

Service as a Strategy:

# LET'S MOVE LET'S LEARN

a service blueprint

IMPACT AREA:  
education & youth,  
health

## Let's Move, Let's Learn

is a teaching and learning service strategy in which the mayor's office helps children learn healthy eating and exercise behaviors through health-focused service-learning activities.



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## LET'S MOVE, LET'S LEARN

Let's Move, Let's Learn is a teaching and learning service strategy in which the mayor's office helps children learn healthy eating and exercise behaviors through health-focused service-learning activities.

ultimately helping these youth adopt long-term behaviors that can counter childhood obesity.

“Service-learning” is an approach that integrates meaningful service to the community with intentional learning. Let's Move, Let's Learn teaches youth about healthy lifestyle choices while empowering them to lead service projects with their peers, putting young people at the forefront of encouraging healthy eating habits and active lifestyles. By supporting youth to participate in this initiative, mayors channel the energy of young people into activities that can help increase the amount of time spent exercising or the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed while teaching the benefits of healthy lifestyles –

## BACKGROUND

Childhood obesity is an epidemic affecting communities nationwide as the number of overweight and obese children has tripled in the last three decades. Today, one in three children in America are overweight or obese; millions will face chronic obesity-related health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and asthma. Obesity is estimated to cause more than 100,000 deaths per year in the United States.

These health problems will have a significant impact on local government and the community at-large, straining health and emergency services and increasing the number of people who are disabled and dependent on public assistance. For obese children, the chance of becoming an obese adult is at least twice as high as the risk for non-obese children<sup>1</sup> and each year, obese adults incur an estimated \$1,429<sup>2</sup> more in medical expenses than their non-obese peers.

<sup>1</sup> Serdula, MK, Ivery, D, Coates, RJ, Freedman, DS, Williamson, DF, and Byers, T. (1993), Do obese children become obese adults? A review of the literature. *Preventative Medicine*, 2: 467-477. <http://1.usa.gov/mR1zx2>

<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control Vital Signs Report: State-Specific Obesity Prevalence Among Adults - United States. (2009)

**(BACKGROUND CONTINUED)**

Besides the staggering costs obesity places on our health care system, it also hinders children from becoming active and participating members of society. For example, overweight and obese children are often targets of early and systematic social discrimination.<sup>3</sup> The psychological stress of social stigmatization can cause low self-esteem that hinders academic and social functioning, and persists into adulthood.

Mayors, as elected leaders, can help address the obesity crisis locally. Using their bully pulpit to raise the visibility of health and nutrition in their communities and leveraging interest generated by the White House's Let's Move! campaign, mayors can mobilize educators and youth-serving organizations to promote Let's Move, Let's Learn projects designed to measurably improve youth's knowledge of healthy eating and exercise habits. By mixing classroom and experiential learning with a challenge to develop community projects aimed at addressing childhood obesity, mayors engage those of primary concern – young people themselves – in leading the campaign to change unhealthy patterns of behavior and help fight childhood obesity over the long-term.

## REQUIRED ELEMENTS

**1** Mayor's office commits to raising the visibility of health and childhood obesity in the community, determines the target demographic youth for the initiative (e.g., elementary school students), and disseminates information about Let's Move, Let's Learn to create community interest.

**2** Mayor's office engages schools or youth-serving organizations to serve as partners and create a plan for developing and implementing the service-learning initiative. As part of this, the mayor's office designates a lead partner to direct adult volunteer and partner coordination, curriculum development, and student engagement.

## (REQUIRED ELEMENTS CONTINUED)

**3** The lead partner develops the curriculum for the program using the “IPARD/C” model (investigation, preparation and planning, action, reflection, demonstration and celebration), a tested method for engaging students in service learning. The curriculum should clearly spell out the teaching, learning, and service goals of the initiative. Youth Service America recommends that partners plan for the entire program to take about 40 cumulative hours spread across a semester.

**4** To advance the service component of the program, adults work with youth to develop and implement service projects related to obesity and healthy lifestyles. Through their projects, youth will try to increase the number of hours children spend exercising each week or the amount of fruits and vegetables they consume in their daily diet.

**5** Mayor’s office works with partners to host a Let’s Move, Let’s Learn fair (similar in structure to a science fair) to help students publicize their projects and report their results to the community, as well as recognize partners and volunteers.

