K-12 SERVICE LEARNING IN CALIFORNIA: GAPS, SYSTEMS, AND PATHWAYS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Prepared By :

sewa usa

2026

About Sewa International USA

Sewa International is a volunteer-driven Hindu nonprofit organisation, active in 30+ countries. In the United States, it has built a nationwide volunteer ecosystem with 45+ chapters across 25+ states, enabling sustained community engagement across diverse geographies. Through this distributed yet coordinated model, Sewa delivers programs spanning education, disaster management, health, family services, and youth engagement, positioning itself as one of the more structured volunteer-led service organizations in the ecosystem.

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Foreword

Srikanth Gundavarapu
President, Sewa International USA

At the foundation of every thriving society lies a powerful force: the willingness of individuals to act beyond themselves, to serve others with empathy, humility, and a sense of shared responsibility. Progress is not sustained by knowledge and innovation alone, but by a deeper commitment to the well-being of communities and the recognition that individual growth is inseparable from collective good.

As technology increasingly shapes how we interact and learn, experiences of real-world human engagement can become more limited. This places greater importance on education to cultivate empathy, connection, and a commitment to service.

It is therefore essential to reimagine education not only as a pathway to achievement but as a space where values are lived and practiced. When young people engage with real-world challenges, work alongside communities, and reflect on their role in shaping society, they begin to internalize a deeper sense of purpose: one rooted in service.

In California, this vision is already reflected in efforts to create structured opportunities for young people to engage in civic life. This report builds on that foundation, examining how these efforts can be further strengthened and how service learning can be more effectively integrated within them.

It examines how service learning can serve as a bridge between education and real-world engagement, and how existing policy and programmatic frameworks can further enable this connection. By tracing its evolution, analyzing current systems, and studying models of implementation, the report seeks to identify pathways through which service learning can become more consistent, accessible, and impactful.

The insights presented here are relevant for policymakers, educators, institutions, and organizations working at the intersection of education, civic engagement, and community development. More importantly, they speak to a broader shared responsibility, to ensure that future generations are not only knowledgeable but also grounded in values that sustain communities.

As we look ahead, strengthening this connection between learning and service will play an essential role in shaping individuals who are not only capable but also conscious of their role in the world around them.

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Executive Summary

For over two centuries, the United States has grappled with a central democratic question: how to prepare young people not only as learners, but as active, responsible citizens. Each generation inherits the responsibility of sustaining and strengthening democratic life, and the future of the nation depends on how effectively its youth are equipped to engage with real-world challenges, communities, and civic institutions.

Within this broader project, service learning has emerged as one of the most enduring and evolving approaches to civic education. It brings together academic learning and engagement with real-world challenges, enabling students to connect knowledge with action and develop as active participants in their communities. Over time, it has taken diverse forms, adapting to changing educational priorities while consistently reinforcing the link between learning and civic life.

Among U.S. states, California stands out for the depth and clarity of its commitment to civic learning. Its policy ecosystem places civic engagement as a central educational outcome and consistently reinforces service-learning as a powerful pathway to achieve it.

The History-Social Science Framework positions service-learning as a high-impact instructional approach. The State Seal of Civic Engagement enables students to demonstrate civic knowledge through investigation, action, and reflection. The California Serves program further strengthens this vision by introducing funding and instructional support to expand service-learning opportunities.

Taken together, these efforts provide a strong and coherent direction as they elevate service-learning as a central pillar of civic education. Yet, the challenge California faces is of enablement.

While service learning is strongly encouraged across policy instruments, its implementation pathways remain flexible across districts. As a result, its full potential as a scalable approach to civic learning is still emerging.

This gap, however, is narrow and, importantly, addressable. Strengthening system-level enablement requires reimagining policy direction with a targeted effort to translate an already strong vision into consistent practice.

This report, therefore, examines and tries to answer a central question: Why does service-learning remain inconsistent in practice, and how can this problem be addressed?

What This Report Does

To understand this gap, the report examines service-learning across three levels :

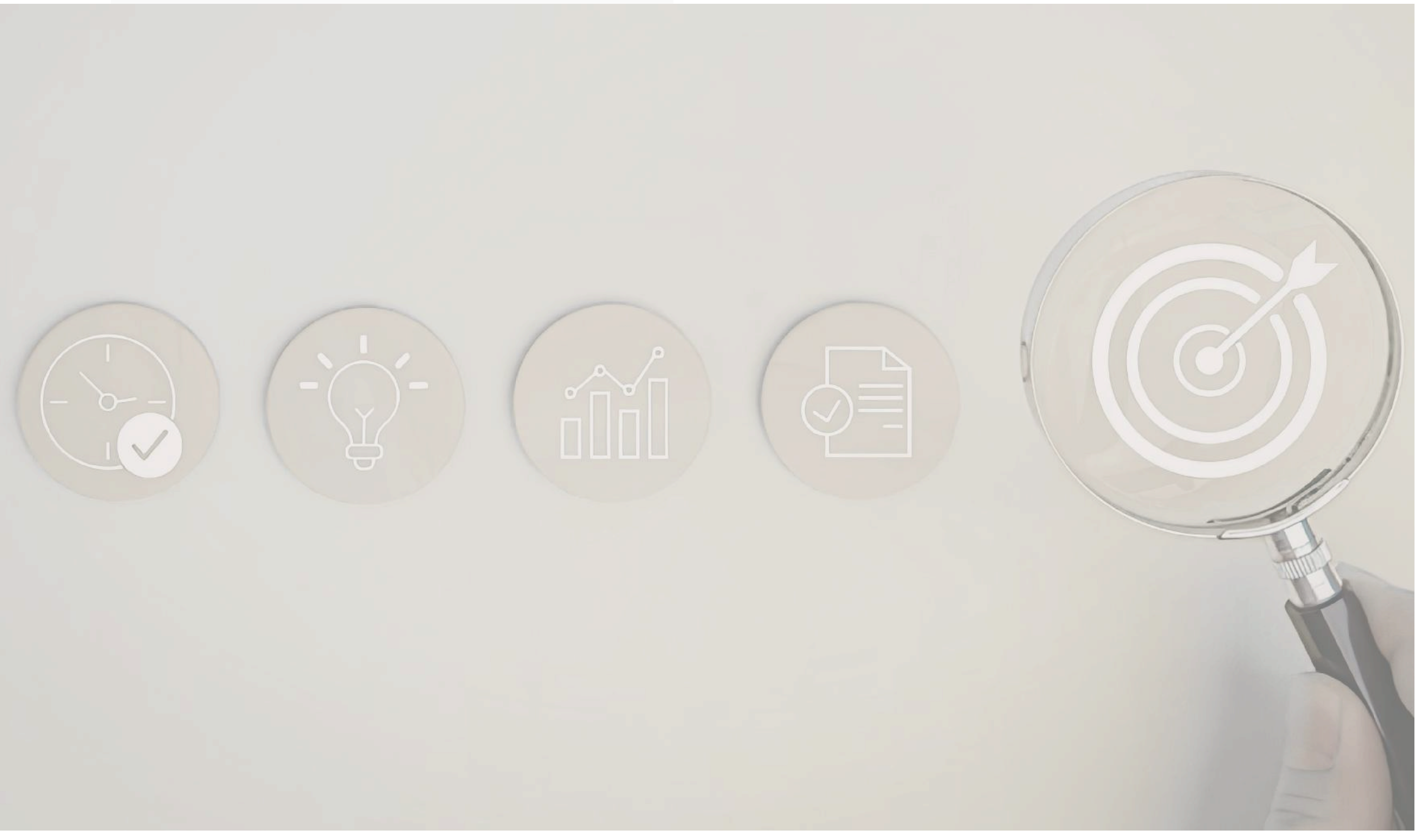
Key Findings

This report looks at service-learning across three levels:

1. California's highly decentralized system gives districts the flexibility to design service-learning in ways that reflect local needs and priorities. While this enables innovation, often it creates variation in how service-learning is interpreted and implemented across districts.

2. This decentralized system enables districts to build local partnerships, allowing students to engage with issues relevant to their communities. However, in some cases, it also leads to variation in the range of partnership opportunities available to students across districts.

3. Programs such as the California Serves Program provide targeted funding and support to high-need districts, strengthening equitable access to service-learning. While this ensures depth and inclusion, the service-learning pathway to civic learning remains limited across districts, with other forms of civic engagement more widely adopted.

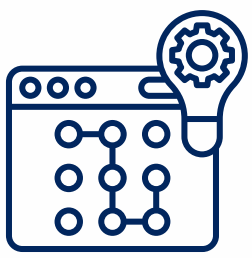


Recommendations

To strengthen service-learning as a scalable pathway to civic engagement, this report proposes three system-level interventions:

1. Establish a district-level service-learning assessment framework

Enable districts to assess their current stage of service-learning, identify gaps, and define clear pathways for strengthening implementation.



2. Transition the California Serves Program to a tiered, statewide access model

Expand access while maintaining prioritization through:

- An open-access pathway while retaining priority targeting
- Replace the eligibility restriction with a tiered funding design
- Phased expansion aligned with budget realities
- Strengthen incentives without altering legislative intent
- Tiered administrative oversight to ensure feasibility

3. Establish a structured school-nonprofit partnership system through California Volunteers

Develop a system that:

- Defines clear roles across state, district, school, and nonprofit actors
- Enables partnership matching through a centralized platform
- Standardizes the partnership lifecycle (identification, vetting, matching, and review)

At a time when the future is being governed as much by algorithmic autocracy as by human connection, service learning offers a powerful pathway to ground education in real-world experience, community, and shared responsibility. With targeted system-level enablement, California can further strengthen this pathway, shaping student experiences and also offering a model for service-learning more broadly.

Part I:

History and Evolution of Service Learning

Introduction

Across time and societies, education has carried a responsibility beyond the transmission of knowledge: to prepare individuals to participate in and sustain the communities they inhabit. As societies have evolved, so too have expectations from education—whether to prepare young people for work, citizenship, or collective life.

In responding to these expectations, educators and policymakers have repeatedly grappled with a central question: how do students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for civic life?

One response to this question has appeared consistently across contexts: that civic understanding is not formed through instruction alone, but through engagement with real-world problems, communities, and public life. This idea has taken different forms over time, shaped by the social and political conditions of each period.

Service learning emerged as a way to give structure to this idea. It brought together academic learning, engagement with real-world issues, and reflection into a coherent approach to civic education.

However, while the idea gained recognition, the systems required to sustain it did not develop in the same way.

Its trajectory has been shaped by periods of expansion and decline, influenced by shifts in policy, funding, and institutional support. At different moments, service learning has moved from local experimentation to national policy attention, and then back to decentralized implementation.

Understanding this trajectory is critical to understanding the present.

Part I traces this evolution, examining how service learning developed across changing contexts, and how these historical patterns continue to shape its role in education systems today.

Chapter 1 examines the early roots of service learning from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, focusing on community-based experiments, philosophical foundations, and the first policy efforts that linked education with real-world engagement.

Chapter 2 traces its expansion and institutionalization during the 1960s to 1980s, highlighting the role of social movements, federal programs, and the emergence of service learning as a recognized educational approach.

