

Bridging the Gap – Involving Younger Generations in Service

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Community and purpose have been found to be keys to a longer life. Service provides the opportunity for both – a chance to come together for a purpose. In 2017, the United States experienced record highs for the total number of volunteer hours and charitable dollars given to



organizations. However, that statistic is deceiving as fewer Americans are participating in volunteering. Furthermore, rural areas have suffered the greatest decline in volunteerism. One trend that is also clear is the age of volunteers. The review of a variety of research sources shows that Generation X (1965-1981) is participating in volunteerism at a higher rate than other generations, followed by Baby Boomers (1946-1964).

How can we help volunteers develop a successful service project? And how do we start engaging younger generations in programming?

Keys to a QUALITY Service Project

The service-learning cycle was developed to define the keys to a quality service project. This breaks a project down into three parts: the preservice phase, the service phase and the post-service phase.

First, we must plan our project. This occurs during the pre-service phase.

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This phase involves:

- Why – Identify the Need
- Who – Develop Ownership
- What – Establish Objectives
- When - Plan and Prepare
- Where - Identify the Service Environment

Next, we implement the service project. This is identified as the service phase. This involves:

- Conduct meaningful service.
- Observe the impact of the service.

Finally, the project enters the post-service phase. This includes:

- Evaluate and document the experience.
- Celebrate success!

Keys to Engaging Gen Xers, Millennials and Gen Zers in Service

As we have learned, each generation is different.

To engage Gen Xers, we must:

1. **Respect Their Family Responsibilities** – Nearly half of this generation are still supporting adult children, while another 21% are helping parents. Nearly one out of six Gen Xers (15%) are sandwiched between older and younger family members who need help.
2. **Value Work-Life Balance** – Gen Xers are typically described as being resourceful, independent and keen on work-life balance.
3. **Expert DIYers** – This generation is known for being left alone while guardians were away at work during their childhood. Gen Xers love DIY projects.

Millennials are more interested in opportunities that emphasize:

1. **Passion for Learning** – This generation exhibits deep curiosity about the world and displays the



desire to further develop skills and knowledge that can help them within their professional lives. Millennials understand the importance of setting and achieving goals.

2. **Participating in Meaningful Service** – In their work, Millennials value meaningful motivation. They may be characterized as being motivated by creative work, sharing their gifts and making an impact on others and within their communities.

Finally, the keys to engaging Gen Z is providing opportunities related to:

1. **Micro-Volunteering** – Gen Zers need flexible opportunities to serve. Service needs to fit their schedules. Gen Z is more likely to have volunteered than any other age group. Nearly half of Gen Z has volunteered, and almost 25% say they are currently serving.
2. **Engagement with Technology** – As digital natives, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are among teens' favorite online destinations. Gen Zers may want to participate in digital service opportunities.

Ultimately, service is an important component of social capital that assures opportunities remain available for all. When communities come together, they really have the capacity for change.

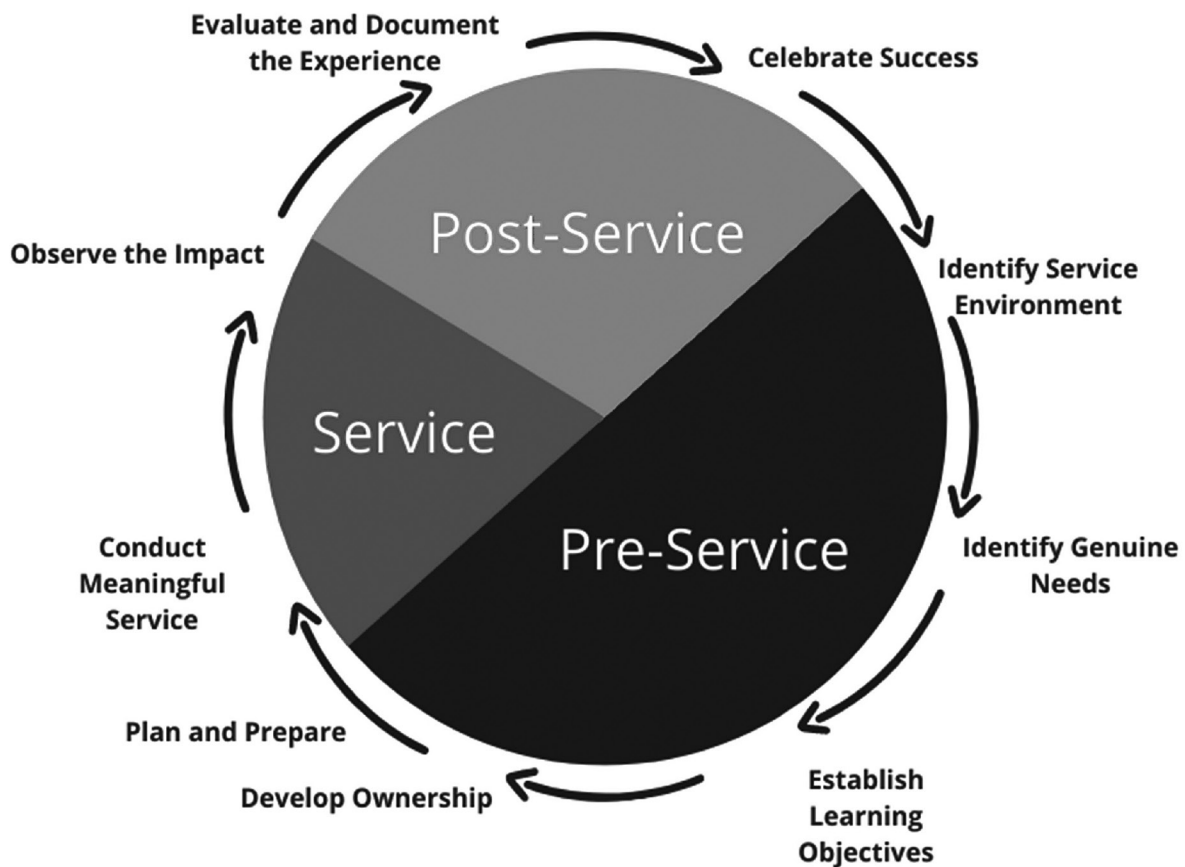
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Integrating Youth Voice in Service-Learning



Service Learning Cycle adapted from Utah State University Extension.