicate a "Yes" response

Many Approaches, One Goal

by Katharine Kravetz
Assistant Professor Emerita, American University

Service can meet immediate needs, engage us with others, and increase understanding of community problems. On the other hand, it has limited impact in solving many of society's underlying problems. A growing number of young people have come to believe that creating healthy communities requires liberation from an endless cycle of need. They have engaged in and championed more inclusive and multifaceted forms of service that amplify the voices and choices of youth. Two examples of creative, collaborative approaches to service for and by youth – one old, one new – exemplify this new approach.

We often think of service providers as an alternative to government, but our largest and arguably most established youth service organization, **4-H**, is an umbrella composed of local clubs and organizations supporting youth development under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's network of public land-grant universities. Originally focused on rural areas and projects, 4-H expanded into a variety of communities and initiatives, with a focus on students taking charge of their own development and learning.

A more recent youth-oriented approach to service is exemplified by **Need in Deed**, a small nonprofit which partners with local schools in Philadelphia to become engaged in their communities. A school's participation is voluntary, largely determined by its teachers. Under teacher guidance and with Need in Deed's support, students identify and implement a community service project, conduct research on the issues they are addressing, and – armed with their knowledge – implement the project. Their involvement in

the community may include a number of strategies, including service, advocacy, education, and community organizing.

While 4-H and Need in Deed are quite different, their approaches to service possess many commonalities. They focus on youth, both as recipients and providers of services. They have young people take a leadership role in selecting and implementing community projects and initiatives. They encourage participants to think independently, collaboratively and critically in identifying and addressing individual and community challenges. Finally, they stress community engagement as critical to a positive educational experience, healthy youth development, and community well-being.

Rates of Youth Participation in Service

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 placed a direct focus on youth service primarily through educational contexts. Rates of youth participation in service can be grouped into three categories: (1) findings from the US national census, (2) national research studies, and (3) policy reports from service-based organizations.

Based on US census data, only 23% of youth ages 16-24 engaged in annual, formal volunteering (i.e., helping others through organizations) in 2021 (AmeriCorps, n.d.). This percentage remained static over the past decade with 22.5% reporting annual service in 2011. National research studies paint a similar picture with 28% of youth ages 18 – 25 participating in community service in a given month in 2021 (Correia-Harker, Dugan, & Associates, 2021).

Yet, emerging research from service-based organizations along with data collected for this report paint a far different picture. When participation is measured across the wider array of service concepts (e.g., community service, service-learning, civic engagement, advocacy, and volunteering), the numbers increase exponentially.

For Example:

- When US census data included rates of participation in informal helping (i.e., helping others on one's own and outside of formal organizations), the rate increased by 10% among 16-24 year olds to 33.5% (AmeriCorps, n.d.).

- In surveys conducted for this report, a whopping 70% of youth ages 18-25 reported participation in monthly service when it was defined broadly (i.e. service of any kind from everyday acts like mowing a neighbor's lawn to voter registration drives to volunteering to advocating for community change).

To understand this exponential increase in participation, we asked youth 18-25 to identify the types of actions that they believed constituted a form of community service. Results reflected an expansive understanding. Regardless of what scholars and adults may consider "service," youth see it as running the full gamut from informal helping to formal civic engagement. This aligns with data indicating that 62% of Generation Z youth believe that they can contribute to positive change in society (Laughlin, 2020).

Equally as interesting are the pathways that youth take into service experiences, 41% of youth engaged with service via school. Note that this number includes both service-learning and informal service through school channels. Family, friends, and neighbors provided the pathways into service for 19% of youth, while an additional 11% connected to service through faith-based organizations.

Youth in the United States are traditionally defined as birth through age 25. The seeds of service can be planted in early childhood with direct attention paid to youth ages 5-25.

Three Opportunities for Leveraging the Potential of Service

Based on the current state of play, we propose three levers of opportunity to exponentially increase the quality of youth service across the United States now and in the future.

1 WE NEED TO LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND DISRUPT CONVENTIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF WHAT CONSTITUTES SERVICE.

Youth interpretations of service are far more expansive and their levels of engagement are far higher than typically described.

2 YOUTH ARE SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SERVICE.

They are looking for ways to meet new people, make friends, build connections, and make a difference in their community. They are ready to lead and be heard across age groups.

3 SMOOTHING PATHWAYS AND ENABLING ACCESS INTO INCREASINGLY MEANINGFUL SERVICE IS ESSENTIAL.

Removing constraints on youth associated with limited time, money, transportation, and adultism increases access to and the meaningfulness of service.

Voices of Youth

"My definition of service is an action that provides support for a community or goal. An example of an action could be a charity drive or spreading awareness of a particular issue."

— **Ethan H.**, *Butler Community College*

"It's incredibly important for communities to come together to participate in opportunities that benefit the greater good. Especially for youth, service is an opportunity to get to know your community better and surround yourself with people who have mutual respect for each other."

— **Michaela C.**, *University of Miami*

"To increase participation in service, much has to be done to ensure that youth are given flexibility in how they can help, as well as providing compensation and assistance financially to students who may not be able to self-fund."

— **Ryan S.**, *University of Delaware*

A New Vision
for Youth-Led, Youth-Driven Service

This report highlights youth's more expansive perceptions of service, its role in society, and its impact. Many of the grounding definitions and models for service generated in the 1990s still serve as the primary lens for scholarship and practice today. This is despite substantial societal transformations and rising generations that view service through more expansive lenses. Note that we are not recommending existing conceptualizations be discarded or that organizations committed to youth service overhaul their existing frameworks and strategies. We do, however, acknowledge that a reinvestment in the scholarship and practice of service is merited.

Consider the possibilities of what a broad definition of service might stimulate for novel research and innovative practice. Rather than contributing to potentially competing or contradictory understandings, we lean into commonalities across service in its varying forms. We propose a new foundational definition that reflects our contemporary context and is as expansive in its framing as youth's vision of service.

The grounding definitions and models for service generated in the 1990s still resonate today across a variety of sectors and provide important frameworks and strategies for engaging in service. This report builds off of the formative definitions and highlights youth's more expansive perceptions of service, its role in society, and its impact. Integrating existing approaches to service with a more expansive youth-centered perspective sparks increased possibilities.

We propose a new definition that reflects our contemporary context and is as expansive in its framing as youth's vision of service. Our definition is framed through three central questions: What? How? Why?

What? Act(s) intended to benefit people and/or communities
How? By enhancing connections and relationships
Why? To address issues and strengthen communities

The metaphor of a tree can be used to illustrate the What - How - Why definition of service. Just like a tree grows over time, an individual's engagement with service does as well. The seeds of service exist all around us in our communities waiting to be watered. Christopher D. (University of Portland) reflected that "Many people feel their actions don't make a difference. We have to remind people that small actions add up. Plant the seed and it can grow."

Importantly, our capacity for service may expand as we age, but age does not dictate the scope or impact of our service. Instead, as we grow, our lives become more expansive, as do the ways that we engage in service. Growth reflects a maturing of our understandings of the complex issues being addressed and deepening relationships between and among those with whom we serve. As Diego R. (Norfolk State University) explains: "No matter your age, there are things you can do to contribute. At any point in the tree's development, you can hold the watering can."

What may start as a singular act around a singular issue may grow into multiple acts around many issues. Some may start with service through advocacy while others start with volunteering. Some may spend the majority of their lives growing their forms of civic engagement until their tree is full and lush. Others may branch out into multiple forms of service around multiple issues that bear fruit at different times in their lives.

This powerful metaphor highlights how the pathways into service are often stewarded by peers, adults, family, and organizations while maintaining youth's agency to be self-directed and self-tending in their service experiences.

We propose that this new definition must center and amplify the importance of youth voices. Thus, we also propose a framework for youth-led, youth-driven service co-created by youth editors of this document and vetted with a broad cross-section of youth from across the United States through focus groups, listening sessions, and surveys.

Youth-Led, Youth-Driven Service

Youth-led, youth-driven service acknowledges and centers the powerful role of youth in influencing civic and community life.

Each new generation experiences the world differently. Elevating their unique perspectives and energy are opportunities to catalyze change. Young leaders actively shape the trajectory of service initiatives, generating new and innovative solutions now and in the future. This creates greater youth agency and autonomy while delivering the promise of a more equitable future. Youth-led, youth-driven service cultivates:

1. **a greater sense of agency, purpose, and interconnectedness,**
2. **valuable and transferable life and professional skills,**
3. **the opportunity for increased intergenerational collaboration,**
4. **an understanding of the reciprocal, generative value of working with others to improve civic and community life,**
5. **opportunities, motivation, dedication, and skills to engage in and lead service across a person's life, and**
6. **collective interest and investment in community well-being.**

Our approach to service and youth-led, youth-driven service is grounded in the following values:

1 Curiosity

(for example: imagination; learning; liberation)

2 Empathy

(for example: humility; perspective-sharing; vulnerability)

3 Reciprocity

(for example: equity; inclusivity; mutuality)

4 Sustainability

(for example: accountability; agency; adaptability)

5 Impact

(for example: action-oriented; empowerment; root-cause focused)

Voices of Youth

"Service fosters empathy, strengthens communities, and cultivates connections. By engaging young people in service we can cultivate a culture of compassion and responsibility and empower the next generation to create positive change."

—Valerie M., *Cal Poly San Luis Obispo*

Voices of Youth

"Through my nonprofit, Her Rising Initiative, we organized a conference for young girls to access workshops in fields like engineering, computer science, law, and more while also creating fun sessions for them to build interpersonal skills. These conferences have been my favorite things to plan and host. It impacted me by showing the ways I could use my platform (despite how small) to encourage so many little girls. It built my leadership, public speaking, and coordinating skills."

— **Cherie A.**, *Her Rising Initiative*

Design
Considerations

We propose a series of actionable design considerations that provide a roadmap and tool for creating, delivering, engaging, and evaluating youth-led, youth-driven service experiences. These experiences may range from everyday acts of service to systemic change efforts and can be implemented entirely by youth or through partnership with adults.

Although the design considerations are not exhaustive – and not every element will apply to every context – they increase our ability to deliver experiences that are accessible, meaningful, and reciprocal.

1

Design Focus 1:

Youth-Led, Youth-Driven

Positioning of Young People: To what extent are young people positioned to co-create, design, deliver, and lead community service experiences?

Aligning Development & Opportunity: How are a young person's age and developmental stage aligned with a service opportunity's design and intended impacts? How are our youngest youth invited into service and recognized for their potential for deep influence? How does alignment increase the well-being of everyone involved in a service opportunity?

Creating a Culture of Service: To what extent are people motivated to engage in service? How do youth identify service happening within their communities? In what ways does seeing examples of service inspire people to pursue their own service journeys?

2

Design Focus 2:

Access

Resourcing: What people or resources can youth access to get help in implementing their ideas?

Engagement Level (Episodic, Regular, Sustained): What is the impact of time and effort relative to the capacity needed to engage in the service experience?

Relevance and Relatability of Service Opportunities: How might the design and delivery of a service experience increase and/or decrease the ability of a diverse set of participants and stakeholders to participate? In what way does socioeconomic status impact access to service opportunities?

Role of Compensation: What is the role of compensation when designing service experiences? How might unreimbursed expenses impact the ability or desire to participate in service experiences?

3

Design Focus 3:

Quality

Intent of Service Engagement: How might intent and motivation shape the service experience? How might service requirements and/or mandates shape the experience?

Integration of High-Quality Practices: To what extent does the service experience integrate evidence-based practice, lived experiences, and reflection to guide design, delivery, and impact?

Degree of Risk: What types of risk might arise for all those involved (participants, community members) in a service experience and how might that influence the process of designing and delivering the service experience?

4

Design Focus 4:

Reciprocity

Proximity to Issue: How close are those engaged in a service experience to the issues, people, and/or communities? What role does this play in the design, delivery, and impact of the experience?

Community Reciprocity & Engagement: What is the level of community engagement and co-creation in the process of designing and delivering the service experience? What is the level of youth and peer engagement in the process of designing and delivering the service experience?

Beneficial Impact for Participants & Community: To what degree does the design and delivery of the service opportunity demonstrate impact for those involved? How is this communicated?

5

Design Focus 5:

Change Strategy

Addressing Symptom Mitigation & Root Cause

Transformation: What is the relationship of a particular service experience and the degree to which it mitigates immediate harms and/or offers long-term solutions?

Assessment, Reflection, & Improvement of Impact:

How does assessment of impact from service experiences tap into multiple sources of expertise, particularly from youth themselves at multiple levels and times (e.g., community, stakeholders, youth, participants, during and after programs) as well as ways to enhance future efforts?

Voices of Youth

"Helping the community does not need to be a massive undertaking. Enough people helping in the smallest ways can have massive impacts. Without people there cannot be community."
— **Diego R.**, Norfolk State University

Organizations Bringing Design Considerations to Life

by Stephanie Wu
City Year, a member of the AmeriCorps national service network

For 30 years, AmeriCorps members have been embedded in our communities, responding to our country's most immediate needs and supporting local nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations. It is a powerful example of a private-public partnership that leverages a modest federal investment to secure matching support from private, philanthropic, and local sources. Each year, AmeriCorps grants and service members support over 2,000 local organizations nationwide, empowering millions of people to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. AmeriCorps' community impact—in terms of financial resources, people power, and as a force multiplier—is felt nationwide. Research has shown that for every $1 from taxpayers invested in AmeriCorps, there are returns to society of nearly $17 through higher earnings, increased economic output, and other community benefits.

AmeriCorps is more than the federal agency for national service and volunteerism. It is a larger ecosystem that includes: governor-led state service commissions; local and national nonprofits; schools; government agencies; faith-based, community, and volunteer organizations; the private sector; and philanthropy. Within this system, young people engaged in high-quality service opportunities develop necessary skills for their college and career pathways. There is a need to expand the number of youth service experiences through AmeriCorps-funded opportunities including positions that provide a stipend through AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC, as well as programs

AmeriCorps

Since 2020, AmeriCorps assisted over 20 million people in disaster areas, recruited or coordinated nearly 940,000 volunteers, served 6.1 million meals, staffed emergency shelters and donation centers, repaired homes, protected more than 1.6 million acres of land through firefighting and fire management, and more.

AmeriCorps provides employment services, benefits counseling, transportation, and other support to 245,000 veterans and military families each year. Approximately 15,000 veterans serve in AmeriCorps, applying the skills they learned in the military to the home front.

Approximately 65,000 AmeriCorps members serve in 12,000 K-12 schools across the country, providing cost-effective, high-impact services to ensure all students are ready for college, careers, and full participation in civic life.

In communities across the country - urban and rural - AmeriCorps members of all demographics provide on-the-ground support to 36,000 schools, homeless shelters, health centers, food banks, youth organizations, veterans' facilities, and other nonprofit and faith-based groups.

Organizations Bringing Design Considerations to Life (continued)

such as the Volunteer Generation Fund which provide funding for youth service and volunteer engagement training for organizations. Service enriches our communities and is a vehicle to nurture positive, productive connections and relationships. Investing in more service opportunities for youth will strengthen a pathway of service into adulthood. A continuum of service from youth, adolescence, emerging adulthood will have a systems effect as private and public sector employers, such as the already 600 "Employers of National Service," recognize the valuable outlooks and skills of service participants.

As AmeriCorps celebrates its 30th anniversary, there is a growing understanding that its grant-making and programming must evolve. Voices for National Service created an "AmeriCorps Modernization Agenda" informed by on-the-ground user experiences. This agenda promotes the expansion of service and reduces barriers to service including enhancing the AmeriCorps benefits, making grantmaking more equitable, improving utilization of federal funds, reducing financial risks for nonprofits to operate AmeriCorps grants, and eliminating burdensome federal policies. In addition to these reforms, organizations including America's Service Commission and the Coalition for Service-Learning continue to advocate for the expansion of volunteer engagement funding through the Volunteer Generation Fund and restoration of federal service-learning resources.

Youth Bringing Design Considerations to Life

by Sky Harper
Drexel University, Cobell Scholar

On the reservation, many families like mine live without running water, traveling over dirt roads with barrels to haul clean water. With the nearest health clinic 45 minutes away, the lack of water and other disparities create unsafe living standards. The summer before college, I went to my local government to demand action. I knew there were funds allocated to address these conditions, but for years there had been no progress. When I spoke with officials, I was quickly dismissed for my age and inexperience.

Though I wasn't initially perceived as a leader, I was not discouraged. I hosted community meetings to discuss how to break the pattern of inaction and asked for support at the next local meeting. I drafted a petition and several resolutions, collecting 143 signatures. At the meeting, I presented our work, and a resolution was approved to extend water lines to remote homes. This experience gave me my voice and demonstrated the impact anyone can have regardless of age.

Since starting my undergraduate journey, I have continued to serve as a changemaker. I have founded the first Indigenous student-serving organization at my institution, played a role in establishing a university-wide Land Acknowledgment, and have represented my people and community in rooms where we haven't always been present.

These experiences have laid the foundation for my future career, opening my eyes to public service. My goal is to conduct research in low-resource

Indigenous communities to identify factors that lead to healthcare disparities, resulting in disease prevalence in Indigenous populations at a higher rate than other social groups, such as access to healthcare, environmental exposure, and genetic predisposition. I can use science to inform policy and communicate discoveries to the public sector for resource allocation and clinical practice development.

Although still a youth, I now mentor other students – passing the knowledge I have garnered and sharing the networks I have built. Together we can amplify our voices and couple our energies to make positive change for all.

Recommendations
and The Path Forward

As inheritors of the future, young people will be in a position of determining the world in which we live. Through a reinvigorated focus on youth-led, youth-driven service, we can strengthen young people and communities. The following recommendations represent just a few of the actions we can take to advance youth-led, youth-driven service.

We hope you will join us on this journey and consider the ways that you can make a difference — both today and tomorrow — through your spheres of influence.

1 Amplify the Voices of Youth and Let Them Lead

Establish opportunities for youth leadership on boards, in committees, and with community projects across organizations.

Break through the adult-curated, adult-driven stories about youth by supporting youth in learning how to tell their story and creating youth-led media spaces.

Develop public recognition opportunities for young people engaged in service in your schools and communities.

2 Ease On-Ramps and Pathways Into Service

Fund youth-led, youth-driven service, including philanthropic support to youth directly, with attention to investing in youth under age 18.

Reduce barriers to service created by policies or laws (e.g., fingerprinting, required government IDs, and age minimums to engage in some service experiences).

Offer compensation and/or transportation stipends for youth engaged in service to allow for increased access to opportunities.

3 Engage with the Design Considerations to Maximize the Meaningfulness of Service

Distribute worksheets and playbooks that translate design considerations for different age groups and contexts to empower youth-led, youth-driven service.

Develop toolkits for teachers to include service in their curricula that align with educational standards and enhance learning.

Use the design considerations to position service as the connective tissue between academic, social, and community development journeys for youth.

4 Provide Training for Youth and Adults Most Proximate to Youth

Establish a hub that compiles resources for young people who want to integrate service into their organizations (e.g., how can you register a nonprofit? Where do you find sponsors? How to file yearly tax documents?)

Emphasize career opportunities and pathways into service by explicitly incorporating career exploration conversations into their mentoring plans.

Create professional development opportunities to explore ways to integrate service into existing programs through practice and pedagogy.

5 Reshape Scholarship on Service to Address Contemporary Realities

Support youth participatory action research (YPAR) to make sure youth voices are involved in the research process.

Create stronger connections between research and practice as well as learning opportunities for researchers to integrate inclusive voices from community stakeholders in their scholarship.

Expand the knowledge-base and use of multiple forms of measurement (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) to explore the impact of service on community, employers, and constituents.

OLUNTEE
OLUNTEE
TEER

References

AmeriCorps. (n.d.) *Volunteering and Civic Life in America*. Retrieved from https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/volunteering-civic-life/demographics.

Astin, A.W. & Sax, L.J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39(3), 251-263.

Ballard, P. J., Hoyt, L. T., & Pachucki, M. C. (2019). Impacts of adolescent and young adult civic engagement on health and socioeconomic status in adulthood. *Child Development*, 90(4), 1138-1154.

Celio, C. I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 34(2), 164-181.

Compare, C., & Albanesi, C. (2023). Belief, attitude and critical understanding. A systematic review of social justice in Service-Learning experiences. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology,* 33(2), 332-355.

Correia-HarkerDugan, J. P., & Associates. (2021). Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership 2021: Institutional Reports. National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs.

Ducharme, J. (2023, May 30). Volunteering may boost kids' well-being, study says. *Time*. Retrieved from https://time.com/6283458/volunteering-good-for-kids-health/.

Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2010). Influences on college students' capacities for socially responsible leadership. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51, 525-549.

Jacoby, B. (2015). *Service-learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned*. Wiley.

Kahne, J.E. & Sporte, S.E. (2008). Developing citizens: The impact of civic learning opportunities on students' commitment to civic participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 738-766. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831208316951

Lanza, K., Hunt, E.T., Mantey, D.S. (2023). Volunteering, health, and well-being of children and adolescents in the United States. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(5), 1-4. https://doi.org/doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.15980

Laughlin, N. (2020). *Gen Z's Worldview After 2020*. Retrieved from https://pro.morningconsult.com/trackers/gen-z-worldview-tracker.

