Introduction

This handbook is designed to guide Extension agents, high school teachers, or adult leaders of youth organizations in creating and implementing their own youth leadership and community development project. The purposes of this project are as follows:

◆ To provide youth with a community service learning process so as to increase their understanding of their community, to improve their sense of empowerment, and to encourage participation in community affairs.

◆ To forge the school-community partnership and to develop increased community support for the school's educational programs.

◆ To help community leaders and citizens address important local needs through the enthusiasm, knowledge, and labor contributed by youth.

Our approach is to link community organizations and students at the local high school in a community development process involving three phases:

1) improving youth's understanding of their community and how it works through several hands-on activities;

2) conducting a needs assessment survey of residents;

3) implementing a project to address an issue identified through the needs assessment.

> **"I'm more likely to be involved because here I've been involved already and I want to see it keep moving forward."**
> **- student, Immokalee, FL**

At each phase, we provide youth with opportunities to develop skills and to contribute in meaningful ways. Through this process students will better understand the issues and problems facing their community, feel capable of addressing community problems, and aspire to be involved in future community affairs. The needs assessment process, in particular, is a win-win project for everyone—every community can use information from surveys and youth can assume responsibility and make significant contributions in a number of ways. Through this project, we hope to help youth begin the transition from student to adult member of the community and to help them become more active contributors in solving community problems.

Community development projects also can increase local leaders' appreciation of youth's contributions to community affairs. We believe that the perception among the adult community can be changed from one viewing youth as a problem to viewing youth as a resource [1,32]. Changing this perception is important if leaders are going to be able to take advantage of the opportunity to harness the energy and enthusiasm of young people to build more sustained

community action. We will need their help if we hope to solve the myriad of problems facing our communities.

Another benefit of such projects is that schools may benefit from increased public support [5]. The difficulty that schools are currently having in obtaining funds may be due, in part, to the perception by segments of the public that they do not benefit from money spent in the schools. We are convinced that building the community-school partnership through involvement in community development programs can enhance a school's image and expand public support.

This handbook is intended to serve as a guide for the process but each school will need to tailor the program to its unique needs and resources. Examples are provided for as-is use or use as models for local adaptation. This process is intended as an extracurricular activity or a curriculum supplement for high school students.

The introductory section of this handbook will discuss community service learning, community development, and the role of schools in development; our strategy for merging service learning and community development; and a brief outline of the practical steps involved in implementing this strategy.
Community Service Learning

The demand for changes in the educational system inspired the development of a number of programs in which students provide a service to their community [2,5,6,8, 25,31]. Specifically, a number of politicians and policy makers have called for more community service and applied learning programs [9]. Service learning is a method for increasing the meaning and relevance of classroom-based activities for youth [32] and can also build students' sense of citizenship and increase their involvement in the community [2,28,29]. Efforts are being made to integrate community service learning into the school's curricula, thereby turning the community into a laboratory for experiential learning [6,25].

The goal of community service learning programs is to create an environment of learning-by-doing and to begin the process of helping youth assume roles of social responsibility. Community service learning includes a broad array of activities: peer tutoring for other students, publishing newsletters, assisting the elderly with chores, developing a community day care program for children, landscaping a parcel of public property, creating artwork for local nursing homes, organizing recycling programs in schools and communities, and so much more.

Well designed community service programs are reported to increase teamwork among teachers and students [31]. This approach to learning corresponds more closely than traditional student projects to the collaborative

> **"Certain power people are involved and... began to look at the kids in the community differently because they saw that maybe they aren't the only ones who have to solve all the problems and all by themselves."**
> **-teacher, Immokalee, FL**

methods recommended by a number of community action models. Harry Silcox reports, "school-based service has changed attitudes, values, and relationships and made education come alive" [31]. Partnerships have also been developed with the business sector, civic and social organizations, and other governmental agencies as projects were undertaken [2,31].

Most community service programs enhance students' self-concept and self-image. Service provides youth with opportunities to feel needed by others and to fill important roles in their community [24]. But many programs neglect to teach skills that help students become effective actors in local policy-making or other aspects of community action [4]. As Harry Boyte observes, community service refers mainly to a variety of individual voluntary efforts with local service organization and does not usually include group decision-making, collaborative action, conflict resolution, and other elements of collective action [4].