Chapter 3 examines how shifting democratic conditions and federal policy shaped the entry of service learning into K–12 education from the 1990s to the early 2010s, including the rise and subsequent weakening of national infrastructure.

Chapter 4 focuses on California in the post-2011 period, analyzing how service learning has continued within a decentralized system shaped by local control, evolving policy signals, and targeted state-level initiatives.

Methodology: Part I

Part I is based on secondary research and uses a historical-analytical method to examine the evolution of service learning across changing social, political, economic, and educational contexts. The analysis relies on:

1. Social, political and economic histories (books, academic papers),
2. policy documents & legislative acts education research,
3. institutional records (universities, programs, foundations), and
4. philosophical writings on education and civic life.

Key moments are selected based on their significance in shaping the relationship between education and civic engagement, as established in credible historical and academic sources. Selection is based on the following criteria:

1. the emergence of new educational philosophies and pedagogical approaches;
2. the influence of social and political movements;
3. shifts in economic conditions affecting educational priorities; and,
4. in later periods, the development of policy frameworks and institutional support.

The analysis is structured across four time periods, each defined by a distinct set of drivers shaping the evolution of service learning.

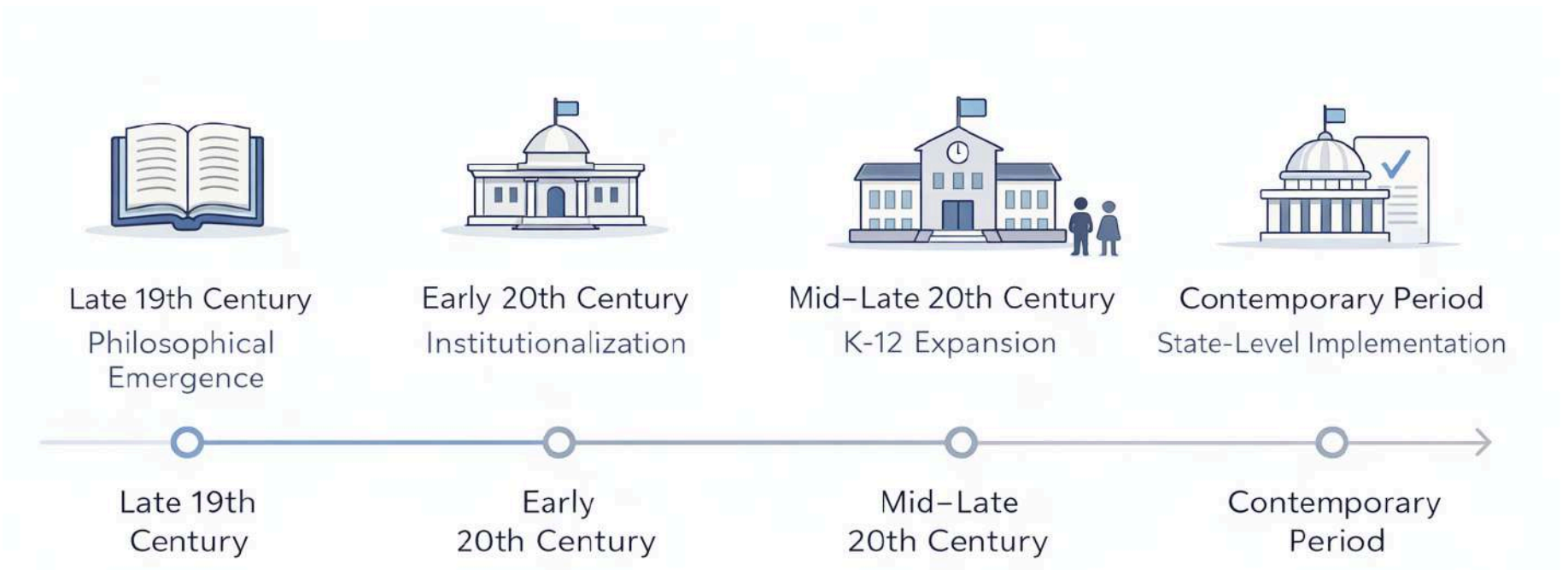
Chapter 1 examines the philosophical emergence of service learning, situating early ideas within broader social and political movements that emphasized the relationship between education, community, and democratic life.

Chapter 2 traces its gradual institutionalization, analyzing how changing social and political conditions led to the incorporation of these ideas into educational practice and early programmatic structures.

Chapter 3 focuses on the expansion of service learning into K–12 education, examining policy responses to declining civic trust in the United States and the role of federal initiatives alongside economic constraints in shaping its trajectory and limiting sustained scale.

Chapter 4 examines the evolution of service learning within California, focusing on state-level policy developments, programmatic shifts, and the transition to a decentralized implementation model

The periodization begins in the late nineteenth century, corresponding to the consolidation of modern public education systems and the emergence of structured efforts to connect learning with community and civic life.



Note:
This section presents a selective analysis of key developments relevant to the evolution of service learning, rather than an exhaustive historical account.All sources are documented through footnotes to ensure transparency and traceability.

Chapter 1
Roots of Service Learning (1890s–1950s)

Two young girls carrying placards with the slogan "Abolish Child Slavery" in English and in Yiddish. Photo taken probably during the workers' march, New York, 1 May 1909 [1]

1.1 Introduction

By the late 19th century, the world was entering an era of intensifying tension. Rapid industrialization was reshaping economies and cities across continents, even as inequality, labor unrest, and political instability grew beneath the surface.[2] Though these tensions would later be overshadowed by the world wars that defined the 20th century, they were already forcing societies to confront fundamental questions about progress, responsibility, and human dignity.

In the United States of America, these pressures were especially visible, as rapid industrial growth, mass immigration, and unresolved racial inequality collided in cities faster than civic institutions could adapt. The social pressures of this moment were prompting communities to ask what kind of society they hoped to build.

Education could not stand apart from this question.

It was during this period of social strain in 1899 that John Dewey reminded us that **"the school is fundamentally a social institution."**[3] A school reflects the life around it. When that life was marked by strain and uncertainty, classrooms, too, felt the pressure. The traditional school, removed from daily realities, seemed increasingly inadequate.

In response, young people in educational institutions confronted the realities of industrial cities firsthand and engaged in emerging forms of learning grounded in community life. Reformers, too, began to argue that education must respond to the social conditions shaping students' lives, and new experiments quietly took shape.

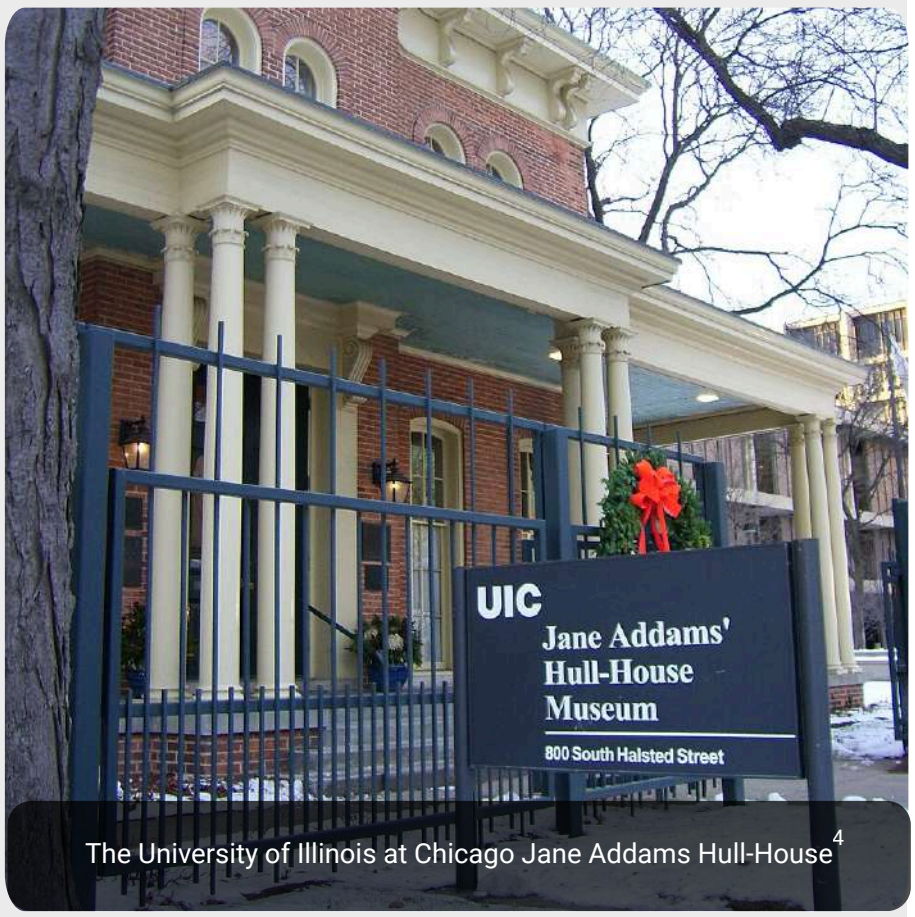
Out of these experiments would emerge an idea that would echo far beyond their moment and reshape the present and future of Education.

This chapter traces how these early American experiments, alongside parallel developments across the globe, laid the groundwork for the service-learning movement that would later take shape.

> "I believe that the **school is primarily a social institution.** Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends " - **John Dewey**

1. Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abolish_child_slavery.jpg (LC-DIG-ppmsca-06591), accessed April 12,2026
2. Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution: 1789–1848 (New York: Vintage, 1996). John Dewey, My Pedagogic Creed (1897), https://archive.org/details/mypedagogiccree00dewegoog, accessed April 12, 2026.
3. John Dewey, My Pedagogic Creed (1897), https://archive.org/details/mypedagogiccree00dewegoog, accessed April 12, 2026.

1.2 Early U.S. Foundations



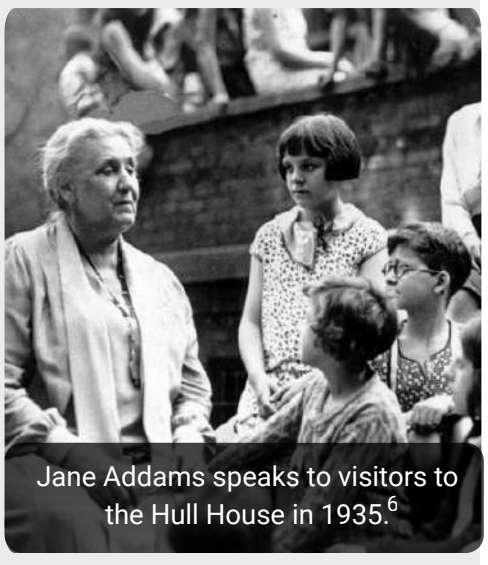
The University of Illinois at Chicago Jane Addams Hull-House[4]

One of the earliest and most influential American efforts to link learning with community life took shape in Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods in the late 19th century.

In 1889, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founded **Hull House**, a settlement house that quickly became a crossroads of cultural life, civic reform, and social investigation. What began as a "community of university women" soon evolved into a bustling center where residents mapped housing conditions, studied labor exploitation, challenged political corruption, and worked side by side with their neighbors to understand the forces shaping daily life.

