By now most of you are fluent in service-learning ‘speak’, and you understand and can articulate the importance of youth voice in providing students with quality service-learning experiences. However, understanding youth voice and actually giving students more of it are very different concepts. The process of expanding youth voice can seem daunting, but is nevertheless a critical part of enriching and growing service-learning in your school. Because every school is at a unique place on the service-learning growth curve, we hope to help you take your current practice for youth voice to the next level, whatever that may look like for you and your students. Feedback we received from participants in the Schools of Success Showcase in Nashville indicated that many teachers want to involve students more intentionally in identifying projects that would benefit the community, but are unsure of how to do so without sacrificing the quality of their projects and curricula. This issue focuses on ways to address this challenge.

The National Youth Leadership Council’s (NYLC) K-12 Service-Learning Standards and Indicators for Quality Practice (http://www.nylc.org/sites/nylc.org/files/files/Standards_Oct2009-web.pdf) asserts that service-learning should provide students with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating service-learning experiences. Involving youth as often as possible in all aspects of the service-learning process increases the likelihood that their learning will have a lasting impact and that they will develop an affinity for serving their communities. Conversely, projects that do not engage students in important decision-making can leave them feeling frustrated, invalidated and generally dissatisfied with the experience.

During our Schools of Success site visits we learned that often students do help with planning and implementing project work, but they don’t determine what issue a project will address. Specifically, we have found that teachers sometimes feel pressure to select service-learning projects simply to save time, and to provide a framework that blends well with specific curricular objectives. In these instances, once the project is selected, students are more involved in decision-making as things evolve and activities are planned, carried out and evaluated. The concern seems to be that giving students more of a voice at the start might slow the learning process to the extent that they cannot master core objectives in the time allotted.

Examination of NYLC’s core components of service-learning can help explain why student voice throughout the entire service-learning process is important. **Investigation**, the first component of IPARDC: (Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, Demonstration & Celebration), emphasizes the importance of engaging students in the process of deciding what they want a service-learning project to be as well as what action they will take. This process encourages students to actively shape their learning and allows teachers to serve as facilitators who guide students through the experience and incorporate content objectives all along the way. For practitioners who prefer to drive the project’s direction, this approach might appear to lacks structure and lead to chaos. And these days, with the pressures of stringent achievement standards, meeting AYP, etc., teachers feel more challenged than ever by the idea of broadening student voice in service-learning projects. However, a bit of creativity and a willingness to “boldly go” into less familiar learning territory can benefit students and teachers alike. As students take more of the lead, teachers no longer have to plan every facet of the project and they can serve more as facilitators. Students have a variety of opportunities to build leadership and self-determination skills, creativity and problem solving. It’s important to note that giving students greater voice should be a gradual process that allows them time to adjust to having more responsibility and ownership in their learning. (cont. on next page)
Cultivating Youth Voice in Service-Learning (cont.)

While this all sounds good, making it happen is another issue altogether. For those of you faced with this challenge, let's examine some ways you can involve students in the very initial aspects of service-learning projects. Remember that the best way to fully immerse students in service-learning work is to have them identify issues in the community that need attention. We have identified a variety of strategies you can use to foster student involvement in investigating community needs.

**Community mapping**: Where students really look closely at their neighborhoods and community — to identify challenges as well as actions they can take to address those challenges. This creates a deeper awareness of what is happening within their community and paves the way for more meaningful service.

**Research newspaper and online publications**: We all know that the media shines light on the hottest issues of the day, so you can use this as a kind of ready-made menu of potential service-learning project ideas.

**Brainstorming**: Some teachers like to have students brainstorm ideas for ways to help their community, and then come to a consensus on what the project's focus will be. Regardless of what activities you use, it's important that students learn how to collect evidence (via surveys, photos, interviews, etc.) as well as how to effectively document their findings.

These are just a few examples of approaches you can use to "set the hook" with your students from the very start of your project. These kinds of activities empower students and help them to see clearly how they collectively can make a positive difference in the lives of others. While it would save time to have a pre-packaged project at the ready, the trade-off is missing out on valuable learning opportunities.

Who is doing it well?

Several of the Network schools excel at integrating youth voice into their service-learning projects. Students at duPont Manual Magnet High School in Louisville, Kentucky for example, have used the United Nations Millennium Goals (www.un.org/millenniumgoals) as a framework to lead collaborative work with their peers and local organizations in addressing community issues. This collaborative atmosphere has created students with a more profound interest in their learning and an eagerness to take charge of their projects. Staff at Malcolm Shabazz City High School in Madison, Wisconsin encourages students to delve deeply into what will make service-learning experiences more meaningful for them — in essence, setting the bar for their learning. The principal meets weekly with a group of student leaders to discuss issues, concerns and ideas they have about service-learning projects, community problems, etc. This interaction gives students an opportunity to make contributions and be a part of something positive — to be citizens. During Morning Meeting, (like homeroom) students at Park Forest Elementary School in State College, Pennsylvania brainstorm ideas for service-learning projects each day that address school and community issues, and then work to create solutions to those issues. Once a week, 5th graders plan and put on all-school assemblies focused on current issues and challenges.