> **"Service Learning is the intentional integration of curricular content with community service activities."**
> **-Kate McPherson**

To better cultivate "the ability to contribute effectively within a democratic society," [25] community service projects need to be developed in a way that allows students to experience empowerment through meaningful and significant roles [4]. This is not easily accomplished because, not only does the content or curriculum in the educational program change, but the relationships among students, teachers, and members of the larger community are redefined [10]. The nature of relationships between youth and adults shifts from youth being passive recipients of care, education, and discipline to being active, decision-making participants [22].

In recent years, a few community service programs which focus on community development have been implemented by schools [12,29]. These programs involved students in collective action in which they began to leadership develop skills of the type suggested by Boyte [4]. For example, high school students in Belle Fourche, South Dakota, got the community certified by the governor's Guide to Opportunities for Local Development program. These students spent months targeting tasks, designating task forces, and carefully preparing the necessary documentation [12]. Similarly, students in Immokalee, Florida, conducted a needs assessment survey and helped present the results to a number of community organizations. Local leaders used the information to plan programs to address educational, health care, housing, and recreational needs [19].

Developing the Community

Community development involves a process of increasing the capacity of local citizens to solve local problems [33]. Increasing the capacity of local actors has usually focused on leadership development. Most leadership development programs enhance human capital (the skills and knowledge needed by

actors to be effective contributors to local solutions), but build community social capital (the network of relationships which gives access to the financial and human resources needed for action [3]) only inadvertently [33]. Thus, community social capital can be viewed as a resource to be drawn on when needed for other community projects.

> **"We believe in ownership. Students who help plan own the results."**
> -teacher,
> Belle Fourche, SD

Though many people involved in community affairs lament their inability to get more residents involved, very few see the youth of their community as an untapped resource — one ready to be asked to help work toward solving local problems [16]. Though community leadership has long been recognized as a developmental process, [17] few communities build a foundation for their young people to develop into involved citizens and leaders. For rural communities, which have a more limited pool of human resources and often lose their brightest high school graduates to out-migration, [23] the need for this type of foundation for young people is even greater.

Effective leadership requires that people understand the economic, political and social processes of their community and the larger society [26,33]. Daryl Hobbs states "It strains credibility to believe that rural community development can travel very far on ignorance of the locality and how it works" [14]. Thus, the first task in any citizenship or leadership development program should improve the understanding of the community and identify the issues and concerns facing its residents. We believe that youth have much to contribute to their communities but, like adults, they can only become more effective participants and leaders through education and experience.

Historically, young people assumed important responsibilities but in recent decades, little is asked of them [28]. As a result, young people are often viewed more as a problem than as a resource. Students need opportunities to develop leadership skills yet such opportunities are the exception rather than the rule [11]. According to John Gardener, "Our young people are born into a society that is huge, impersonal and intricately organized. Far from calling them to leadership, it appears totally indifferent. "... It is very hard for young people today to believe that any action on their part will affect the vast processes of their society" [25].

The youth of a community are both potential actors and a resource, and to omit members of this group from making contributions to community affairs on the basis of their age unnecessarily limits a community's capacity to solve local problems. Involving young people in local affairs can both develop the community and solve specific problems [16]. As youth invest their time and talent in their community, they can develop a sense of ownership [4]. Further, the relationships between students, teachers, and other citizens and leaders develop the community by reinforcing local norms and expectations and building community social capital [7]. These investments made by and for

youth can be drawn upon for future community action. In short, youth leadership development is needed to provide a firmer foundation for future leadership and solidarity in the community [18].

Strategy for Merging These Together

The key to successfully merging community service learning and community development is to build a partnership among youth, teachers and administrators in the school, and people in civic, social, and governmental organizations in the community. Such a coalition can cement a relationship between the three groups this document focuses on: youth, the school, and the community. The emphasis on an integrated curriculum in service learning helps us focus on identifying relevant activities for youth and providing the materials that are essential for youth to carry out the tasks for which they will assume responsibility. Given that youth are a viable, necessary resource, the service learning perspective leads us to ask, "What information and training do youth need to effectively contribute to their community?" By proposing a specific, practical, and useful plan, as outlined below, for developing a relationship between youth, the school, and the community, we feel we have created at least one possible answer to this question.