Addams believed that **people must learn from "life itself,"** and the daily work of Hull House reflected that conviction.[5]

> We forget that the accumulation of knowledge and the holding of convictions must finally result in the application of that knowledge and those convictions to life itself.
> — **Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics**


Jane Addams speaks to visitors to the Hull House in 1935.[6]

These activities advanced a radical idea for the era: that the **community itself could be a site of education.**

Hull House was not a standalone experiment. It drew the attention of major thinkers, including **John Dewey**, who lived nearby and lectured at the settlement.[7] Dewey recognized in Hull House: a practical expression of the democratic and experiential principles he had been developing, and believed that **schools should function as miniature democracies**, places where people learn cooperation, inquiry, and shared responsibility by living them.[8] [9]

The work unfolding in Chicago slowly started forming a movement that showed that education could respond to social conditions and that communities could function as classrooms.

This movement led to the first policy in this direction.

The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created the Cooperative Extension system, a bold federal experiment that asked universities to step beyond their campuses and share agricultural, technical, and health knowledge with rural communities.[10] In doing so, universities began to adopt what Hull House had modeled: learning as a process rooted in real problems and shared action.

The Smith-Lever Act, 1914:
Established Cooperative Extension and became the first U.S. policy that required universities to apply learning in real community settings.

By the 1940s and 1950s, this spirit of applied learning had taken firmer shape in higher education. Colleges and universities expanded community-based projects and experimented in their own ways.[11]

By **mid-century,** a clear pattern had emerged. Education in the United States, once confined largely to classrooms and textbooks, was slowly opening itself to the world.

These developments, however, were not uniquely American. As the US was reshaping its approach to learning, other parts of the world were responding to similar pressures and arriving at ideas that echoed, paralleled, or even influenced those emerging in the U.S.

4. Hied5, "UIC Hull House," via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UIC_Hull_House.JPG, accessed April 12, 2026.
5. Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House: With Autobiographical Notes (New York: Macmillan, 1910), https://archive.org/details/twentyyearsathu00addagoog, accessed April 11, 2026.
6. Wikimedia Commons, "Jane Addams. Movimiento Settlement," https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jane_addams._Movimiento_Settlement.jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
7. Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House: With Autobiographical Notes (New York: Macmillan, 1910), https://archive.org/details/twentyyearsathu00addagoog, accessed April 11, 2026.
8. John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: Macmillan, 1916), https://archive.org/details/democracyandedu00deweuoft, accessed April 11, 2026
9. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Jane Addams and John Dewey: A Pragmatic Partnership," American Journal of Education 117, no. 2 (2011): 211-235, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/657665, accessed April 11, 2026.
10. Smith-Lever Act of 1914, 7 U.S.C. § 341 et seq., https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-10296/pdf/COMPS-10296.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.
11. Campus Compact, A Brief History of Civic Engagement in Higher Education, https://compact.org/resource-posts/a-brief-history-of-civic-engagement-in-higher-education/, accessed April 11, 2026.

1.3 Parallel Global Movements

The main 1894 building of Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street, London E1.[12]

Education for All, India Post stamp (2020)[13]

Post War Planning and Reconstruction in Britain- Workmen construction outside lavatory blocks for a group of temporary houses built from converted army Nissen Huts. (1935-45)[14]

Across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, societies confronting industrialization, social inequality, and political change began asking similar questions about the role of education in public life.

In the 1880s and 1890s, as American cities absorbed waves of immigrants and grappled with labor unrest, Britain faced parallel pressures produced by industrial capitalism.[15]

Toynbee Hall, founded in London in 1884, emerged as an institutional response and became a model for community-rooted education. University graduates lived in working-class neighborhoods, offering adult classes, discussion groups, legal aid, and social research.[16] When Jane Addams visited Toynbee Hall in 1888, she encountered an approach that echoed her own emerging convictions. What she brought back to Chicago shaped Hull House directly in 1889.[17]

Across the world, in India, a very different context produced a remarkably parallel idea.

In India during the 1930s and 1940s, as the country confronted colonial rule and the challenge of national self-determination, Mahatma Gandhi developed ***Nai Talim***, or Basic Education. Schooling was woven into the everyday life of villages, with children learning spinning, weaving, farming, sanitation, and collective decision-making as part of their education.[18]

Gandhi believed that education should cultivate self-reliance, social responsibility, and moral awareness, ideas strikingly similar to those being explored by Dewey and Addams. Even though the two traditions evolved independently, both were grappling with a shared insight: that education was at its strongest when it was rooted in lived experiences and the life of the community.

On the other hand, Europe's contribution emerged from yet another set of pressures. After the devastation of the Second World War, many societies faced the urgent task of rebuilding not only physical infrastructure but civic trust. In the late 1940s and 1950s, young people joined **reconstruction brigades** that rebuilt towns and restored civic institutions, and hence blurred the line between service and education.[19]

By the mid-twentieth century, these parallel developments began to converge within a rapidly globalizing world. Two world wars, expanding international institutions, and growing awareness of shared human vulnerability pushed nations to think beyond borders when addressing education, development, and peace.

This international shift found institutional expression in the founding of the **United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** in 1945,[20] giving an international platform to ideas that had previously emerged in scattered pockets around the world. American scholars and institutions participated actively in this early dialogue, and UNESCO's emphasis on education as a social and ethical responsibility reinforced trends already underway in the United States.

12. Wikimedia Commons, "Toynbee Hall 2020," https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toynbee_Hall_2020.jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
13. Wikimedia Commons, "Stamp of India - 2020 - Nai Talim - Education for All," https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamp_of_India_-_2020_-_Colnect_996656_-_Nai_Talim_-_Education_For_All.jpeg, accessed April 12, 2026.
14. Imperial War Museums, "Post-War Planning and Reconstruction in Britain: The Construction of Temporary Housing," via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Post_War_Planning_and_Reconstruction_in_Britain-_the_Construction_of_Temporary_Housing_D24231.jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
15. Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Empire: 1875-1914 (New York: Vintage, 1989).
16. Michael Barnett, Toynbee Hall: 130 Years of Social Reform (London: Toynbee Hall, 2017).
17. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Hull House," https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hull-House, accessed April 11, 2026.
18. UNESCO, Basic Education (Paris: UNESCO, 1947), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000073979, accessed April 11, 2026.
19. Akira Iriye, Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
20. UNESCO, Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022 ed. (Paris: UNESCO, 2022), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382500, accessed April 11, 2026.

1.4 Conclusion

By the mid-twentieth century, decades of experimentation in settlement houses, university programs, and postwar reconstruction brigades had begun to shape a new educational imagination in the U.S. One where learning grows deeper when it engages real communities, real problems, and real responsibilities.

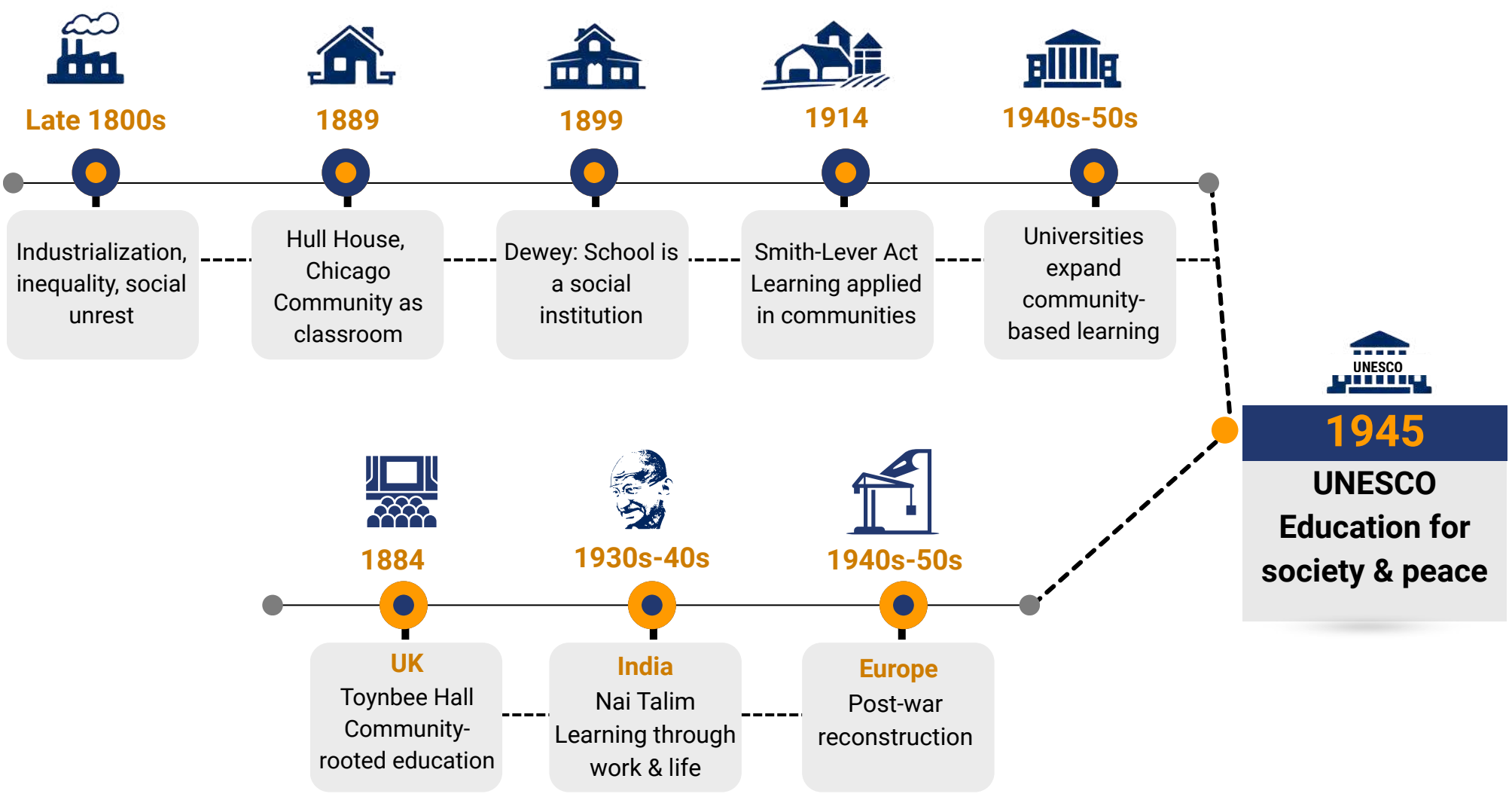
Policymakers had begun to support community-engaged learning through initiatives like **Cooperative Extension**. And now, through **UNESCO,** American educators were part of a global dialogue that framed education as essential to peace, justice, and human development.

The stage was set.

What had been scattered experiments in the early twentieth-century U.S would, in the years to come, gather force and direction in the changing democratic environment of the US. **Universities would take the lead** in translating these ideas into structured programs. What Addams practiced in Chicago and Gandhi envisioned in Indian villages would reappear, reframed, expanded, and systematically studied, in the service-learning experiments in the U.S of the 1960s and 1970s.

The next chapter follows this transformation into practice. It traces how the ideas developed across decades began to take concrete form in educational institutions.

TIMELINE FLOW



Chapter 2
Civic Expansion and Institutionalization (1960s-1980s)

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the 1964 Civil Rights Act as Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, look on[21]

2.1 Introduction

By the early 1960s, America was undergoing transformations that reshaped public life.

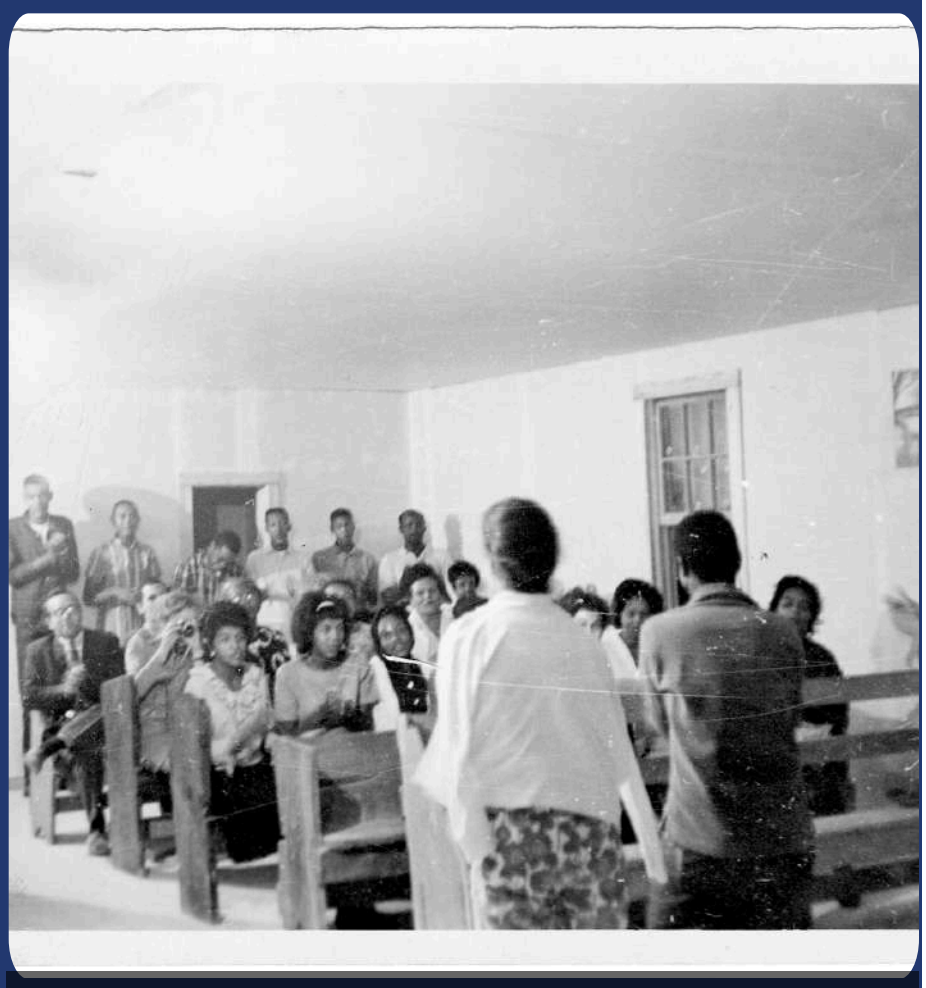
Cold War pressures required the nation to project moral leadership abroad, while domestically, communities were challenging segregation, demanding voting rights, responding to poverty, and redefining the role of young people in society.[22]Educational institutions were not insulated from these tensions. They felt the effects of political uncertainty and community demands in ways that reshaped their educational landscape.

The ideas introduced in Chapter 2, that learning could be rooted in community life, informed by democratic values, and shaped through experience, found renewed relevance in this turbulent period.

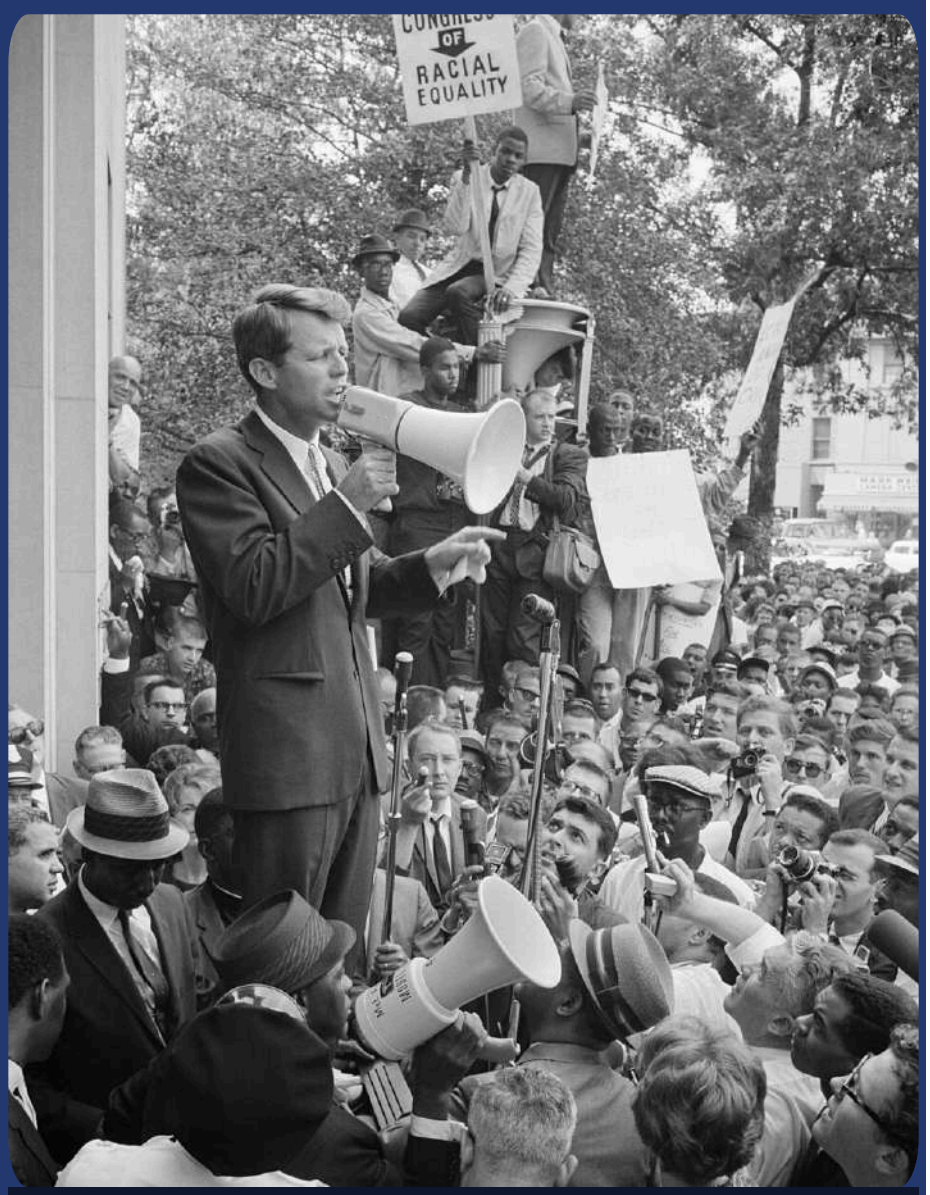
But it was the convergence of three forces that ultimately moved the nation toward service-learning as an educational approach: powerful social movements, government programs created in response to those movements, and the gradual adaptation of these ideas by educational institutions.

This chapter traces that shift.

21. Wikimedia Commons, “Lyndon Johnson signing Civil Rights Act, July 2, 1964,” https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lyndon_Johnson_signing_Civil_Rights_Act,_July_2,_1964.jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
22. Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).



Freedom Summer [23]



Robert F. Kennedy speaking to a crowd of African Americans and whites through a megaphone outside the Justice Department.[24]

2.2 Social Movements and Civic Awakening

The modern roots of service-learning lie in the broader civic environment of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Civil Rights Movement led to community mobilization across the country, and education quickly became part of the struggle. **Freedom Schools, created during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964,**[25]demonstrated a new way of learning: students explored literacy, history, and civic rights through direct engagement with the realities of their lives.

At the same time, young people were asserting themselves as active participants in public life. High school and college students organized walkouts, supported local campaigns, and raised their voices on issues ranging from racial justice to the Vietnam War.[26]

> True service-learning connects education with real-world experiences, rooted in empathy, responsibility, community, and service to humanity.
>
> **Ankur Patel**
>
> ***School Teacher, Policy Cafe by Sewa USA***

The War on Poverty intensified these currents. Grassroots activism and community organizing pushed for solutions to unemployment, inadequate schools, and unequal services.[27]Local leaders demanded a role in shaping programs affecting their neighborhoods, arguing that meaningful change could occur only when communities had a voice.

Together, these movements of civil rights, community empowerment, and youth activism reshaped American thinking about education. They reinforced the belief that learning should connect to the world beyond the classroom.

23. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, “Foner (Thomas) Freedom Summer papers,” via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Foner_(Thomas)_Freedom_Summer_papers._(9068632240).jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
24. Wikimedia Commons, “Robert Kennedy CORE rally speech,” https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Kennedy_CORE_rally_speech2.jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
25. National Archives, “The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC),” National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power/sncc, accessed April 11, 2026.
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27. Michael L. Gillette, Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

2.3 Policy Responses and Movements

Peace Corps Volunteers[28]

In the 1960s, the United States of America introduced a wave of programs designed to address both international and domestic challenges through service. **The Peace Corps, launched in 1961**, sent young Americans abroad to work on community development projects, fostering a form of experiential learning rooted in cross-cultural understanding.[29]

Around the same time, the War on Poverty produced **Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)** and placed volunteers in under-resourced communities, where they worked closely with local schools and organizations.[30] This domestic counterpart to the Peace Corps reinforced the idea that service could be a powerful tool for both community improvement and personal growth.

Community Action Agencies added yet another dimension. Their mandate for "maximum feasible participation" placed students, residents, and parents at the center of public decision-making.[31] This shift brought civic participation into the daily work of education and helped frame community engagement as part of students' growth, not separate from it.

One of the earliest milestones in service-learning came in 1967, when the term **'service-learning' first appeared as part of the Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) initiative**. Associated with the early work of Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey, the program allowed students to earn academic credit and financial support for work on community problems.[32]

One of the first programs to use the term "service-learning"-1967

The Southern Regional Education Board was among the earliest institutions to apply the term service-learning to a structured program linking community service with academic credit and financial support

Many other such programs flourished during the 1960s and 1970s. As these policies took shape, educational institutions began adopting elements of these civic initiatives, creating environmental projects and community partnerships.

By the 1980s, studies began documenting improvements in attendance, motivation, and civic understanding among students who participated in structured service experiences.[33]

But these educational advances of the 1980s unfolded against a more turbulent national backdrop.

The aftershocks of the Vietnam War, the erosion of trust following Watergate, and the economic restructuring that hollowed out many local communities all contributed to declining civic confidence. Through the late 1970s and into the 1980s, youth participation in civic life began to weaken.[34]

The field was maturing institutionally, but the society it hoped to strengthen was showing signs of strain.

