Community Action Projects (CAP) Implementation Guide

What is the Community Action Project (CAP)?

The purpose of the Community Action Project (CAP) is to empower students to apply civic knowledge, research skills, and democratic principles to identify, investigate, and address an issue that affects their community. Students will analyze root causes, engage with stakeholders, and propose informed solutions that address a community challenge. This project allows students to practice active citizenship by connecting classroom learning about government, rights, and responsibilities to real-world civic action.

What is the difference between Service Learning vs Community Service?

Service learning is a teaching and learning approach that connects academic learning with authentic community engagement. Through thoughtfully designed projects, students apply classroom knowledge to address real-world issues, reflect on their experiences, and develop the skills and mindsets of active, informed citizens. Unlike traditional community service, which focuses on volunteerism, service learning integrates service with curriculum, ensuring that students both learn from and contribute to their communities. It deepens academic understanding, builds empathy, and fosters civic agency by showing students that their ideas and actions can make a meaningful difference.

Service Learning	Community Service
Definition: Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with academic instruction and reflection to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. **Key Features:** • **Curriculum Connection:** Directly tied to what students are learning in class • **Reflection:** Students critically reflect on their service to deepen understanding and link experiences to academic content. • **Sustainability:** Often involves long-term partnerships and projects that build ongoing capacity within the community. • **Civic Skill Building:** Develops empathy, problem-solving, and leadership skills rooted in civic engagement.	**Definition:** Community service refers to volunteer activities intended to help others or improve the community, but it does not necessarily connect to classroom learning or curriculum goals. **Key Features:** • **Charitable Focus:** Primarily about giving time or resources to meet immediate needs. • **Less Academic Integration:** Usually not tied to specific course content or learning objectives. • **Limited Reflection:** May or may not include structured opportunities for discussion or analysis. • **Short-Term:** Often one-time or periodic activities. • **Personal Growth:** Builds character and empathy, but not always linked to academic or civic skill development.

How does CAP align with my Government curriculum?

The Community Action Project (CAP) directly aligns with multiple units and essential understandings within the Virginia and United States Government framework. It provides students with an authentic opportunity to apply their civic knowledge and skills to real-world contexts by taking informed action on issues of local, state, national, or global significance.

- **Unit 1: Foundations of Government** – Students demonstrate how democratic systems balance power and freedom by exercising their own civic agency to address a public problem.
- **Unit 2: Written Plan of Government** – Students explore how checks, balances, and accountability operate in practice through civic research and advocacy efforts that mirror the responsibilities of citizens in a constitutional democracy.
- **Unit 3: Political Process and Procedures** – The project reinforces understanding of how institutions, media, and individuals influence public policy and political participation.
- **Unit 4: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties** – CAP topics often stem from students' inquiry into rights, equity, and justice, illustrating how citizens shape the evolving definition of freedom and equality.
- **Unit 6: State and Local Government** – Students engage directly with local decision-makers, understanding how change occurs through state and local systems of accountability and transparency.
- **Unit 7: Economics** – Students consider how public policy, economic priorities, and government decision-making intersect in addressing community challenges.

Stage	Purpose	Teachers Do...	Students Do...	Suggested Pacing

Preparation	To ensure that every student is set up for meaningful, equitable participation. During this stage, teachers coordinate the logistics and support that make authentic community-based learning possible.
	
	This stage builds the foundation for successful implementation, ensuring that CAP is not only well-organized but also inclusive, responsive, and aligned with real-world learning outcomes.
		☐ Meet with your PLC to align CAP goals with instructional standards and student outcomes.
		☐ Create and share a timeline for all CAP stages, including key checkpoints and showcase dates.
		☐ Communicate the timeline with administrators, WBL Specialists, and key partners.
		☐ Reserve student workspaces (classrooms, libraries, makerspaces, or community sites).
		☐ Gather or prepare project materials (templates, research tools, reflection logs, supplies).
		☐ Partner with your WBL Specialist to
		  ☐ recruit community partners and confirm logistics.
		  ☐ Complete all permission forms, transportation plans, and volunteer clearances as needed.
		☐ Review accommodations, EL strategies, and group roles to ensure equitable participation.
			☐ Complete the Civic Self-Efficacy Survey *(In SchooLinks (Open Nov-Jan)*	Start a minimum of a Month before Launch

