



10 Steps Towards Performing a Successful Community Service Project

A Planning Guide for 4-H Club Leaders

Community service is an important function of all 4-H clubs. A community service project can take many forms. The form it takes in your club depends on many factors. Whatever is decided, it benefits the community as well as your 4-H members. Sometimes adults are reluctant to take on community service projects with youth; they worry the members will not be able to get the job done and the bulk of the work will fall on them. It doesn't have to be that way. With some pre-planning and structured guidance from 4-H leaders, youth and adults working in partnership can accomplish more than we imagine.

Following are some hints in making your community service project both successful and fun:

1. ASSESS

Determine what is *needed* in your community/county.

- Ask club members and families.
- Ask other community groups. Develop partnerships with those who have common goals. By collaborating, you won't have to do the project alone!
- Talk with community officials.
- Find out what types of service projects have and have not been done in the recent past.
- Ask your county 4-H staff.

2. BRAINSTORM

Determine what types of activities your members have *interest in and abilities* to do.

- Consider the size of your club and ages of members.
- Consider the skills possessed by club members and their families.
- Determine how much time your club would like to devote to community service activities. (Would members rather do one, ongoing community service project that may last several months or more—or several short-term activities?)
- You may wish to start small and build on small successes.

Keep a list of the activities that have been suggested.



3. CHOOSE

Ask your club to discuss the possibilities and rank them in order of importance and interest, based on what was considered in steps #1 and #2. Reach consensus or use a vote by majority rule to determine the activity your club will do. If this isn't practical (especially if your club is large), consider forming a committee to develop priorities. Then the club can simply accept or vote on the committee's recommendations.

4. PLAN

After your club has decided what community service project to focus on first, **develop a plan**. Your members will learn organizational skills in developing such a plan. A plan doesn't have to be overly detailed and formal, but it should be specific and include the following:

- Identify exactly what will be done. Determine both the overall goal and the specific tasks involved. Remember the time frame for the project: dates/times for beginning, completion.
- Obtain necessary permission in advance.
- Develop a financial budget for the project, if appropriate. Obtain funding needed for the project. If not available from club funds, seek a community sponsor. Your county 4-H staff may know of sources of funding for such projects, especially if you plan far enough in advance. A decision to use club funds must be voted on by the club membership.
- Obtain needed equipment or supplies.
- Determine how many people will be needed. What is the minimum required to do the job correctly, and what is the optimum number? Be sure you have at least the minimum before proceeding!
- Ask members to volunteer for specific duties and get a commitment from them. Consider teaming up less experienced members with more experienced workers to maximize the learning experience.
- Encourage members to report progress on their assigned duties.
- Make safety a priority!

5. ENGAGE

Share your service project plans with your county 4-H staff. Your county 4-H staff can help you inform local media outlets. They can also inform public officials (ex. Town Mayor, County Freeholders) about your project and invite them to your project site, if appropriate. By engaging the media and public officials you can publicize the efforts of your club and the 4-H program.

6. IMPLEMENT

Carry out the project as planned.

7. RECORD

Record your club's efforts with photos, videotape, or written notes.



8. EVALUATE

As you work on this project, monitor the activities taking place and make adjustments as needed. Especially when the project has been completed, allow time for your club to discuss the successes and shortcomings of the project and ideas for improvement. This reinforces the **learning experience!** Refer to *Learn by Doing the 4-H Way* for tips in using the do-reflect-apply experiential learning process.

9. SUMMARIZE

Develop a summary report of your club's experience when the project has been completed. Share it with mass media representatives and your county 4-H staff. A scrapbook is also a nice way to present the project's success. Include a written description, photos, news clippings, etc. Such activities might be assigned to the club reporter, secretary, chair of the project, or other club member.

10. CELEBRATE

Feel good about your club's contribution to the community and members' positive learning experience!

Remember that planning, conducting, and evaluating a community service project (or any other 4-H activity) is a great opportunity for 4-H members to **learn by DOING**. Therefore, **DO** encourage members to get involved in all phases of the project, including planning. **DON'T** do it all for them.

Remember that 4-H'ers learn from their mistakes as well as their successes.

The role of a club leader and other adults working with the club is to guide members in the right direction and provide needed support and encouragement.

Ideas for Community Service Projects

MAKE IT FUN!

The following is a sampling of ideas for community service projects, compiled from a variety of sources, that your club might consider doing.

- Assist local fund drives such as the American Cancer Society, Heart Association, Association of Retarded Citizens, March of Dimes, etc.
- Adopt a grandparent.
- Sponsor a child to attend summer camp.
- Donate dog/cat food to a local animal shelter.
- Donate books to a library, or magazines to group homes.
- Collect food/clothing for families.
- Entertain nursing home patients.
- Clean a park or roadside.



- Build/donate benches for a park.
- Prepare holiday food baskets for shut-ins.
- Paint or repair playground equipment.
- Plant trees/flowers in vacant lots.
- Donate bird seed to a park.
- Serve a highway “coffee break” on holiday weekends.
- Provide pet therapy for patients at hospitals or nursing homes.

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For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

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