> Parents can be both bridges and barriers to service-learning; building their buy-in is essential where it's still lacking.
>
> **Elizabeth Navarro**
>
> ***Migration Policy Expert, Policy Cafe by Sewa USA***

28. Peace Corps, "Peace Corps 44 (54042272949)," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peace_Corps_44_(54042272949).jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.
29. Stanley Meisler, When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and Its First Fifty Years (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).
30. William H. Crook and Ross Thomas, Warriors for the Poor: The Story of VISTA; Volunteers in Service to America (1969), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED028355, accessed April 11, 2026.
31. DAngel Zambrano, A "Brief" History of Community Action (1964-2026), https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=470712, accessed April 11, 2026.
32. SAGE Publications, "Service-Learning," in Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent, https://sk.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/educationalreform/chpt/service-learning, accessed April 11, 2026.
33. Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, The Impact of Experiential Education on Adolescent Development (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1982).
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2.4 Conclusion

MG George W. Casey, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), checks a map at Landing Zone Barry[35]

The 1960s to 1980s period marked an era of experimentation.

Decades of work in philosophical foundations, settlement houses, and youth initiatives had given the field a practice foundation, shared vocabulary, and emerging research evidence.

Yet these developments unfolded alongside a shifting national mood with the post-effects of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and economic restructuring.

By the late 1980s, voter turnout was declining, public trust in institutions had fallen to historic lows, and communities worried that younger generations were drifting away from civic life.

This tension: strengthening educational frameworks but weakening civic engagement on the ground, did not halt the momentum behind service-learning, but it complicated its trajectory. The ideas taking shape in universities and community centers still held power, yet they now entered a society far less certain about its democratic foundations.

It was into this crosscurrent that the next era would step.

The intellectual and institutional groundwork laid in higher education was beginning to **reach kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) schools.** Even as civic participation declined, the policy imagination of the U.S was increasingly shaped by the belief that schools could help rebuild civic engagement.

Chapter 4 picks up at this turning point. It traces how these foundations met the realities of a changing democracy, and how, in response, the nation began constructing policies that attempted to bring academic learning and civic responsibility together in K-12 education.

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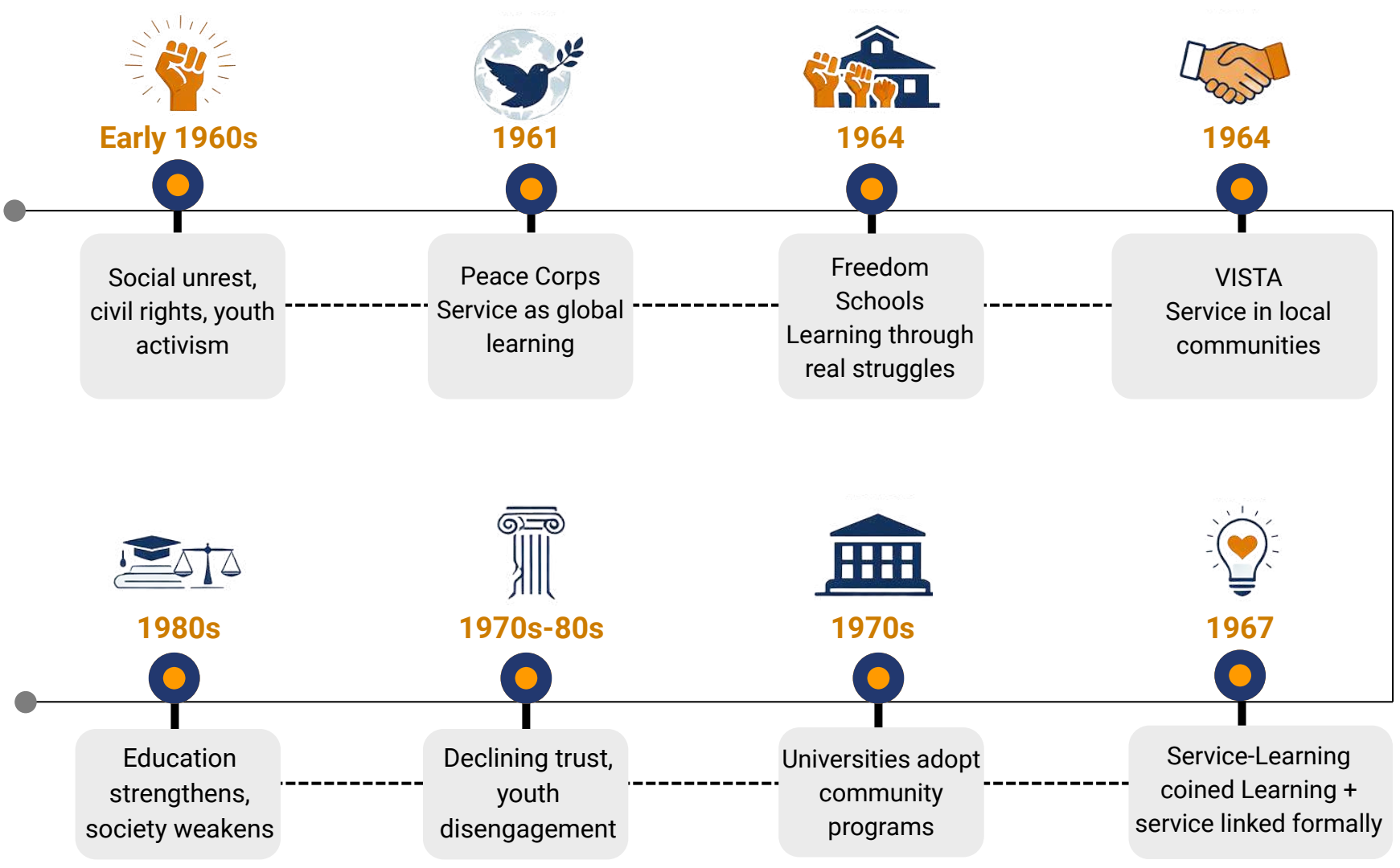
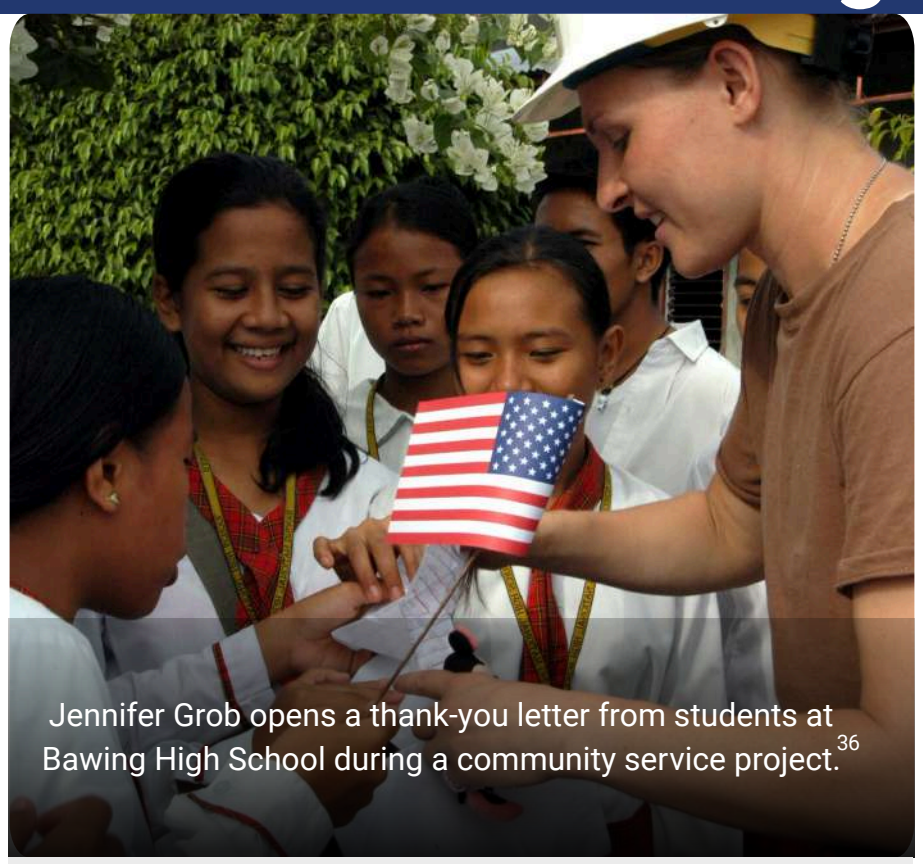


35. SP4 James Seller, "MG George W. Casey, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), checks a map at Landing Zone Barry," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MG_George_W._Casey,_1st_Cavalry_Division_(Airmobile),_checks_a_map_at_Landing_Zone_Barry.jpg, accessed April 12, 2026.

Chapter 3 : How a shifting democracy shaped K-12 Service-learning (1990s - Early 2010s)



Jennifer Grob opens a thank-you letter from students at Bawing High School during a community service project.[36]

3.1 Introduction

By the late twentieth century, America was working through the accumulated consequences of post-war conflicts, civil rights struggles, and late twentieth-century economic restructuring.

Immigration increased, and communities became more diverse, even as traditional sources of economic stability weakened.[37]At the same time, the U.S was entering a more openly globalized economy, one in which educational performance was increasingly measured against international competitors. Concerns about academic outcomes, workforce readiness, and national competitiveness grew sharper through the 1980s and into the 1990s.[38]
Alongside these pressures ran a quieter but persistent civic strain.
The political distrust following Watergate, the disillusionment of Vietnam, and the economic restructuring had weakened confidence in public institutions. Traditional pathways into civic life, including unions, neighborhood organizations, and youth groups, were eroding.

In response, youth civic participation weakened. Voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds dropped from nearly half in 1972 to roughly one-third by the late 1980s.[39]

Schools found themselves at the center of these overlapping pressures.

They were expected to raise academic performance, prepare students for an uncertain labor market, respond to demographic change, and address signs of civic disengagement

Education policy during this period reflected an effort to adjust to these demands, producing multiple reform strands shaped by different priorities.

It was under this broader redefinition of education that service-learning reached K-12.

It emerged as one response among many, offering schools a way to connect learning to community life while operating alongside performance and workforce priorities. This chapter traces how service-learning took shape within that environment.

3.2 The Federal Turn to Service

As concerns about civic disengagement deepened with the post-effects of Watergate, Vietnam, and economic restructuring, it culminated in President Bush's campaign to promote volunteerism as a way to strengthen national community life.[40]Together, these forces produced the **National and Community Service Act of 1990**, the country's **first legislative attempt** in the modern era to rebuild civic engagement as part of education through service-learning in K-12.[41]

The Act offered grants to schools and community organizations willing to link service with learning. But its purpose was exploratory. It seeded the idea; it did not yet supply the infrastructure required to support schools across fifty states.

That system arrived only three years later.

The **National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993** amended the earlier law and reshaped the landscape by creating the **Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)**, which administers **AmeriCorps.**[42]
What the 1990 Act had seeded, the 1993 Act organized.
School partnerships, service fellowships, and community programs were brought under a single federal framework. **Learn and Serve America** was folded into this structure, giving states and districts sustained, if modest, support to develop K-12 service-learning initiatives.