Introduction Resources: *AHS CAP Student Handout* *CAP Slide Deck Packet* *Hot Topic*	To introduce students to the goals, process, and impact of the Community Action Project (CAP). During this introduction, students will begin to see how their learning connects to real issues and opportunities in their communities. **Students will:** • Understand what civic agency means and why it matters. • Explore examples of how young people can create change. • Begin identifying issues, interests, or passions they care about.	☐ Introduce the CAP framework, goals, and timeline using the *Introduction to CAP* Slides Packet (complete slides 1–3). ☐ Establish class norms and reflection routines for collaboration and discussion. ☐ Teach the concept of civic agency, public policy, and why it matters in shaping communities. ☐ Guide students to identify issues, interests, or passions they care about.	☐ Brainstorm challenges and issues in your community (school, neighborhood, city, etc.) ☐ Complete the Interest Survey ☐ Schedule the milestones of CAP (in your planner, calendar, phone, etc)	1 or 2 Class Periods for Work Time

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One-Pagers *Brainstorming Handout* *AHS CAP Workbook* *CAP Teacher SlideDeck*	• Learn the steps of the CAP process (from research to action to reflection). By the end of the introduction, students should feel curious, empowered, and ready to take the first steps toward designing a project that applies their learning in meaningful, community-centered ways.	☐ Share examples of youth-led change that connect civic learning to real-world impact. ☐ Facilitate a Brainstorm using Hot Topics One-Pagers, Brainstorming Handout and other resources to generate student ideas. ☐ Collect information on what students are curious to explore next through Interest Survey *(teachers make a copy)*		
Explore What Matters	To narrow their focus and select a community issue that matters to them. Students explore topics from their initial brainstorms with teachers, peers, and community members to identify a problem that is both meaningful and actionable. **Students will:** • Reflect on their brainstorms and select a meaningful, actionable community issue. • Listen to and learn from multiple perspectives to understand real community needs. • Develop inquiry skills by identifying key questions and potential stakeholders for further research. • Create an initial plan for how they will explore their issue. By the end of this stage, students have engaged in a process of listening and discovery, learning to recognize different perspectives, clarify the scope of an issue, and ensure their chosen focus reflects genuine community needs and interests. They also begin to develop inquiry skills by identifying what questions still need to be asked, who holds valuable insights, and how they can gather credible information.	☐ Review student brainstorms and help identify emerging themes or interests. ☐ Host Brainstorm Office Hours for students to refine ideas before meeting with partners. ☐ Invite administrators, community members, and educators to meet with students and discuss their ideas. ☐ Guide students in developing key questions and next steps for research. ☐ Help students identify experts or stakeholders connected to their topic. ☐ Confirm final topics and groups; share with your PLC, WBL Specialist and other staff supporting CAP.	☐ Review your brainstorm ideas and look for patterns or issues that interest you most. ☐ Create a group around your topic of interest. These are the people you will work with on this project. ☐ Confirm your issue and group with your teacher. ☐ Attend Brainstorm Office Hours to get feedback from teachers and peers. ☐ Share your ideas with visiting administrators, educators, and community members for input. ☐ Write down key questions you still need to answer about your topic. ☐ Identify experts or organizations who might help you learn more.	1 or 2 Class Periods for Work Time
Investigate	To take a deeper dive into their chosen issue to	☐ Introduce and model how to evaluate	☐ Complete p. 1–2 of the VIP CAP	2 or 3 Class