The bottom line is that quality service-learning, like any good experiential learning, isn't always clean and precise. It can be messy and unpredictable at times. It's important to know that going in, and to learn to trust your instincts — and your students' ability to choose compelling learning paths.

Here is a list of useful resources available on how to engage young people in leadership and decisionmaking in your programs.

**Youth Voice: A Guide for Engaging Young People in Leadership and Decision-making in Service-Learning Programs**

**14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making**

A comprehensive guide to youth involvement and ownership in their community. The publication is available from Youth on Board.

**Guidelines and Resources for Establishing a Youth Advisory Committee**
This is a free step-by-step guide to creating Youth Advisory Committees.

**Youth Involvement: Developing Leaders and Strengthening Communities**
Bruce Swinehart, Partners for Youth Leadership, 1990.

**Great Ideas: Using Service-Learning & Differentiated Instruction to Help Your Students Succeed**
Pamela J. Gent, 2009.

**Integrating Youth Voice in Service-Learning**
**In Memoriam**

Michael. Scott, Sr.

November 27, 1957—January 4, 2011

District Leaders Network Member, Gary, Indiana

Michael believed that his life’s purpose was to serve and protect children. To that end, he served as the Executive Director of Gary Youth Services Bureau for over 17 years and as the Sixth District Representative to the Board of Trustees of the Gary Community School Corporation for 16 years. He was the longest serving elected representative. He leaves behind his wife of 32 years, a son and two daughters, several siblings and many extended family members. Michael believed wholeheartedly in the value of civic engagement and service-learning, and chose to focus on the positives in our advocacy work. He will be deeply missed.

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**Food for Thought**

We all understand and appreciate how vitally important citizenship education is to creating engaged, principled young people. If you know someone who still questions citizenship education’s value — here is something to share with them. In the August 17 edition of *The Guardian*, an online publication out of the United Kingdom, there is a piece titled “Lesson from the Riots: Don’t Get Rid of Citizenship”.


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**Funding Opportunities**

**Sodexo Youth Grants**

Deadline: September 16

YSA will award 25 Sodexo Youth Grants of $500 each to support youth-led service projects in the United States that address the issue of childhood hunger during National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week (November 13–20, 2011). They’re looking for projects that engage your peers, friends, families, neighbors, Sodexo employees and other community members in creative, youth-inspired solutions to ending childhood hunger in your community.

Learn more at: [www.YSA.org/grants/sodexoyouth](http://www.YSA.org/grants/sodexoyouth)

**Pearson Foundation/Jumpstart—Read for the Record: SAVE THE DATE!**

October 6, 2011

Please join We Give Books and record-breakers everywhere on October 6, 2011, as together they set a new world record for the largest shared reading experience by reading Llama Llama Red Pajama by Anna Dewdney. Presented in partnership with Pearson, Jumpstart’s Read for the Record brings young people, families, teachers and community members together to raise awareness about the importance of early literacy. Jumpstart offers a free library of digital children’s books. With each book you read online, Jumpstart will donate another brand-new book to a classroom Jumpstart serves.

Learn more at: [www.wegivebooks.org](http://www.wegivebooks.org)

**Lowe’s Toolbox for Education Grants**

Deadline: October 14 or 1,500 applications

The Toolbox for Education Grant Program provides grants of $2,000 to $5,000 to public K-12 schools and school parent-teacher groups associated with public schools throughout the U.S. that develop projects that encourage parent involvement and build stronger community spirit. Preference is given to funding requests that have a permanent impact such as facility enhancement (both indoor and outdoor) and landscaping/cleanup projects. The deadline is October 14; however, if 1,500 applications are received before the deadline, the application process will close.

Learn more at: [www.toolboxforeducation.com/](http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/)

**UnitedHealth HEROES Grants**

Deadline: October 17

The UnitedHealth HEROES program is a service-learning, health literacy initiative that awards grants to help youth, ages 5-25, create and implement local, hands-on programs to fight childhood obesity. The grants encourage semester-long projects that launch on MLK Day of Service and culminate on Global Youth Service Day. Schools, service-learning coordinators, nonprofits and students in the health professions located in all 50 states and the District of Columbia are eligible to apply for the $500 - $1,000 grants.

Learn more at: [www.YSA.org/HEROES](http://www.YSA.org/HEROES)
Project Ignition Grants  
Deadline: November 15

The National Youth Leadership Council® and State Farm® are pleased to announce the availability of $2,000 Project Ignition grants for public high schools to support their students in addressing teen driver safety through service-learning. Public high schools in the United States and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick are invited to apply for the 2011-12 grants. 25 schools will be chosen to receive $2,000 grants to implement their campaigns from January to April of this school year. Ten of these schools will be selected to receive additional support.

Learn more at:  http://sfprojectignition.com/

For additional funding ideas and opportunities, visit:  
http://www.servicelearning.org/funding-opportunities

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Quote of the Month

“The future belongs to those who can give the next generation reasons to hope.”

—Pierre Teilhard DeChardin

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The Schools of Success Network is supported by The State Farm Companies Foundation and Learn and Serve.