For much of the late 1990s and early 2000s, this framework defined the federal role in service-learning. Learn and Serve America did not mandate adoption; instead, it provided a thin but real backbone: competitive grants, state-level coordination, and a degree of national legitimacy. Where states and districts had the capacity to act, service-learning spread. Where they did not, it remained peripheral.

Service-learning's presence in schools depended less on national[43] mandate than on local leadership, community partnerships, and the availability of funds to sustain implementation.

36. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Shannon K. Cassidy, "US Navy 070217-N-9604C-001 Lt. j.g. Jennifer Grob, executive officer of Team Engineer, opens a thank you letter given to her by a group of students at Bawing High School during a community service project," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_070217-N-9604C-001_Lt._j.g._Jennifer_Grob,_executive_officer_of_Team_Engineer,_opens_a_thank_you_letter_given_to_her_by_a_group_of_students_at_Bawing_High_School_during_a_community_service_project.jpg, accessed April 13, 2026.
37. Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Roger Daniels, Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882 (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).
38. National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (Washington, DC: National Commission on Excellence in Education (ED), 1983), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED226006, accessed April 11, 2026.
39. U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration in the Election of November (Current Population Survey, 1972-1990), https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting.html, accessed April 11, 2026.
40. Points of Light Foundation, "History of Points of Light," Points of Light Foundation, https://www.pointsoflight.org/history/, accessed April 11, 2026.
41. National and Community Service Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-610, https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/1430, accessed April 11, 2026.
42. National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, Pub. L. 103-82, https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/2010, accessed April 11, 2026.
43. Ibid

3.3 The Attempt to Rebalance: The Serve America Act

By the late 2000s, the civic anxieties that had prompted the 1990s service push had intensified.

The 2008 financial crisis brought massive unemployment, strained state and local budgets, and placed new pressure on community organizations already operating with limited resources.

At the same time, the post-war crisis had exposed gaps in the nation's civic infrastructure.

The failures of coordination and response revealed during **Hurricane Katrina** in 2005 lingered in public memory, reinforcing concerns about the country's capacity to mobilize effectively in moments of collective need.

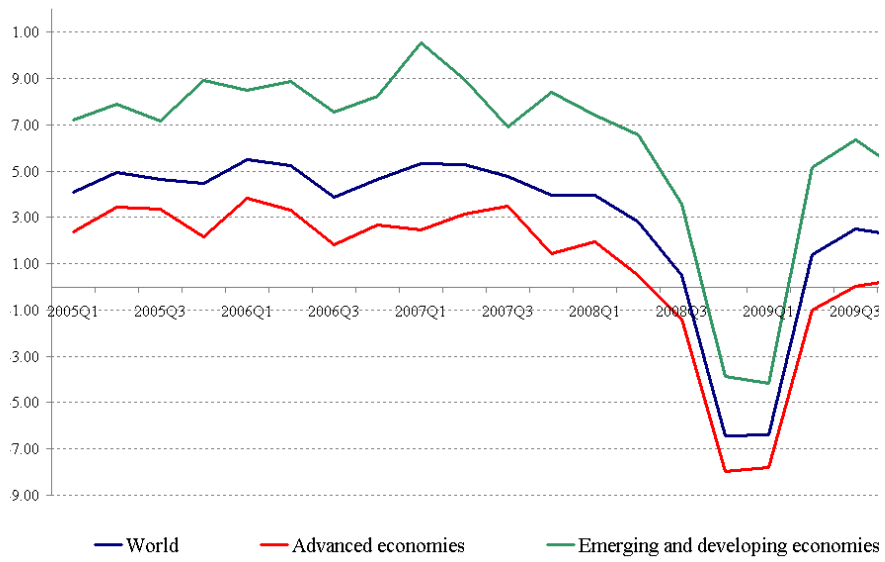
In this environment, national service reemerged as a practical response to overlapping challenges.

In this context, Congress passed the **Serve America Act in 2009**, a sweeping reauthorization that expanded AmeriCorps, authorized new service corps, and created initiatives such as the Social Innovation Fund and youth engagement programs meant to reconnect young people to communities.[44]

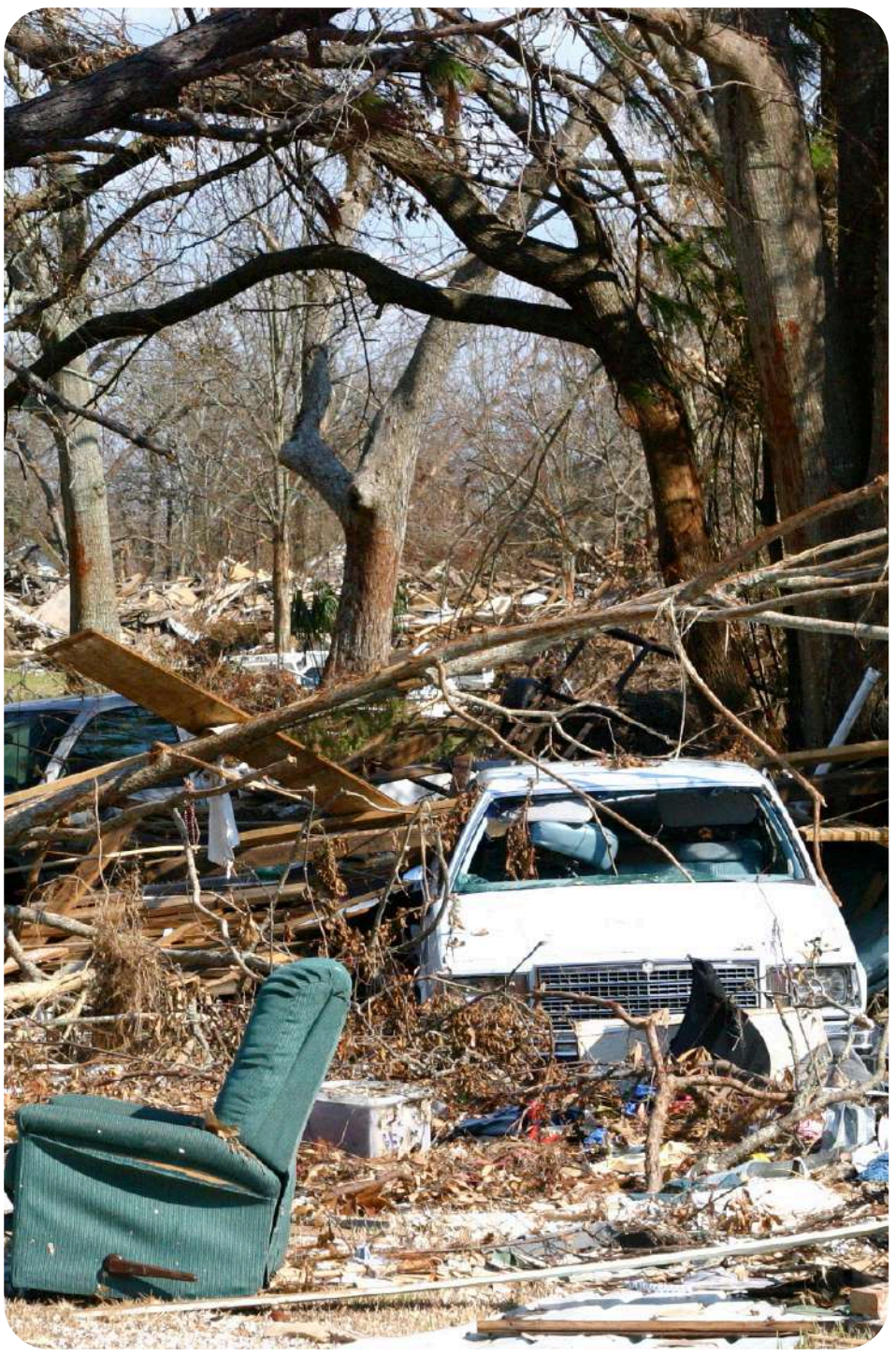
Yet the same economic crisis that renewed national interest in service also constrained it.

The financial crisis triggered deep federal budget tightening, and the ambitious goals of the Serve America Act quickly collided with fiscal reality. While the Act authorized major expansions, appropriations never matched authorization levels. In 2010-11, recession-driven cuts **reduced the CNCS's capacity**, and the Learn and Serve America Act, the only federal legislation dedicated specifically to K-12 service-learning, was eliminated.[45]

The result was a partial institutional realignment: service-learning remained a federal priority in principle, but the **national infrastructure became thinner and more fragmented**. Instead of a dedicated K-12 backbone, service-learning increasingly depended on state initiatives, district leadership, and AmeriCorps-linked partnerships. The decade closed with service-learning still alive, but no longer supported by the unified federal structure envisioned in 2009.



World GDP growth, annualized quarter-over-quarter.[46]



National and Community Service Act of 1990
First legislative attempt in the modern era to rebuild civic engagement as part of education through service-learning in K-12.

The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993
Reshaped the landscape by creating the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which administers AmeriCorps.

The Serve America Act of 2009
Expanded AmeriCorps, authorized a new service corps, and created initiatives such as the Social Innovation Fund and youth engagement programs.

44. Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, Pub. L. 111-13, https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ13/PLAW-111publ13.pdf, accessed April amer11, 2026.
45. Congressional Research Service, *The Corporation for National and Community Service: Overview of Programs and Funding* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2023), accessed April 11, 2026, https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33931.html
46. Bình Giang, "Word GDP Growth.png," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Word_GDP_Growth.png, accessed April 12, 2026.

