

9/11 Day of Service: Serving Safely During the Pandemic

Ideas gathered from youth development and higher education leaders as we plan for this year's September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance.

This year we have the opportunity to think in new ways about how we organize and how we use Days of Service to meet the goals we have set for our programs, students, and communities. Here are some suggestions for how you can still engage in commemorative service during the time of Covid-19

1. Consider your definition of SERVICE, are you thinking of it in all its fullness?

The Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University has created a really useful way to think about service. These can lead you to widen the activities you can consider as additional ways to engage:

Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement

- **Community Engaged Learning and Research:** Connecting coursework and academic research to community-identified concerns to enrich knowledge and inform action on social issues.
- **Community Organizing and Activism:** Involving, educating, and mobilizing individual or collective action to influence or persuade others.
- **Direct Service:** Working to address the immediate needs of individuals or a community, often involving contact with the people or places being served.
- **Philanthropy:** Donating or using private funds or charitable contributions from individuals or institutions to contribute to the public good.
- **Policy and Governance:** Participating in political processes, policymaking, and public governance.
- **Social Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility:** Using ethical business or private sector approaches to create or expand market-oriented responses to social or environmental problems.

2. Shift from goals focused on immediate outputs to building community connections

As it may not be possible to do many of the direct service projects you have traditionally done on a day of service, consult with your community partners to reframe and rethink what you may be able to achieve that goes beyond immediate, tangible results. The emphasis may shift from outputs (i.e. number of schoolrooms painted or trees planted) to outcomes such as increased awareness and strengthened campus-community relations. Here are a few ideas brainstormed by youth development and higher education leaders that can help achieve this community connections goal:

Use the 9/11 Day of Service to launch a commitment to a year or semester of service

- Frame the plan, set goals, and ask participants to build out their individual service plans to activities that take place continuously from 9/11 Day of Service to MLK Day of Service in January and perhaps, Global Youth Service Day/Earth Day in April. Work with partners by sharing examples of service through the Pathways to choose projects and issues to address. Participants may also do research and discover ways to respond to community needs on their own over time.
- Investigate and present findings on the state of the pandemic and other local issues, review local responses, and determine how your group may contribute.
- Schedule regular check-ins throughout the semester to reflect on progress made towards the goals set on 9/11.
- [Youth Service America](#) has online [tools](#) to help establish a semester of service. Although this is geared towards a K-12 audience, the tools are easily adapted for higher education.

Host an online community service fair/information session

- Work with your community partners to plan and schedule an online “fair” or info session where they can share more about their missions, their current work and the kind of support they need now.
- Create breakout rooms based on issue area, locality or other factors so participants have the chance to meet one another and perhaps commit to service activities.

Train participants in the skills they’ll need for service and, particularly, service online

- Set the stage with an interactive presentation about community needs and assets and create a series of trainings over the semester or the year. Include community partners to help build relationships and awareness of community issues and assets.
- Present research to help participants understand the community context
- Create a conversation about building community when face-to-face interaction is limited.
- Create spaces for reflection to consider what it means to be a member of a democratic community and allow students to share challenges and opportunities related to the service and these stressful times.
- Use Zoom or another online training platform, and use breakout rooms, spotlights, emojis and other tools to facilitate learning, engagement and interaction

3. Shift planned projects to a socially distanced or virtual setting

Plan outdoor projects that allow for distanced work

- Participants may still be able to conduct trash clean up on trails, in parks and on beaches while maintaining proper distance from each other. Other outdoor projects, such as tree planting, non-native removals, trail building, etc. may also be possible and the local parks and recreation department is an excellent planning partner for these types of projects.

Work with organizations that have already shifted their service online

- Identify youth-serving organizations such as afterschool programs that have already made the shift to virtual learning and inquire about their volunteer needs to help with online tutoring and mentoring – especially in subjects such as literacy and STEM.

