

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR COMBINING SERVICE AND LEARNING
(Wingspread Conference, 1989)

1. **An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.**

Participants in programs combining services and learning should engage in tasks that they and society recognize as important. These actions should require reaching beyond one's range of previous knowledge or experience. Active participation - not merely being a spectator or visitor - requires accountability for one's actions, involves the right to take risks, and gives participants the opportunity to experience the consequences of those actions for others and for themselves.

2. **An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.**

The service experience alone does not insure that either significant learning or effective service will occur. It is important that programs build in structured opportunities for participants to think about their experience and what they have learned. Through discussion with others and individual reflection on moral questions and relevant issues, participants can develop a better sense of social responsibility, advocacy, and active citizenship. This reflective component allows for personal growth and it is most useful when it is intentional and continuous throughout the experience, and when opportunity for feedback is provided. Ideally, feedback will come from those persons being served, as well as from peers and program leaders.

3. **An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.**

From the outset of the project, participant and service recipients alike must have a clear sense of: (1) what is to be accomplished and (2) what is to be learned. These services and learning goals must be agreed upon through negotiations with all parties, and in the context of the traditions and cultures of the local community. These goals should reflect the creative and imaginative input of those providing the service, as well as those receiving it. Attention to this important factor of mutuality in the service-learning exchange protects the "service" from becoming patronizing charity.

- 4. An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.**

The actual recipient of service, as well as the community groups and constituencies to which they belong, must have their primary role in defining their own service needs. Community service programs, government agencies, and private organizations can also be helpful in defining what service tasks are needed and when and how these tasks should be performed. This collaboration to define needs will insure that service by participants will: (1) not take jobs from the local community, and (2) involve tasks that will otherwise go undone.

- 5. An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.**

Several parties are potentially involved in any service and learning program: participants (students and teachers, volunteers of all ages), community leaders, service supervisors, and sponsoring organizations, as well as those individuals and groups receiving the services. It is important to clarify roles and responsibilities of these parties through a negotiation process as the program is being developed. This negotiation should include identifying and assigning responsibility for the tasks to be done, while acknowledging the values and principles important to all the parties involved.

- 6. An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.**

Because people are often changed by the service and learning experience, effective programs must build in opportunities for continuous feedback about the changing service needs and growing service skills of those involved. Ideally, participation in the service partnership affect personal development in areas such as intellect, ethics, cross-cultural understanding, empathy, leadership, and citizenship. In effective service and learning programs, the relationships between groups and individuals are dynamic and often create dilemmas. Such dilemmas may lead to unintended outcomes. They can require recognizing and dealing with differences.

- 7. An effective program expects genuine, active and sustained organizational commitment.**

In order for a program to be effective, it must have a strong, ongoing commitment from both the sponsoring and

the receiving organizations. Ideally, this commitment will take many forms, including references to both service and learning in the organization's mission statement. Effective programs must receive administrative support, become line items in the organization's budget, be allocated appropriate physical space, equipment, and transportation, and allow for scheduled release time for participants and program leaders. In schools, the most effective service and learning programs are linked to the curriculum and require that the faculty become committed to combining service and learning as a valid part of teaching.

- 8. An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.**

The most effective service and learning programs are sensitive to the importance of training, supervision, and monitoring of progress throughout the program. This is a reciprocal responsibility and requires open communication between those offering and those receiving the service. In partnership, sponsoring and receiving organizations should recognize the value of service through appropriate celebrations, awards, and public acknowledgment of individual and group service. Planned, formalized, and ongoing evaluation of service and learning projects should be part of every program and should involve all participants.

- 9. An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.**

In order to be useful to all parties involved, some service activities require longer participation and/or a greater time commitment than others. The length of the experience and the amount of time required are determined by the service tasks involved and should be negotiated by all the parties. Sometimes a program can do more harm than good if a project is abandoned after too short a time or given too little attention. Where appropriate, a carefully planned succession or combination of participants can provide the continuity of service needed.

- 10. An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.**

A good service and learning program promotes access and removes disincentives and barriers to participation. Those responsible for participation in a program should

make every effort to include and make welcome persons from differing ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, as well as those of varied ages, genders, economic levels, and those with disabilities. Less obvious, but very important, is the need for sensitivity to other barriers, such as lack of transportation, family, work and school responsibilities, concern for personal safety, or uncertainty about one's ability to make a contribution.