3.4 A New Era of Distributed Responsibility

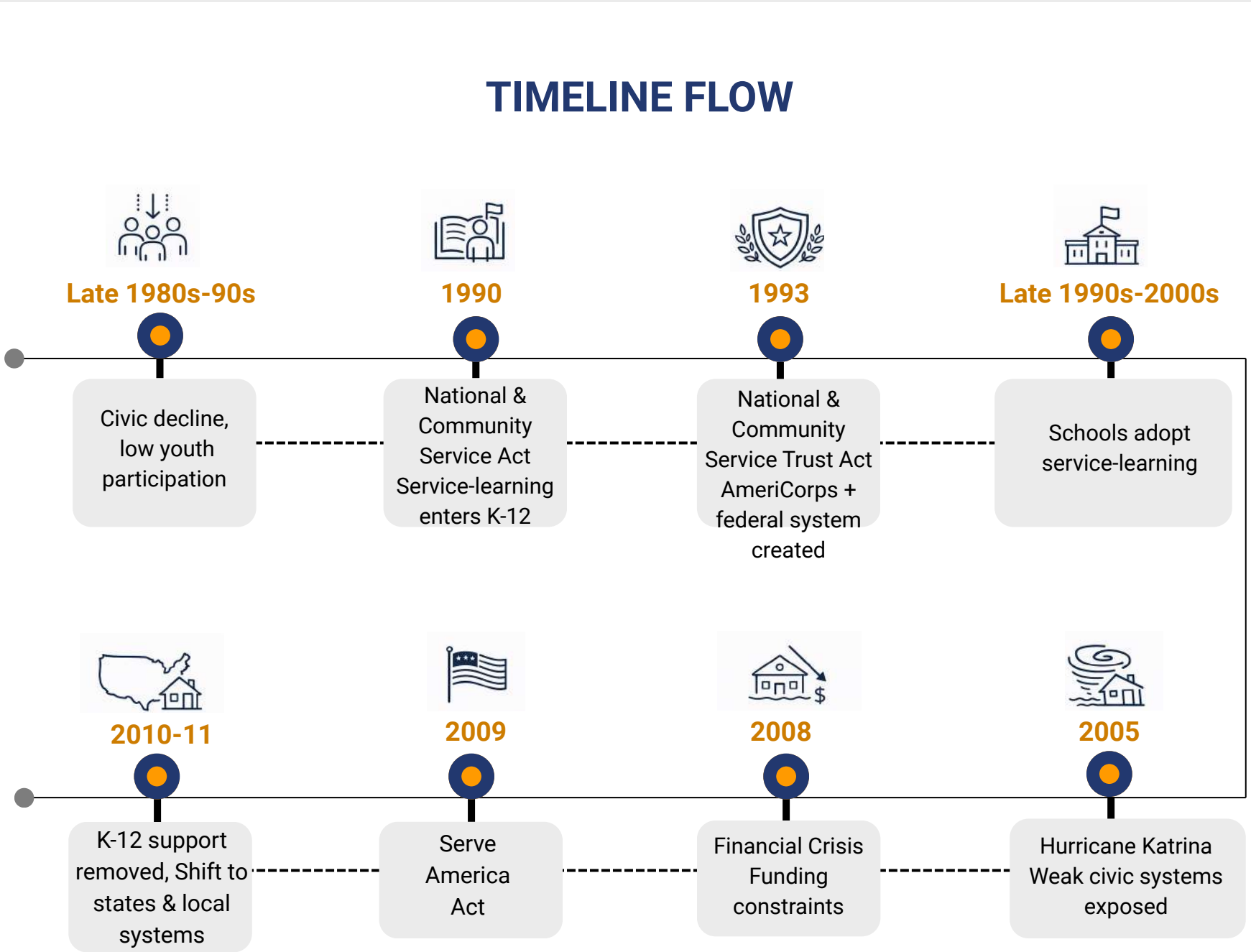
With the loss of federal infrastructure in 2011, the responsibility for sustaining service-learning shifted decisively to the states. What survived did so because states, counties, schools, and local nonprofits stepped forward to fill the vacuum. [47]

Some states and districts built on the momentum of the 1990s and early 2000s, weaving service-learning into graduation requirements, district priorities, and teacher training. Elsewhere, regional networks and strong district leadership sustained programs even without state mandates.[48]

California emerged as one of the most active ecosystems in this period. Large districts integrated service-learning into curriculum initiatives; county offices of education offered training and technical assistance; and universities and community organizations formed long-standing partnerships that kept civic engagement visible in public schools.

Yet California's experience also revealed the challenges of a decentralized system. Without a statewide mandate or consistent funding, a patchwork of approaches shaped by district priorities, county capacity, and long-standing partnerships with universities and community organizations surfaced. Some efforts scaled. Others stalled.

The next chapter follows this uneven terrain. It examines how service-learning in California evolved within these constraints, revealing what became possible, what remained fragile, and what could not be sustained once responsibility shifted away from the federal center.



47. Shelley H. Billig and Andrew Furco, eds., Service-Learning Through a Multidisciplinary Lens (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2002).
48. National Youth Leadership Council, "Resources on K-12 Service-Learning," NYLC, https://nylc.org/resources/, accessed April 11, 2026.

Chapter 4
California and the Institutionalization of Service-learning (2011- Present)

An on-site native garden with North Idaho species educates visitors about connections between people, plants, and pollinators.

4.1 Introduction

By the early twenty-first century, service-learning had already lived several institutional lives in American education.

Born in settlement houses as a response to social upheaval, service-learning first took shape as a community-centered educational practice grounded in civic responsibility. The next phase refined it in universities as a form of experiential pedagogy, where learning through experience became a recognized instructional approach. In the late twentieth century, service-learning entered a third phase, formalized through federal policy and programs that gave it a name, a definition, and institutional support within public education, even where practice remained uneven.

Service-learning's core idea, that academic learning deepens when it engages real community needs, has survived changes in politics, funding, and educational fashion.

California is part of this history. During the 1990s and 2000s, Learn and Serve America provided the state with a national framework through which teachers, districts, nonprofits, and local agencies built partnerships connecting classrooms to community life. Service-learning was not universal, but it was institutionally legible. It had a name, a definition, and a place within public education.

That scaffolding receded quietly in 2011 with the defunding of Learn and Serve America.

This shift unfolded as California's education system was simultaneously absorbing the aftershocks of the financial crisis, redesigning its funding structure, and refocusing attention on equity and academic recovery. Within this environment, service-learning did not disappear. But it increasingly depended on local capacity rather than statewide design.[49]

This chapter traces how California navigated that transition. It follows the period after federal withdrawal, the reorganization of authority under local control, and the state's re-engagement with civic learning priorities, within which service-learning practices reappeared.

The story that emerges is not one of abandonment, but of continuity reshaped by decentralization.

49. Learning Policy Institute, California's Local Control Funding Formula: Next Steps Toward Equity (2024), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED670929.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.

4.2 After Learn and Serve America: A Vacuum Without Collapse (2011-2016)

In the years immediately following the withdrawal of federal support through Learn and Serve America, service-learning in California did not end. It thinned, shifted, and localized.

There was no statewide pause or announcement. No new guidance arrived to replace what had been lost, no directive arrived to dismantle existing work either.

Decisions about whether service-learning would continue, contract, or disappear were made district by district, often school by school[50]

Service-learning became contingent.

The broader context reinforced this pattern. California schools were emerging from years of fiscal austerity. Administrators were focused on stabilizing budgets, restoring instructional capacity, and responding to new demands that emphasized measurable academic outcomes.[51] Within these constraints, service-learning, lacking a mandate or protected funding, competed with priorities that were immediate and system-driven.

In 2013, the adoption of **the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)**[52] quietly altered the terrain on which service-learning operated.

In 2013, California enacted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The LCFF fundamentally overhauled the state's prior K-12 education finance system, which studies found to be inequitable, irrational, and highly centralized. The formula distributes state grants to K-12 school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools based on student characteristics, including both grade level and whether they belong to groups identified for additional support: those from low-income families, English learners, or foster youth.

LCFF did not emerge from a civic education agenda, nor did it respond directly to the loss of federal service-learning support. It was a broader effort to restructure school finance after the financial crisis and address persistent inequities across districts.

But in practice, LCFF changed how survival was possible.
By replacing many categorical programs with a flexible funding model tied to broad state priorities such as student engagement, school climate, and parent involvement, LCFF gave districts the discretion and latitude to sustain programs aligned with local priorities.[53]

This introduced both **opportunity and optionality.**

Opportunity meant that districts with existing service-learning programs could absorb costs into general funds or embed activities within Local Control and Accountability Plans. Optionality meant that districts without such programs had the discretion, but not the impetus, to adopt them.

LCFF preserved continuity where it already existed, but it did not create momentum.

The reform neither named nor defined service-learning. As a result, the meaning of service-learning began to fragment across districts.

In some schools, service-learning continued as a structured pedagogical model. In other settings, the term was applied to volunteering, community service requirements, or civic activities disconnected from academic objectives.[54]

By the mid-2010s, service-learning's survival in California depended on local capacity rather than statewide expectation, and inherited practice rather than deliberate policy design.

50. Education Commission of the States, "50-State Comparison: Civic Education Policies," Education Commission of the States, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED626255.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.
51. Learning Policy Institute, California's Local Control Funding Formula: Next Steps Toward Equity (2024), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED670929.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.
52. California Department of Education, "Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)," California Department of Education,https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/, accessed April 11, 2026.
53. Ibid
54. National Youth Leadership Council, "Service-Learning," NYLC, https://nylc.org/service-learning/, accessed April 11, 2026.

4.3 Re-Entry Through Curriculum and Civic Recognition (2016- present)

By the mid-2010s, California began to re-enter the civic education space in a new way.

The state did not attempt to recreate the federal service-learning infrastructure that had existed under Learn and Serve America. Instead, it moved incrementally, shaping priorities through curriculum guidance, recognition frameworks, and civic signaling rather than program mandates.

The **2016 History-Social Science Framework (HSS)** for California Public Schools marked this shift clearly. Developed in a period of heightened political polarization, demographic change, and renewed concern about democratic participation carried forward from the preceding decade, the Framework articulated civic learning as a core responsibility of public education.[55]

Students were encouraged to engage in inquiry, analyze primary sources, examine contemporary public issues, and understand democratic institutions as living systems shaped by human choice.

This was a curricular response to a changing democracy.

Service-learning appeared within the Framework as one of several ways students might connect academic study to civic life. Over the following years, the state continued to signal the importance of civic participation through its policies. One of the most visible was the **State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE), adopted by the State Board of Education in 2020.**

The SSCE recognized graduating students who demonstrated civic knowledge, skills, and participation through coursework and engagement beyond the classroom. The Seal elevated civic engagement as an achievement worthy of formal recognition.[56]

In 2022, California took its first **explicit post-2011 step toward service-learning** through the establishment of the **California Serves Program.** Enacted in statute, the program named service-learning as a strategy for advancing civic engagement through the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and provided dedicated funding to support service-learning activities.[57]

Together, these developments shaped the civic landscape of California schools through the mid-2010s till today.

Service-learning continues within this expanding landscape where local capacity and partnerships support it.

55. California Department of Education, *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* (California Department of Education, 2016), https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssframeworkwhole.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.
56. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)," https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstateseal.asp, accessed April 11, 2026.
57. California Education Code § 51475, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=51475.&lawCode=EDC, accessed April 11, 2026.

4.4 Conclusion

In 2025, service-learning is visible within California's educational agenda.

It does so through an accumulation of signals. Curriculum guidance reaffirms service-learning as a meaningful educational outcome. Recognition frameworks emphasize civic learning. Across districts, schools are increasingly encouraged to offer students opportunities to connect academic study to real-world issues.

In this sense, service-learning is no longer peripheral. Yet the form it takes across California matters. Its form varies by district and school, influenced by prior partnerships, institutional memory, and local priorities.

As a result, service-learning now exists alongside a broad array of civic and service-oriented activities that vary in instructional intent and student experience. In some settings, it functions as a structured pedagogical model that integrates community work with academic learning and reflection. In others, similar activities take shape through volunteering, participation requirements, or civic projects.

This is the present landscape of service-learning in California's K-12 system.

Part I has shown how California arrived here.
Part II examines what this moment contains.

It moves from history to examination. It asks what existing policies do, how they interact, and what their combined effects reveal about service-learning's place in public education today.