**6** Mayor’s office tracks and reports impact metrics for the initiative. Required metrics include:

- Number of students participating in the program
- Participating youths’ understanding of healthy food and lifestyles, assessed via survey
- Number of active living and healthy eating service-learning projects completed
- Number of young people served by the projects
- Number of hours of exercise generated by each project
- Reported increase in amount of fruits and vegetables consumed by young people targeted by each project

Depending on the type and duration of the service-learning projects, it also may be appropriate to track:

- Participating youths’ change in BMI or body fat percentage after completing service-learning projects that are a semester or longer
- Number of adults serving as volunteers in developing or executing service-learning projects



## EXECUTING LET'S MOVE, LET'S LEARN

### ENGAGING PARTNERS

Conduct an initial orientation meeting for prospective partners, which include local schools and youth-serving community organizations. The orientation meeting is an opportunity for mayors to:

- Introduce prospective partners to the service and learning goals of the initiative;
- Outline and clarify to participants the required elements of the program;
- Explain impact metrics;
- Create a plan for partners to lead participating students in developing the service-learning content and integrate the initiative into relevant coursework or after-school programming that builds youth knowledge about nutrition, fitness, and healthy lifestyles;
- Encourage partners to identify adult volunteers to assist the youth in developing their projects (volunteers may be teachers, community volunteers, older students, or staff in youth programs); and
- Introduce prospective partners to resources for projects such as grants from Youth Service America<sup>4</sup> or the Corporation for National and Community Service, if available.

### DESIGNING THE PROGRAM

Through Let's Move, Let's Learn, students will be supported by schoolteachers, staff at youth-serving organizations, or adult volunteers to accomplish the dual learning and service impact goals of the initiative. These goals are to:

- Develop service-learning projects that will increase students' knowledge and understanding of healthy lifestyles; and
- Increase exercise or the amount of fruits and/or vegetables young people consume.

The mayor's office works with its partners to design the overall service-learning program to meet the stated goals. In accordance with the National Youth Leadership Council's *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice*,<sup>5</sup> youth should play a central role in planning and executing their service projects. However, adults leading the Let's Move, Let's Learn initiative should determine the broad parameters of the program - including the timeline,

<sup>4</sup> <http://ysa.org/grants>

<sup>5</sup> National Youth Leadership Council's K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice (2008)  
<http://bit.ly/ss83k8>

## (DESIGNING THE PROGRAM CONTINUED)

duration and intensity, overall curriculum, and role of outside partnerships – before students are engaged. As recommended by Youth Service America, the most impactful service-learning programs run for at least 40 cumulative hours spread across concentrated blocks of time throughout a semester. (See the Resources section for best practices in service learning.)

Once the timeline and duration are established, the lead partner identifies specific topics on which the curriculum will focus. For example, if it is a school-based program, it will be important to determine what parts of the semester's curriculum the projects will relate to. If it is an after-school program, it can help to designate a specific obesity-related educational topic of interest. To fully integrate service and intentional learning into program design, the teaching and learning component should be robust and planned in advance. For example, instructors should find creative ways to connect the structured lessons with real world experiences (e.g., connecting instruction on the benefits of healthy diets to students helping their peers examine the nutritional value of their daily lunches and make healthier choices). The major components of the curriculum can be found in the next section.

## EXECUTING THE SERVICE-LEARNING CURRICULUM

Although the specific programs may vary from city to city, all Let's Move, Let's Learn curricula and related activities should follow the IPARD/C model<sup>6</sup> – investigation, preparation and planning, action, reflection, and demonstration and celebration – which is generally recognized as an effective method of engaging students in meaningful service learning. As part of the larger program, students should be provided with a deadline for completing their service projects, suggested documentation and presentation formats, and any other locally determined requirements.

### Step 1: Investigation

Students begin by examining childhood obesity in their community to understand why this issue is important. In addition to structured lessons led by adults, students may read news articles, watch media reports, or seek other reputable sources of information to make sure they have an adequate comprehension of childhood obesity in their community.

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<sup>6</sup> Youth Service America's First Responders: Youth addressing childhood obesity through service-learning (2010)  
<http://bit.ly/qO6oH3>

**(EXECUTING THE SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM CONTINUED)**

As an additional component of their research, students should explore examples of what healthy living looks like in their community (e.g., this could include examining the nutritional value of a school lunch or counting the number of students involved in school sports). While they're gathering information, students should be encouraged to reflect on how healthy living is relevant to them as individuals (e.g., how their diet impacts their health or how doing their favorite physical activities improves their health).

**Step 2: Preparation and Planning**

After a thorough investigation period, students start to determine what their service-learning project will be, ideally by working in teams. As part of this, they set short-term goals (e.g., create a walk-to-school-together club) and long-term goals (e.g., the desired changes, over time, in BMI or body fat percentage of walking club participants) that they would like to achieve. They also identify what roles community members and potential partner organizations can play to help them.