Engage with senior citizens

- Reach out to nursing homes and assisted living centers where residents have been largely isolated. These organizations benefit greatly from pen pals, online buddies, meal deliveries and even lawn signs that can help lift spirits. Campus and school leaders report establishing regular online “coffee hours” with seniors where stories are told and music is shared. The local office on aging, [Senior Corps](#) programs, or [Generations United](#) can be a great resource and partner to plan these activities.

4. Community assessments and research, trainings and other non-contact activities

Collaborate with community partners to conduct needs assessments or asset mapping

- Collaborate with community partners to train participants to conduct needs assessments and asset mapping and then work with partners to implement the assessment through online research and perhaps, safely planned visits to community sites. As a result, participants can then work with partners to create projects.

Provide trainings in and for community members

- Survey community partners to identify topics for trainings that could be led by your participants based on skills, current studies and other areas of interest and experience. Deliver trainings through virtual sessions or by creating videos that can be made available on YouTube. For example, students from [Florida Atlantic University created a video encouraging community members to complete this year’s very important census.](#)

Ask community partners to provide training

- Partners may want to provide training to meet their missions or to enhance the skills of participants, for example, Community Emergency Response Training (CERT); tutor and mentor training; conflict resolution; community dialogue; and more.

Transcribe documents for government and community organizations

- Reach out to government organizations, museums, and other community partners to check on whether they need meeting proceedings, interviews or other recordings and documents transcribed. This is a much-needed way to contribute to community needs while staying socially distanced. For example, students from George Washington University in Washington, DC is partnering with the National Archives [Citizen Archivist](#) program to transcribe historical documents.

Complete other capacity-building tasks for community partners

- Offer services such as marketing, social media promotion, video creation, or other ways that you can support local nonprofits with their administrative needs. This is a much-needed area of support that can be completed in a virtual setting.

Skill Building Workshops

- Engage students as peer leaders for other students
- Create specific issue or project focused trainings such as classroom or group management in an online setting for virtual tutoring projects.
- Also helpful are trainings that help students understand how to add their service experience to their resumes and professional portfolios.

5. Use social media to make individual service activities a collective experience

Try a “hackathon”!

- Use the hackathon method to bring participants together virtually and generate solutions and service project ideas in response to community needs through quick-fire design thinking. This can be really fun for participants to work on together and rewarding when a concept and potential approach to a solution is collaboratively identified. Here are two helpful resources on how to create a hackathon:
 - [Building a Community with a Mission Statement + Hackathon](#)
 - [Hackathon Guide](#)

Get creative with social media to bring disparate service projects together

- Encourage participants to identify and complete service projects on their own (after engaging in your trainings described above) and then post about it on social media. Create fun and familiar hashtags for all to use and get folks to tag each other and their community partners in their posts.
- Offer incentives for participants who share posts displaying their service projects and community engagements.
- Explore alternative social networking platforms such as [FlipGrid](#) and challenge your group to use the one platform to stay connected with each other and share their experiences.

Resources

- [GivePulse](#) is a useful tool to find, share and track service opportunities
- On their Community Engagement page listing volunteer opportunities, Drake University includes a section on [volunteering in times of coronavirus](#)
 - Leaders at Drake University also shared their [brainstormed list of remote service projects](#)
- George Mason University’s University Life Offices also shared their [ideas for virtual service projects](#)
 - GMU also has a webpage dedicated to their [9/11 Day of Service](#)
- University of Central Arkansas shared their [Covid-19 Off-Campus Service Policy](#)

- Youth Service America has created resources focused on [How Youth Can Help Communities Respond to and Recover from the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) along with resources to [“Do Good From Home”](#)
- George Washington University’s Nashman Center also shares a series of [Opportunities to Serve the Community](#) during the pandemic
 - GW is also moving forward with their Welcome Days of Service to honor 9/11, with information on [how it will be planned safely this year](#)
- The Corporation for National and Community Service has many resources for [service in honor of the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance](#), along with [resources for safe service during Covid-19](#)
- 9/11 Day.org developed several [toolkits](#) for employers, nonprofit organizations and [lesson plans](#) for teachers to support their mission to engage groups in virtual volunteering and “9/11 Day at Home.”