Martini, M., Rollero, C., Rizzo, M., Di Carlo, S., De Piccoli, N., & Fedi, A. (2023). Educating youth to civic engagement for social justice: Evaluation of a secondary school project. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(650), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13080650

McLellan, J.A. & Youniss, J. (2003). Two systems of youth service: Determinants of voluntary and required youth community service. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32(1), 47-58. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021032407300

Michelsen, E., Zaff, J.F., & Hair, E.C. (2002). *Civic Engagement Programs and Youth Development: A Synthesis. Child Trends*. Retrieved from https://search.issuelab.org/resource/civic-engagement-programs-and-youth-development-a-synthesis.html.

Mitchell, T. D. (2007). Critical service-learning as social justice education: A case study of the citizen scholars program. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 40(2), 101-112.

O'Connor, M., Sanson, A., Hawkins, M.T., Letcher, P., Toumbourou, J.W., Smart, D., Vassallo, S., & Olsson, C.A. (2011). Predictors of positive development in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 40, 860-874. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9593-7

Points of Light in partnership with Data Shine. (2022, January). *Civic Engagement & The Civic Circle*. Retrieved from https://www.pointsoflight.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Civic-Engagement-Civic-Circle-Literature-Review_FINAL.pdf.

Raskoff, S.A. & Sundeen, R.A. (1999). Community service programs in high schools. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 62(4), 73. https://doi.org/10.2307/1192268

Schmidt, J.A., Shumow, L. & Kackar, H. (2007). Adolescents' participation in service activities and its impact on academic, behavioral, and civic outcomes. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 36, 127-140. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9119-5

The Power of Volunteer Advocacy. (2021, January 15). Independent Sector. Retrieved from https://independentsector.org/blog/the-power-of-volunteer-advocacy/.

Value of Volunteer Time. (2023, April 19). *Independent Sector*. Retrieved from https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/.

Wilson, J. (2000). Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 215-240. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.215

Wray-Lake, L., Shubert, J., Lin, L., & Starr, L.R. (2019). Examining associations between civic engagement and depressive symptoms from adolescence to young adulthood in a national U.S. sample. *Applied Developmental Science*, 23(2), 119-131. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1326825

Yates, M. & Youniss, J. (1996). A developmental perspective on community service in adolescence. *Social Development* 5(1), 85-111. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.1996.tb00073.x

Appendix: Research and Methods

Surveys

In February, 2024, data were collected via a national sample of 5 cohorts of participants to understand the rates of engagement with and perceptions of community service. The survey also sought to understand the benefits of, barriers to, and resources for youth interested in engaging in community service.

- 750 young people shared their insights on service and volunteerism across three surveys of youth ages 18-25.
- 250 adults ages 26-35 surveyed about what they learned through their own youth service journeys in a survey.
- 500+ parents of children ages 5-18 surveyed about their own engagement with and understanding of service as well as the engagement of their children. Parents reflected on the importance of their own experiences with service and why they hoped for their children to engage in the community as well.
- 250 educators surveyed to understand the ways in which service is used in an educational setting and the resources needed to further equip and enable youth-led, youth-directed service in schools.

Focus groups

Over a series of five 90-minute focus groups in early 2024, 35 young people aged 18-25 shared their experiences with service and provided feedback on the emerging definition, model, and design framework for this report. Participants were recruited from 14 colleges and universities across the United States. Participating campuses were inclusive of community colleges, HBCUs, public, and private institutions. Additional participants were recruited from a network of youth-led and youth-serving organizations from across the United States.

1. Sharing personal definitions of service;
2. Reacting to and providing feedback on the new concepts of youth-led, youth-driven service presented in this report;
3. Reflecting on lessons learned through a meaningful service experience; and
4. Articulating the value of service for young people today.

Voices of Youth

"I went into service straight out of high school and I have been with the organization as a volunteer ever since (three years now). It has provided me with more connections (career-wise and personal-wise) than I would have ever imagined and pushed me to grow in ways that I didn't think I was capable of. I was able to find my voice, grow into a leader, and find comfort outside of my comfort zone."

—Val F., *City Year*

Allstate Foundation

CELO
CENTER FOR EXPANDING LEADERSHIP & OPPORTUNITY

LEARN MORE AT:
expandingleadership.org
allstatefoundation.org