

## **Think before you serve**

### Five critical elements of planning thoughtful service

Before you jump in and start planning projects, stop and think. As a new club, you need to ask the tough questions: Is this what members want to do? Does our community need our help in this area? Is this project being motivated by just one person?

If new members find value in the service they do, they are more likely to stay active and serve throughout their lifetime. For community service projects to have value and meaning, they must include five critical elements.

#### *1. Assessment of community needs and members' interests*

Community voice is essential to bring about change and solve problems. Members should make sure that the voice and needs of the community are included in the development of the service project. Positional leaders and adult volunteers can survey all members to know where their service passion lies.

##### *What this looks like:*

Your members have said they are animal lovers, so it's time to contact an animal shelter and ask how your club can help. Think creatively to meet the needs of the shelter as well as the community.

#### *2. Education*

Information should be provided to all members about the community, the issue and the agency or community group. If you want buy-in and attendance, make sure your members have been called to action through education.

##### *What this looks like:*

Have someone from the animal shelter come talk at your club meeting before the project or show a video about the topic.

#### *3. Meaningful action*

Members should know their contribution has made a difference in a measurable way, and that their time was well used. Without this, people will not want to continue their service, no matter how well you've done with the other four elements.

##### *What this looks like:*

Dogs are happier and the facility is a little cleaner thanks to club members. The staff is thankful and members know their work has made a difference.



#### *4. Reflection*

Reflection should happen immediately after the project to discuss reactions, share stories and explore feelings. Reflection will help members see how their service experience can be applied in a broader context.

#### *What this looks like:*

At the next club meeting a couple of nonofficer members share what they did and how the service experience affected their lives. You could even share pictures or video footage. Some members may even look broader and realize their love for animals could one day become a career opportunity.

#### *5. Evaluation*

Members should evaluate their learning experience and agencies should evaluate the effectiveness of the members' service. Evaluation gives direction for improvement, growth and change. Quality community service should challenge members to educate themselves about the issues surrounding their involvement so they might better understand and work with communities.

#### *What this looks like:*

If the majority of your club came to the animal shelter project, and the agency asks for your service again, then you might want to make this an ongoing project.

Adapted from the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL)