

GSS YOUTH SUMMIT 2015

GUIDE FOR DIRECTORS AND MENTORS

A YOUTH-LED LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The GSS Youth Summit invites young people from Good Shepherd Services programs across New York City to an energizing youth-led conference addressing the critical issues young people have identified in their communities. The Summit is not simply a day with youth-led workshops; it's a youth leadership development experience.

Each program site works with a team of youth ambassadors over a period of several months, culminating on the day of the Summit. The team of youth ambassadors at each site will choose an issue or need in their community, create a project to help address it, implement the project and then prepare a presentation to teach their peers about the issue and/or how to address it in their own communities.

Choosing the Issue

Ambassadors should gather together to discuss the following:

1. Determine a critical need in your school, program or home community.
 - Note that this is a YOUTH-LED experience. Youth voice and leadership development is paramount in the decision-making process.
2. Research the topic thoroughly.
 - Each site will be paired with a topic expert either of their choosing or with our assistance. Topic experts are available to consult with your team of ambassadors to help them with their research and project plans. Topics experts have a minimum of two meeting dates with your team.
3. Develop realistic, well thought out solutions that can be shared with others.
 - For example, a program may explore bullying and how to prevent bullying in their schools. The ambassadors would develop a project that would help address this issue at their school. The project could bring awareness of the issue and teach strategies to prevent and combat bullying.
 - Ambassadors can implement one or more of the solutions they brainstormed and reflect on the results.
4. Create a presentation to share at the Youth Summit about your project topic and impact. Teams can prepare a tool kit to help other ambassadors implement their project ideas in their respective communities and programs.

Preparing for the Presentation

Each program site (including middle school programs) will be given a time to present once at the Summit. Audience members will include other ambassadors from other GSS programs including our middle school, high school residential and college programs; mentors; various adults within Good Shepherd Services and supporters and dignitaries. Presentations:

1. Must be well planned and thorough.
2. Should be based on research, not just personal feelings. Fact-checking should be a primary role of the mentor and fellow ambassadors. Your topic expert will help to some degree in this area.
3. Should be realistic and relevant to other youth.
4. Should be more than just an oral presentation - PowerPoint, skits, videos and other visuals are expected.
 - Total presentation time has usually been 15 minutes with a 5 minute Q&A. This is determined by the number of programs that participate each year.
 - Presentations are limited to 5 minutes of video.
 - We encourage presentations to offer a "toolkit" to audience members so that they can be ready to address the issue if they so choose when they return to their communities.
5. Practice Presentations: Please arrange a practice presentation with your topic expert.
6. Presentation at Your Program: Please set a date for your team to conduct their presentation to their program or their community.

A Breakdown of Service Learning Projects

This year, we are expecting all participating groups to engage in some type of service learning project about their topic, and then present on their experiences and/or findings.

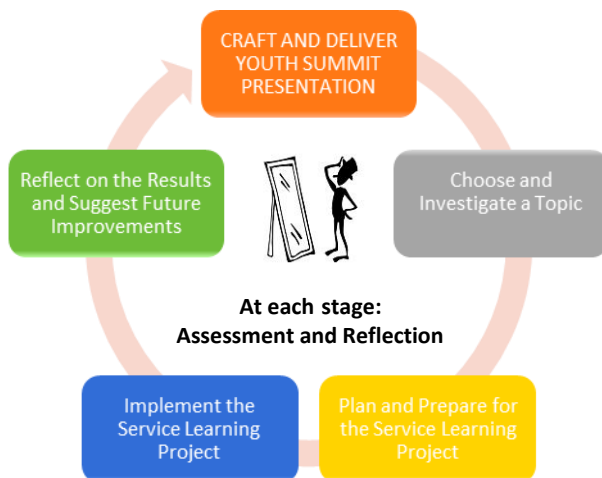
Service learning should not be mixed up with community service; though both involve students engaging with their communities, service learning requires much more leadership on the part of the students. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (p. 2, 2011) breaks down service learning in the academic classroom as such:

- It is a method of encouraging student learning and development through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in, and meets the needs of, a community.
- It helps foster civic responsibility.
- It is integrated into, and enhances, the academic curriculum or the education components of the community service in which the participants are enrolled.
- It provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

We felt that the above bullet points leave out an important part of the work we do at GSS, which is reinforcing and strengthening the adult-student relationship. Projects should be youth-led, but not adult-exclusive. Mentors, Program Directors, Internship Coordinators, Tutors, etc., all play a pivotal role in the facilitating and encouraging the growth students will experience during the service learning process. As such, we have added another bullet point that accounts for this:

- Service Learning gives Mentors an opportunity to implement a hands-on, in-the-moment approach to guiding youth through a major learning experience.

This diagram, from Learn and Service America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, gives a concise breakdown of the service learning process in action:



Make sure that the project you choose is realistic given the time and resource limitations of your program. Service Learning can be as entrepreneurial as recruiting for and planting a community garden or as targeted and small-scale collecting and analyzing survey data from students on their attitudes about a current issue. As long as it involves planning, execution, and reflection on the part of the students, they have engaged in – and hopefully grown from – a service learning experience.

SELECTING YOUTH AMBASSADORS

Each program may determine how they wish to select their Youth Ambassadors, including the design of any recruitment materials or information for the youth. Due to the size of the venue, we have restricted physical attendance to the Youth Summit to about six youth ambassadors per a program and two staff. When the date nears, actual attendance numbers may be more flexible depending on program numbers.

Please be aware of and prepared for the commitment challenges for youth over a long period of time. Programs will experience team members leaving and new ones joining throughout the process. It will be at your program discretion to determine how to best manage this at your site. The logistical impact to keep in mind is registration for the Youth Summit so that your ambassadors all have name tags and swag bag at the Summit.

THE YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

Each site (excluding middle school programs) may nominate one ambassador from your team to be part of the Youth Council that will plan and host the Summit. Along with their regular commitment to their on-site team of ambassadors, Council members will meet about every other Friday after the kick-off to prepare for and make important decisions about the Summit. Council members are the key managers and hosts on the day of the Youth Summit.

Only one youth ambassador per a program can be part of the Youth Council. Program representation is not required in order to participate in the overall Youth Summit, but it is highly recommended. Please keep in mind:

1. This person should be chosen by their peer ambassadors if at all possible. Guidance from staff is encouraged as this position requires a great deal of maturity, commitment and hard work.
2. The same youth ambassador needs to make it to all Council Team meetings. No sharing of the position with another ambassador, and taking turns with meetings.

ROLE OF THE STAFF MENTOR

The Youth Summit is a youth-led process. Nearly every aspect of the Summit will be created, planned and completed by the amazing young people in our programs. In line with Good Shepherd Services' commitment to youth development, staff assist ambassadors in developing their voice and leadership in choosing, implementing and teaching others about their chosen issue and project.

Your staff mentor, therefore, should be a proponent of youth voice and youth leadership in the youth summit process. They should be willing to take a back stage role, and create opportunities for the young people to drive their project and presentation. At no time, should mentors be presenting at the Youth Summit. Mentors are like coaches sports – they work with a team, but they do not go to play on the field. Mentors must be able to guide and support on the sidelines.

Tasks common among staff mentors in past summits include:

- Recruiting ambassadors
- Completing paperwork or helping ambassadors complete necessary paperwork
- Communicating with the Council Coaches via email and/or phone
- Attending the kick-off event with the chosen Youth Council member from their site
- Facilitating weekly hour-long gatherings of the ambassador team at their site
- Assisting or chaperoning ambassador projects during implementation
- More intensive presentation preparation, up to 3 hours a week, as the Summit date nears
- Attending the Youth Summit itself

Mentor Meetings

Due to the intense nature of the youth leadership development work at each site for the Youth Summit, we have established three required Mentor Meetings to provide professional development and support around this process. The meetings are not mere check-ins, but will provide mentors with tools, strategies, resources and mental cheerleading to address the common challenges in this work.