Once students have aligned on goals, they are supported by adult project leaders (e.g., teachers, external partners, or adult volunteers) in creating a plan and timeline for implementation – including a plan to monitor progress against stated goals. While beginner projects can be completed in about two weeks, more advanced projects may take several weeks or months.<sup>7</sup> Research has shown that the duration of service-learning projects is positively correlated with achieving the desired teaching and experiential outcomes.<sup>8</sup> As mentioned, projects should be spread across a semester, with the whole program running at least 40 hours to most affect student lifestyle changes, according to Youth Service America.

Examples of youth-led service projects that increase exercise or consumption of healthy food are:

- Starting an after-school exercise club
- Creating a healthy snack station in schools
- Working with community gardens to grow vegetables that children can eat
- Cleaning or repairing a walking or hiking trail, and engaging peers to use it
- Cleaning or repairing an athletic field or play space, and organizing peers to use it
- Organizing a local farmers market
- Starting a school or community garden
- Organizing an intramural sports team or tournament
- Organizing a healthy eating seminar
- Organizing a personal training/fitness seminar

7 Dary, T., Prueter, B., Grinde, J., Grobschmidt, R., Evers, T. (2010) High quality instruction that transforms: A guide to implementing quality academic service-learning. <http://1.usa.gov/p1p9ON>

8 Billig, S. H., Root, S., & Jesse, D. (2005). The relationship between quality indicators of service-learning and student outcomes: Testing professional wisdom. In S. Root, J. Callahan, & S. H. Billig (Eds.), *Advances in service-learning research: Vol. 5. Improving service-learning practice: Research on models to enhance impacts* (pp. 97–115). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.



## (EXECUTING THE SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM CONTINUED)

### Step 3: Action

During this stage students are supported in implementing their projects using the plan and timeline they created. While the individual projects may differ, it is important to establish a timeline for all projects from start to finish to ensure that students complete all stages of the IPARD/C process. Students also document their activities (e.g., by submitting press releases to local elected officials or taking photographs of actions and recording quotes from activity participants).

### Step 4: Reflection

Throughout the investigation, planning, and action phases, students should be reflecting on their progress and how their project relates to them, their community, and their future. Reflection exercises can be completed as a group or individually; either way helps students internalize the information learned during and after their service-learning projects.

After all service projects have concluded, students undertake a more expansive reflection period during which they evaluate their projects against the short- and long-term goals they determined at the outset. Adult project leaders guide students to think objectively about their service projects and examine what went well, what could be improved, and what the broader impact of their service projects are for themselves and their community. (For examples of questions for students to consider, see the Youth Service America First Responders toolkit listed in the Resources section.)

### Step 5: Demonstration and Celebration: Sharing results at a Let's Move, Let's Learn Fair

Projects are presented at a Let's Move, Let's Learn Fair hosted by the mayor's office and local partners. The fair could take place at City Hall, a school, a higher education institution, or a community organization. The fair, similar to a science fair, features displays prepared by the students to show the design of their projects, the ways that the projects increase healthy lifestyles, and the results the students achieved. Parents, other students, and members of the community are invited to view the fair; this helps broaden the potential impact of the initiative by educating additional people.

A local sponsor may provide prizes for the projects that achieve the greatest impact, with awards potentially presented by the mayor. Overall results using the required metrics can be displayed on a chart at the fair, highlighting the number of hours of exercise generated by all projects and the number of fruit and vegetable servings consumed by participants during the projects.

## MEASURING IMPACT

Collecting data and reporting on the impact of each “Let’s Move, Let’s Learn” project is critical. The mayor’s office or its designated partners are tasked with collecting and reporting the following metrics:

- Number of students participating in the program
- Participating youths’ understanding of healthy food and lifestyles, assessed via survey
- Number of active living and healthy eating service-learning projects completed
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## SECURING RESOURCES FOR LET’S MOVE, LET’S LEARN

Let’s Move, Let’s Learn is a compelling fundraising opportunity for mayors’ offices to solicit support from foundations, nonprofits, and corporations with a commitment to the city, youth engagement, healthy eating, or active lifestyles. Additionally, grants may be made available to support service-learning initiatives. For example, Youth Service America provides a micro-grant program that offers funding for both student-led and educator-led projects supporting “healthy kids, healthy eating, and healthy exercise.”

Proposals for prospective funders should describe the opportunity for support and how the funds will be used. The elements of a typical proposal include:

- Description of Let’s Move, Let’s Learn
- Information on how this initiative will positively impact the city and the youth involved (e.g., number of youth reached by the projects, number of hours of exercise completed through the projects, increase in awareness and knowledge of healthy lifestyles)
- The amount of funding requested, proposed breakdown of grant(s), and how those funds will be used
- The metrics that will be collected to assess progress
- Information on Cities of Service (this is especially helpful for national organizations)
- Description of a recognition plan for the donor (this could include logos on t-shirts if your city is creating them, branding on your service website if you have one, a speaking role at the Let’s Move, Let’s Learn Fair, etc.)

