

# Building Environmental Youth Leadership

## A High-School Service-learning Curriculum



### TOPIC:

Background research

### OBJECTIVES:

- Students will define information requisite to planning their service project.
- Students will practice basic research and presentation skills.

### LENGTH:

1 to 3 hours

### ENVIRONMENT:

Indoors with locations for small group discussions. Need access to a library and/or internet.

### MATERIALS:

- Dry-erase, blackboard, overhead or other means of visibly recording student discussion.
- Computer(s) with internet access.
- Access to library materials.

## Refining the Details

### Background:

Service projects are often identified through a mix of participants' personal interests and basic details of an environmental management problem. However, team members need to develop a deeper understanding of the problem in order to effectively determine a project's solvability, imagine a solution and design an action plan. This activity serves to focus research efforts of the group. Students begin by brainstorming information that they need to know about the problem. In teams, they search for these details, and present their findings to the larger group. The group can use this information to make a final project decision.

### Activity Outline:

#### *Beforehand:*

It is imperative to the success of this activity that students have identified one or more service projects beforehand. Therefore, they should complete the *Adventure Observation Trip*, *Reading the Remedial Action Plan*, *Expert Advice* or comparable activities prior to tackling this project.

Success in this activity also depends on students' familiarity with the content and context of their problem. For instance, students comparing three possible wetland revegetation projects will have an easier time brainstorming information needed if they already hold a basic understanding of the subject. For students with little background, leaders should identify and present foundational information prior to this activity. This might take the form of guided internet research, reading assignments, expert speakers, etc. In such cases, leaders should also spend more time planning guided questions to facilitate a successful brainstorming session.

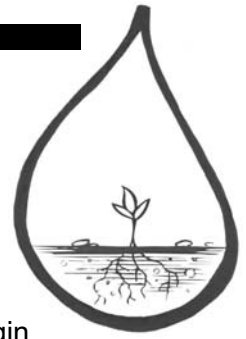
Finally, the meeting room should be set in an arrangement conducive to group discussion and sharing (i.e., seats in a circle, semi-circle or square, etc.) with a dry-erase, chalkboard or other means of visibly recording student comments in a prominent location.

#### *Storming the Brain:*

Students gather for instructions. Briefly introduce the objective of the activity. The group has selected one or more potential service-learning projects. But what do they really know about the work needed to complete these tasks? The group needs to determine what it will take to complete each project, and whether it is feasible under budget and time constraints. Explain that the team will start by brainstorming information about each project that needs to be gathered. They will then work in small groups to research and present the information to the group.

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Write all potential projects on the board. Then, ask students to begin brainstorming needed information. It may be helpful to begin by soliciting general information that is not project specific. For instance, it may be helpful to know average daily temperatures and frost-free dates to help in selecting feasible dates for the project. The group should also pay attention to grouping their information requests. Are some needs subordinate to others, requiring certain information be gathered before others? Are some needs likely to be found in similar areas? This will help the team divvy the search among small groups.

Leaders should also urge the group through constructive follow-up questions to uncover finer details. If students suggest a need to define the cost of a wetland revegetation project, follow by asking what factors they need to include in defining the cost or how they can find that information? If students ask how much time it will take to plant 300 trees on an eroding hillside, follow by asking how they can devise a good estimate.

### *Seeking the Details:*

Once the students have brainstormed and grouped information needed, the team splits into small groups, selects pieces to pursue, and begins research. This part of the activity will comprise the largest part of the project. However, groups should be constrained to a predetermined research period, such as 1 or 2 hours.

Leaders can augment the effectiveness of students' research during the work period by checking-in periodically to assess progress and offer suggestions. This will help groups overcome roadblocks in finding information, and generate further questions that extend their efforts.

### *Presentation and Choice:*

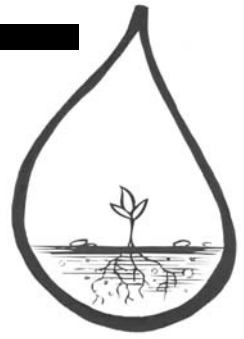
After a predetermined research period, students gather for presentations. These can be short and informal. However, it will be useful to record information as it is presented, ideally on the same record where questions were originally posted. Students should be given a few moments after each presentation to question the group about the details of their information. Again, this may help to draw out fine points.

Once all groups have presented, ask students to identify any information gaps, questions that remain to be answered. Task these out to willing groups. Then discuss whether the information presented provides enough clarity to comfortably choose a service project. Should a decision be put off until remaining questions are answered? Should a choice be made pending final answers? If the group must decide between more than one project, open the decision to a group vote. For choice between 3 or more

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projects, allow students to vote for their top two choices. In any case, the project with the most votes wins.