Schools, especially those in rural areas, have an important role to play in community and leadership development. By using the building for meetings, the library as an informational resource, and staff to research problems and teach community members, schools can contribute to community development programs [15,30]. Schools can also participate in development programs which involve class or club projects to identify needs or solve problems and in school-based enterprises which create jobs and provide services for the community [15,26,30].

Ilvento and Maurer recently explored student participation in a community needs assessment [21]. They concluded that high school students were able to implement a quality telephone survey and thus serve as a valuable resource to the community. Needs assessment, particularly when using surveys, can be an important part of the community development process. But without resources and technical support, surveys can be biased, unrepresentative, and misleading. Unfortunately, most rural communities and small towns cannot afford to hire a consultant to conduct a survey and lack people with the necessary expertise to carry out such a survey [14,21]. Yet school-based community needs assessments can maintain a reasonable standard of rigor while keeping costs low if local leaders and students become involved in the process. These projects, feasible for almost any school, provide information about community needs that citizens and leaders can use to set priorities.

> "The essence of youth participation is a partnership between adults and young people, one which supports joint efforts toward solving community problems and acknowledges and values the contributions of both parties."
> - Bruce Swinehart

School-based community needs assessment projects can provide experiences for students that are fundamental to citizenship and leadership and help them to better understand their community, as well as build community social capital [15,27]. Such projects can develop leadership skills (e.g., public speaking or organizational skills) as well as personal qualities of high self-esteem, independence, and critical thinking that is necessary for effective leadership [1,7].

Project Outline

Building a partnership among youth, the school, and community organizations in a community development process involves three major phases:

1.   Learning About the Community

After initiating interest among community leaders and teachers to sponsor the project and obtaining partners to support its implementation, the project coordinator should use several activities to help youth better understand their community. These activities include studying information from the U.S. Census of Population about residents' characteristics and mapping community landmarks such as roads, libraries, a town hall, memorials and parks, prominent businesses, fire and police stations, etc. After mapping the landmarks, youth can conduct interviews to learn how local leaders worked to build the landmark. This phase of the project lays the conceptual groundwork for youth to guide their work on subsequent phases: the needs assessment survey and the development project.

"The community is developed when people work together on many, not just a few, local issues and needs. Community exists in the relationships among the participants."

2.   The Needs Assessment Survey

We provide guidance for involving youth in a set of activities with significant, concrete responsibilities. These activities include identifying questions and designing the survey, preparing promotional messages for the media, conducting the telephone interviews, tabulating and interpreting the results, and making presentations to civic groups and local leaders. In addition, organizers should spend time recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of youth involved in the survey. This phase of the project not only provides youth with opportunities for personal growth and citizens and leaders with information for local decision-making, but it can also serve to increase community support for youth involvement in other community projects. This in turn can create more widespread support for the third phase, the Community Development Project.

3.   The Community Development Project

The activities address one of the community's needs as identified by the survey and use the research (from phase one) about other successful community project. Phase three activities include reviewing the results of the needs

assessment survey, setting priorities, developing a plan of action, soliciting support from the larger community, implementing the plan, and celebrating the participants' accomplishments. This phase is designed to provide youth with the opportunity to practice the same type of leadership roles as adult members who are involved in community affairs.

Time Line for Use

We recommend allowing for two years to implement all three phases of the program (Figure 1). Each of the three program phases can be conducted separately to better meet local needs or constraints. Developing a better understanding of the community and conducting the needs assessment survey is the focus of the first year. The needs assessment process may carry past the end of the school year. Teachers can adapt the procedures to implement them in a single semester. The second year is devoted to the community development project. Students who participate in this follow-up phase may not be the same as those involved in earlier phases. That is, the first year may involve seniors and thus, the second year would involve a new set of students.

Figure 1. **Development in the community**

Project phase	Year 1			Year 2		
	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer
Learning about the community	■					
Needs assessment survey	■	■	■			
Community development project				■	■	

Creating a Successful Project

People inside the school system or those in the larger community may initiate project. Teachers desiring to have a school organization or class conduct this project will need to find partners among leaders in local government and community organizations. Likewise, local leaders who wish to involve students in community development efforts will need to enlist both teachers and students.