Stage	Purpose	Teachers Do...	Students Do...	Suggested Pacing
the Issue Resources: *Charlottesville Data Resource Hub* *Charlottesville Regional Health Improvement Plan* *AHS VIP CAP Overview and Research*	build an informed, evidence-based understanding of the problem. Students collect data, review existing research, and consult with experts and/or stakeholders to determine the root causes, current efforts, and potential barriers related to their topic. **Students will:** • Gather credible data and insights from experts, community members, and reliable sources. • Analyze root causes and evaluate previous or ongoing solutions to the issue. • Connect their issue to related policies and laws. • Document and organize their findings to build an informed understanding of the problem. By the end of this stage, students demonstrate that their chosen issue is both real and relevant. They connect their findings to the policies, laws, and systemic factors that shape the problem, showing an informed understanding of its complexity. Through this process, students engage directly with those affected by or working on the issue, developing empathy, deepening their civic awareness, and recognizing how their learning can contribute to authentic, sustainable change in their communities.	credible sources (news, policy briefs, local data, etc.). ☐ Provide a template for students to organize their research (AHS VIP CAP Overview & Research) ☐ Work with WBL Specialists to support students in contacting experts or community members connected to their issue. ☐ Schedule work sessions and research checkpoints to monitor progress. ☐ Guide students to analyze causes, existing solutions, and barriers using research findings. ☐ Support students to connect their issue to relevant policies and/or laws. ☐ Provide feedback on research organization and citation practices. ☐ Collect and review completed VIP Tickets *(teachers make a copy)*	Graded Research Template *(make your own copy)*. ☐ Gather credible data and insights from reliable sources, experts, or community members. ☐ Reach out to experts or organizations ☐ Identify and analyze root causes, current efforts, and barriers related to your issue. ☐ Connect your issue to related policies, laws, or systems that influence it. ☐ Organize and document your findings using notes, charts, or summaries. ☐ As a group, completed VIP Tickets	Periods for Work Time
Present & Refine	To give students an opportunity to present their initial research findings and early ideas to community stakeholders, peers, and teachers for constructive feedback. This stage helps students refine their understanding of the problem and strengthen their communication, collaboration, and reflection skills. **Students will:** • Synthesize and organize their	☐ Review student research summaries and provide guidance for organizing key findings. ☐ Introduce or review the Mini-Pitch Handout (p. 6) and clarify presentation expectations. ☐ Schedule presentation sessions and invite administrators, community partners, and other educators to attend and provide feedback.	☐ Prepare your Mini-Pitch using the *p. 6 handout*—summarize your research and initial ideas. ☐ Organize your presentation to clearly explain your issue, evidence, and possible directions. ☐ Present your Mini-Pitch to peers, teachers, and community members for feedback. ☐ Listen carefully to feedback and	1 or 2 Class Periods for Work Time 1 Presentation Day

Stage	Purpose	Teachers Do...	Students Do...	Suggested Pacing
	research into a clear, compelling presentation. • Practice communicating their findings and ideas with confidence and professionalism. • Engage with feedback from community partners and peers to clarify and strengthen their approach. • Reflect on what they've learned from the feedback process to guide their next steps. By the end of this stage, students are able to articulate their issue and proposed direction with clarity and evidence, demonstrating both understanding and openness to revision. They learn that authentic problem-solving requires listening, iteration, and collaboration.	☐ Model effective presentation and feedback norms (clarity, professionalism, constructive critique). ☐ Facilitate mini-pitch sessions, ensuring each group presents and receives actionable feedback. ☐ Guide students in reflecting on what they learned from the feedback process and documenting next steps. ☐ Support students as they begin thinking about contacts or experts to reach out to for the next stage	record notes on what to clarify, expand, or improve. ☐ Reflect on what you learned from the process and identify next steps for developing your solution. ☐ Begin reaching out or following up with contacts/experts to deepen your understanding.	
Develop Solutions	To use their research and feedback to design an informed, realistic, and community-centered response to the issue they've been studying. This stage emphasizes creative problem-solving, collaboration, and the practical application of academic and civic skills to create solutions that are both meaningful and achievable. **Students will:** • Brainstorm and evaluate possible solutions grounded in their research findings. • Consider feasibility, resources, and community impact when selecting a final approach. • Collaborate in teams to design an action plan that outlines clear goals, steps, and responsibilities. • Integrate feedback from teachers, peers, and community partners to refine their plan before implementation.	☐ Review student research summaries to confirm each group's understanding of their issue. ☐ Facilitate solution-brainstorming sessions using research findings as a foundation. ☐ Review Develop Solutions handouts (p. 3–4 and p. 6) for planning and action design. ☐ Guide students in assessing feasibility, resources, and community impact. ☐ Support teams as they refine and select a final, evidence-based approach. ☐ Review and approve action plans (p. 6) to ensure goals, steps, and responsibilities are clear. ☐ Work with your WBL Specialists to prepare to confirm logistics, materials, and any required permission forms or releases for	☐ Identify possible solutions to your issue using your research findings (*p. 3–4 handout*). ☐ Explore and test ideas with experts, stakeholders, and contacts for feedback. ☐ Consider feasibility, available resources, and potential impact of each idea. ☐ Select one realistic, meaningful solution to move forward with. ☐ Develop a detailed action plan (*p. 6 handout*) outlining goals, steps, and team responsibilities. ☐ Integrate feedback from teachers, peers, and community members to refine your plan.	1 or 2 Class Periods of Work Time