## RECOGNIZING AND THANKING VOLUNTEERS

The Let's Move, Let's Learn Fair should serve as the major venue for recognizing and thanking the youth who complete service-learning projects, as well as the adult volunteers who support them. Other options include seeking media coverage, featuring projects on the mayor's website, and providing youth with certificates signed by the mayor.

## OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

### YOUTH SURVEYS TO IDENTIFY ISSUES

With assistance from local leaders, the mayor's office can conduct – or empower young people to design and administer – a survey to inquire about the eating habits and physical routines of their peers at the outset of the service-learning program. Working with youth leaders in the community, cities can then encourage and support youth-led service-learning projects addressing the issues identified in the survey. This data can also serve as a baseline against which to track the progress and impact of the service-learning projects.

### INCORPORATING ADULT VOLUNTEERS

Adult volunteers can play a variety of roles to support students participating in the city's Let's Move, Let's Learn program. It may be most helpful to deploy adults in tasks that students may not be able to do (e.g., driving or chaperoning) or in skilled labor positions (e.g., nurses to collect BMI measurements from students or volunteer physical trainers to lead fitness classes for students).

## SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACTION

Across the nation, youth are taking an active role in the movement for healthier communities. The National Youth Leadership Council, a national organization that promotes service-learning to help redefine the role of youth in society, documents multiple youth-led service-learning projects that target childhood obesity.

### FITNESS AWARENESS THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE<sup>9</sup>

Fifth graders in Oklahoma observed that many of their fellow elementary school students appeared to be out of shape. Working with their physical education teacher, the students anonymously gathered the height and weight of their schoolmates to calculate the average BMI of students at their school. They found that this average BMI was twice that of the state average. The students then devised a fitness challenge that could be replicated by other schools and worked with their local state representative to highlight their recommendations on improving child fitness, which were eventually signed into law.

### COOKING CLUB<sup>10</sup>

Special-needs students in Minnesota worked with other students in their school to explore the skills required to purchase groceries and prepare a healthy, nutritious meal. Together they worked on reading labels and recipes and practiced math skills so they'd be prepared to count their change after grocery shopping. Following the students' joint sessions, they planned their meals, created a grocery list, and bought the necessary items. They then presented their meal at a local senior center's multicultural celebration. Following the project, the students made gains in their reading, math, and communication skills, and showed marked improvements in their ability to develop relationships with other students.

<sup>9</sup> National Youth Leadership Council Resource Library: Project example – Fitness Awareness That Makes a Difference <http://bit.ly/oMxAHm>

<sup>10</sup> National Youth Leadership Council Resource Library: Project example – Cooking Club <http://bit.ly/mZJOir>

## RESOURCES

- Youth Service America (YSA) provides multiple resources to support service-learning projects. One YSA initiative that engages youth as grantees in combating childhood obesity is the UnitedHealth HEROES program, described online at <http://www.ysa.org/HEROES>. YSA also provides a free service learning guide that outlines the IPARD/C model and provides sample reflection questions for students<sup>11</sup> called “First Responders: Youth Addressing Childhood Obesity through Service-Learning,” available online at <http://www.ysa.org/resources>.
- In 2009 the Corporation for National and Community Service released a toolkit to help guide the development of service-learning projects called “K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit, 2009 Updated Edition.” The toolkit can be found online at <http://bit.ly/gkb0Yq>.
- The Corporation for National and Community Service’s Learn and Serve America initiative has created the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse – a comprehensive, online, database of resources for, research on, and examples of service-learning activities available online at <http://www.servicelearning.org/>.
- The National Youth Leadership Council, a leading youth leadership and service-learning organization, provides a number of resources to support the planning and development of service-learning projects including the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, which can be found at <http://bit.ly/nTeF3R>. To view the full cadre of resources, visit [www.nylc.org/resources](http://www.nylc.org/resources).
- Community gardens can be an excellent vehicle for teaching healthy eating habits. The following resources provide more information on starting community gardens:
  - The American Community Gardening Association is a prime resource for community garden advice: [www.communitygarden.org/](http://www.communitygarden.org/).
  - Cooperative Extension System Offices are a national network of experts that give advice and research-based expertise to agriculture producers: <http://1.usa.gov/cBHFPC>.
  - For an example of garden costs in San Francisco, see San Francisco Recreation & Parks’ “Start a Community Garden” webpage: <http://bit.ly/jAR39W>.

<sup>11</sup> Youth Service America First Responders pg. 13-14



## SPECIAL THANKS

We'd like to acknowledge the following organizations:

- The Corporation for National and Community Service for their expertise.
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**Service as a Strategy** is a partnership between ServiceNation and Cities of Service, which equips mayors with high-impact service strategies to address pressing local challenges, funded with generous support from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

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