The success of the needs assessment projects in Florida and Kentucky can be replicated in other communities. We identified a number of criteria for creating a successful community development project based on experience with these projects (see Table 1).20 The coordinator's job is most important to the project's success and entails a significant time commitment. Potential

coordinators should carefully consider whether he or she can fulfill the time commitment.

A strong school-community partnership is also critical to conducting a needs assessment. Community leaders are needed to support and legitimize school-based activities in the larger community. Partners from the community also provide moral support; provide suggestions about strategy, project selection, and questionnaire content; contribute material resources; and volunteer as facilitators.

Teachers and students are seen as key partners in planning and implementing a community needs assessment and subsequent community development projects. Students can conduct many survey activities, including writing questions, preparing promotional messages, sampling, interviewing, entering and analyzing data, and presenting the results. Activities to learn about community development and needs assessment, followed by reflective discussion, help students develop a cognitive framework and better understand the project. Combined with activities to celebrate project milestones, these can build students' sense of achievement. The examples in Table 1 show how a needs assessment project can be applied to a school's and/or youth organization's program. The information generated by the needs assessment project in six months or a year can serve as the basis for selecting community development projects for several years.

Integrating a Project with Existing School Curricula

There are many possibilities for integrating a project with existing school curricula and, thereby, limiting the additional workload for teachers and school administrators who are already very busy. One strategy is for teachers to coordinate the distribution components of the project among several classes in a way that covers the whole. This strategy could complement recent educational reforms that emphasize applied academics and block scheduling . For example, a social studies class might read and discuss the segment "A Primer On Community" (in Part I. Learning About Community and Leadership of this handbook) as part of a curriculum on social organization or community. A geography class might use the population and mapping exercises (also in Part I) as a local application of census data and spatial analysis. A journalism or English class might conduct the studying community action exercise (in Part I). This exercise can help students to develop interviewing skills and strengthen their writing skills by preparing a report.

Similarly, components of the needs assessment survey (Part II) and the follow-up development project (Part III) might be implemented as part of classwork. A mathematics or statistics class can learn a practical application of probability by helping to select the sample for the survey while a computer class

Table 1. Criteria and Examples for a Successful Community Development Project.

Criteria:	*Examples:*
1. Commitment of project coordinator	Student organization selects needs assessment as community development project for year; teacher coordinates project.
2. Active community partnership	County Extension Service and Chamber of Commerce pledges support; members assist in project.
3. Support from school administrators & teachers/use of school facilities	Principal supports project; computer science and government teachers involve class in project; facilities are made available for telephone interviewing and for administering survey in classes.
4. Involvement of students	Student group conducts telephone interviews; computer science class key punches data.
5. Activities to learn about community development & needs assessment	History, journalism and social studies teachers jointly develop lesson on community development. Teach to students in respective areas.
6. Reflection exercise	Student organization discusses and votes on project; discusses highlights and low points at completion.
7. Material resources	Local phone company donates phones; school administration copies surveys.
8. Technical support	State Extension community development specialist assists with project planning, questionnaire, obtaining the sample, interviewer training, data analysis and interpretation.
9. Celebration of accomplishments	Article in local paper, student organization applies for state and/or national award, pizza party.
10. Plans for using information	Students utilize results to select future community development projects; civic groups and local leaders use information to set priorities.
11. Students involved in follow-up to needs assessment.	Next year, school groups work on a survey-based project involving many of the same students.

can build experience with software applications through the data entry and analysis and preparation of graphs and charts. A journalism or marketing class can obtain practical experience while developing newspaper stories, radio spots and posters to promote participation in the needs assessment survey. Finally, a student organization such as a Beta Club or FFA might fulfill their community service requirement by using the results of the needs assessment survey to identify and implement a targeted community development project.

A second strategy is for a teacher to adopt the entire project as the curricula for the class (e.g., a social studies class) during the semester or year if it meets state standards or criteria for that subject. Using this strategy, a teacher would use the handbook as the "teacher's edition" of the text.

A third strategy is to allocate components of the project which apply to existing curricula to one or more classes and allocate other components to an affiliated club or organization. For example, a needs assessment survey in Quincy, Florida, involved social studies and journalism classes in training interviewers and promoting community participation while the Main Street student advisory council assisted with planning the survey and developing the questionnaire.

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