Stage	Purpose	Teachers Do...	Students Do...	Suggested Pacing
	By the end of this stage, students have developed a well-researched and purposeful plan for action that demonstrates critical thinking, empathy, and shared responsibility. They understand that strong solutions emerge from collaboration, evidence, and responsiveness to real community needs.	students to take action.		
Take Informed Action	To put their plans into motion, applying what they've learned to make a tangible, positive impact on their community. This stage emphasizes agency, collaboration, and problem-solving as students move from planning to implementation, navigating real challenges and adapting as needed. **Students will:** • Implement their action plans responsibly and effectively, using teamwork and initiative. • Communicate and collaborate with community partners and stakeholders throughout the process. • Monitor progress, make adjustments, and document both successes and obstacles. By the end of this stage, students demonstrate civic agency in action! They begin to see themselves as capable contributors to their community, understanding that meaningful change happens through purposeful effort and reflection.	☐ Communicate with community partners or sites to ensure readiness and shared expectations. ☐ Provide ongoing check-ins and guidance as students implement their plans. ☐ Encourage students to document progress with photos, journals, or reflection notes. ☐ Support teams in problem-solving and adapting when unexpected challenges arise. ☐ Track student participation and ensure projects are safe, inclusive, and equitable.	☐ Put your plan into action! Carry out the steps in your action plan. ☐ Communicate and collaborate with your community partners, teachers, and peers. ☐ Document your progress: take photos, record data, or keep a reflection log. ☐ Monitor results and make adjustments when things don't go as expected. ☐ Celebrate milestones and acknowledge contributions from your team and partners.	**To be on track to attempt to reach action, ensure students start the first week of March at the latest.** *Students can start taking informed action as soon as they have a teacher approved project and have submitted the necessary permission forms.*
Reflect & Showcase Present Findings	To give students the opportunity to analyze the impact of their work, celebrate progress, and share their learning with others. This stage emphasizes metacognition, communication, and civic growth as students evaluate what they accomplished, what they learned about themselves and their communities, and how they might sustain or expand their efforts.	☐ Provide students with the Reflection Handout (p. 7) and model how to reflect using evidence and feedback. ☐ Work with your WBL Specialist to schedule a Showcase or Presentation Day(s) and invite administrators, community partners, other students, and families. ☐ Support students in preparing	☐ Complete the Reflection Handout (p. 7) to analyze your project's outcomes and lessons learned. ☐ Evaluate both successes and challenges using evidence from your project and partner feedback. ☐ Create a showcase presentation that tells the story of your impact. ☐ Present your findings to an	1 or 2 Class Periods for Work Time 1 Presentation Day

Stage	Purpose	Teachers Do...	Students Do...	Suggested Pacing
	Students will: • Reflect on the outcomes of their project and identify lessons learned. • Evaluate both the successes and challenges of their process using evidence and feedback. • Prepare and deliver a clear, engaging showcase presentation that communicates their story of impact. By the end of this stage, students are able to articulate how their learning, actions, and partnerships contributed to authentic community change. They leave the CAP experience with a stronger sense of civic agency, purpose, and confidence in their ability to lead and collaborate for the common good.	presentations or displays that highlight their learning, outcomes, and impact. ☐ Gather student and audience feedback to inform future CAP cycles. ☐ Celebrate accomplishments and recognize community partnerships.	authentic audience of peers, partners, and community members. ☐ Celebrate your team's success and consider how your work could continue or grow.	
Leave a Legacy	To ensure that the work and learning from each Community Action Project extend beyond the current group of students. Before seniors graduate, students curate their materials, reflections, and insights into resources that can inform, inspire, and guide future teams who continue addressing the same issue or theme. Students recognize that meaningful community change is ongoing and that their contributions become part of a larger, collective effort toward progress.	☐ Create a digital folder or website to collect student Legacy Summary ☐ Provide students with a Legacy Template or Folder to collect final reflections and project artifacts. ☐ Support students as they organize materials, photos, and data into a clear summary for future use. ☐ Report student CAP completion in the WBL Log (in coordination with your WBL Specialist). ☐ Debrief with your PLC & CAP support team (Department Chair, WBL Specialist, etc.) to reflect on impact & improvements for next year.	☐ Complete the Civic Self-Efficacy Survey *(In SchooLinks, Open April & May)* ☐ Create a Legacy Summary outlining your project's purpose, key outcomes, and lessons learned. ☐ Record or write a short message to future students offering advice and insights for continuing the work. ☐ Add all materials to your class's CAP archive or digital folder for future teams.	1 Post Presentation Reflect Day or Assignment