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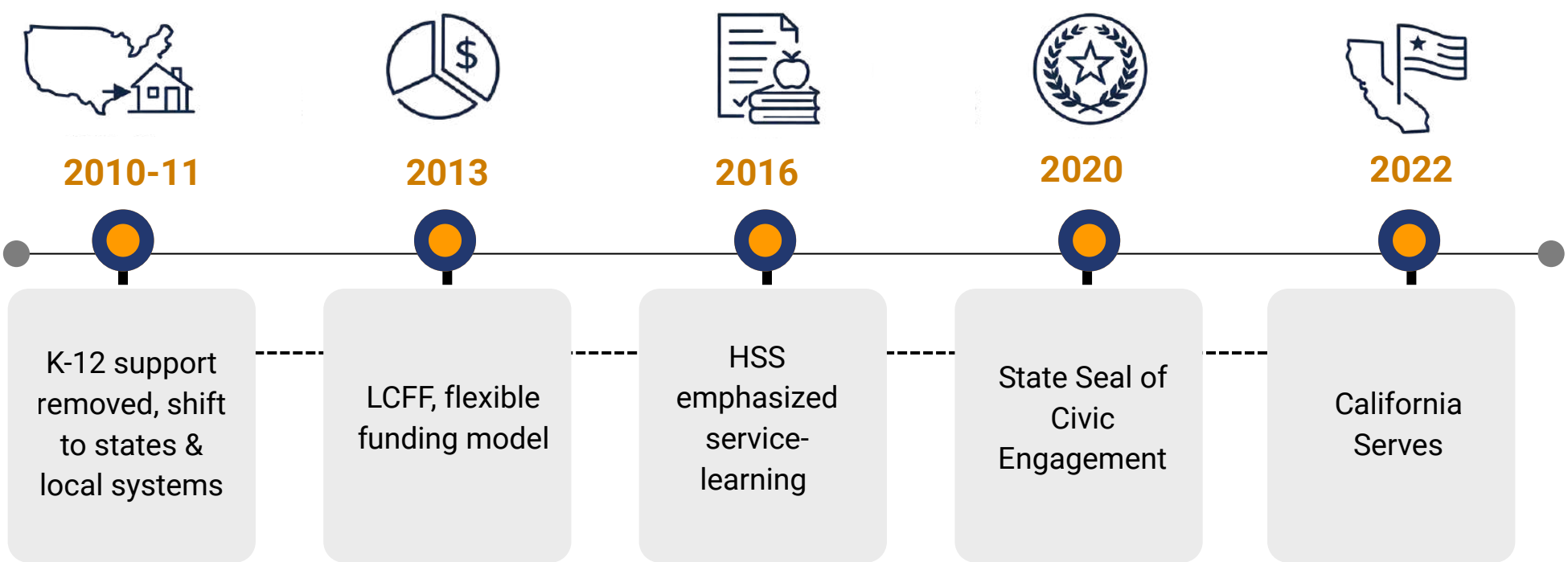


Part II:

Policy and Implementation, Service-learning in California

Introduction

For more than a century, educators and policymakers in the US have returned to a recurring insight that civic learning is most effective when it is practiced.

Service-learning emerged historically as one way to operationalize this insight. It offered a structured approach to connect curriculum, investigation, community engagement, and reflection, translating civic intent into educational practice.

Part I traced how this idea evolved over time. Part II turns to the present.

In California, the foundation for civic learning has already been meaningfully established. Through instruments such as the History–Social Science Framework, the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and the California Serves Program, the state has articulated a clear and forward-looking vision: to prepare students as informed, engaged citizens, and to recognize civic participation as an integral part of education.

This work of vision-setting is significant.

In public systems, defining what matters and signaling it consistently across curriculum, recognition, and programs is often the most complex and consequential step.

California has undertaken this step with clarity and intent, and the direction is now visible across the system.

Implementation, by contrast, is an evolving process. It strengthens over time through institutional learning, local adaptation, and sustained executive will. As districts interpret and operationalize this vision within diverse contexts, variations in practice naturally emerge.

Therefore, within the civic learning architecture, elements commonly associated with service-learning: investigation, action, and reflection, are visible across multiple policy instruments. At the same time, service-learning does not appear as a single, consistently defined instructional model within the system.

The result is not absence, but adjacency.

Service-learning is present within California's civic learning ecosystem, but it exists through an accumulation of signals rather than a unified structure. How these signals are interpreted, combined, and implemented varies across districts, shaping how service-learning is experienced in practice.

Part II begins from this present condition. It examines how California's current policies define civic learning, how service-learning is positioned within that definition, and how these policies translate into practice across districts.

Chapter 5 clarifies how service-learning is defined within California education policy and establishes the conceptual foundation for analysis.

Chapter 6 maps the civic learning architecture, examining how key policy instruments such as the History-Social Science Framework, the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and the California Serves Program interact within a decentralized system.

Chapter 7 analyzes how these policies are interpreted and implemented at the district level, identifying patterns in how civic learning and service-learning within it appear in practice.

Chapter 8 builds on this analysis to outline targeted pathways for strengthening service-learning within the existing system, focusing on improving coherence, access, and implementation across districts.

Methodology: Part II

Part II combines secondary research with primary district-level data to examine how service-learning is defined, structured, and implemented within California's civic learning ecosystem. The analysis integrates document analysis of policy frameworks with the study of district-level interpretation to understand how civic learning frameworks translate into practice.

The study draws on two categories of sources.

1. At the policy level, it relies on state frameworks, legislative acts, program documentation, and official guidelines related to civic learning, including instruments such as the History-Social Science Framework, the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and the California Serves Program.
2. At the district level, it uses district plans, publicly available implementation documents, and structured data collected for this study to examine how policies are interpreted and operationalized.

Districts are selected based on defined criteria to capture variation in implementation approaches. This detailed analytical basis, including selection criteria and data structure, is presented in Chapter 7.

The analysis is conducted across three levels:

- Conceptual analysis examines how service-learning is defined or embedded within policy language.
- System mapping analyzes how different policy instruments interact to shape the broader civic learning architecture.
- Implementation analysis examines how districts interpret and operationalize these policies in practice.

The above work is structured across four chapters:

Chapter 5 defines service-learning within the context of California's policy landscape.

Chapter 6 maps the civic and service-learning architecture, examining the interaction between key policy instruments.

Chapter 7 analyzes district-level implementation, focusing on variation in interpretation and practice, supported by a defined analytical framework.

Chapter 8 synthesizes these findings to identify pathways for strengthening coherence, access, and implementation within the existing system.

This section presents a structured analysis of California's civic learning ecosystem, focusing on the relationship between policy intent and implementation. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive review of all districts or programs.

All sources are documented through footnotes to ensure transparency and traceability.

Chapter 5
What Service-learning Means in California Education Policy

5.1 Introduction

Service-learning in California's *K-12* education system emerges from a broader civic learning ecosystem as one of several instructional approaches through which civic learning is enacted.

The clearest articulation of this ecosystem appears in the History-Social Science (HSS) Framework.[58] The Framework states:

The goal of history-social science education is to prepare students to become informed, engaged citizens.
(HSS Framework, Chapter 1)

Within this broader goal, multiple instructional approaches are used to translate civic learning into practice. The HSS framework provides **six proven ways of civic learning:**

1. Classroom instruction
2. Discussion of current events and controversial issues
3. **Service-learning**
4. Extracurricular civic activities
5. Student voice and participation in school governance
6. Simulations of democratic processes

Service-learning is one of these approaches. Unlike other approaches, it combines academic instruction, engagement with real-world issues, and structured reflection within a single instructional model.[59]

This chapter, therefore, focuses on service-learning as an instructional approach. It defines service-learning, specifies its core elements, and outlines the process through which it is implemented. These definitions provide the analytical basis for examining how policy structures relate to service-learning in subsequent chapters.

In California's policy ecosystem, civic learning is understood as the development of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, alongside opportunities for informed and meaningful participation in civic life. This understanding is reflected across the History–Social Science Framework (2016), the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and related statutory and programmatic guidance.

> **Service-learning is used as an instructional strategy where youth voice guided by experienced adults, play a central role in planning, implementing, and evaluating meaningful service experiences to meet learning goals.**
>
> **Pam Siebert,**
> ***Vice President, Community Impact at NYLC,***
> ***Policy Cafe by Sewa USA***

58. California Department of Education, *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* (Sacramento: 2016), Chapter 1, https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/hssframework.asp, accessed April 11, 2026.
59. California Department of Education, A Teacher's Guide to Service-learning, https://chavez.cde.ca.gov/modelcurriculum/teachers/lessons/resources/Documents/ServiceLearningGuide.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.

5.2 What is Service-learning?

Service-learning has a specific and defined meaning in California education policy.

It is not used interchangeably with community service or volunteering. Instead, it is defined as an instructional approach that integrates academic learning with structured engagement in addressing community needs.

5.2.1 Definition in the History-Social Science Framework

The HSS Framework for California Public Schools provides the first state-level policy definition of service-learning.[60]

"Service-learning is an instructional strategy that engages students in real-world problem solving. Students work on community issues/problems that matter to them, applying critical thinking skills as they analyze causes and effects, discuss possible ways to address the issue/problem, and plan and execute service activities."

The framework further clarifies the instructional nature of service-learning:
"There must be an intentional link between academic content and skills and the students' service activities, which can provide opportunities to make what is learned in class even more relevant to students."

Importantly, the framework explicitly distinguishes service-learning from community service:
"Service-learning is far more than community service alone. High-quality service-learning experiences incorporate intentional opportunities for students to analyze and solve community problems through the application of knowledge and skills."

5.2.2 Definition in California Education Code

California law reinforces the instructional framing of service-learning through Education Code Section 51475, enacted in 2022 as the California Serves Program.[61]

The statute defines service-learning as:

"...an educational approach that intentionally combines meaningful community service activities with instruction and reflection to support pupil progress toward academic and civic engagement learning objectives while meeting societal needs."

5.2.3 Definition by the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC)

Definitions of service-learning used in policy contexts align closely with the one developed by NYLC, which has worked on service-learning since the early 1980s.[62]

The National Youth Leadership Council is a national nonprofit organization focused on youth leadership, civic engagement, and community development.

For more than 40 years, NYLC has worked with students and educators to support the development of leadership skills and to encourage young people to engage with real-world challenges. Its work centers on service-learning, youth leadership, and youth voice, providing tools, professional development, and resources intended to support these areas.

NYLC has played a sustained role in defining, operationalizing, and supporting service-learning in education. Its work builds on foundational principles of service-learning articulated by William Sigmon in the late 1970s.[63] Over time, NYLC translated these principles into practical frameworks and worked with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), state, and federal agencies to embed service-learning within education policy.

As a result, many government documents' definitions of service-learning, including those used in California policy, closely resemble the formulation NYLC has consistently advanced.[64]

NYLC defines service-learning as:

A teaching and learning approach that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

NYLC further emphasizes that service-learning:
Actively engages students in addressing real-world problems through curriculum-based service experiences.

60. California Department of Education, *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* (Sacramento, 2016), Appendix H: "Service-learning," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssframeworkwhole.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.
61. California Education Code § 51475, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=51475, accessed April 11, 2026.
62. National Youth Leadership Council, "About NYLC," https://nylc.org/about/, accessed April 11, 2026.
63. Robert G. Sigmon, "Service-Learning: Three Principles," Synergist (1979).
64. California Department of Education, *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* (Sacramento, 2016), Appendix H: "service-learning," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssframeworkwhole.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026; California Department of Education, *A Teacher's Guide to service-learning*, https://chavez.cde.ca.gov/modelcurriculum/teachers/lessons/resources/Documents/ServiceLearningGuide.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.

5.2.4 Core Elements of Service-learning in the California Context

When the History-Social Science Framework, Education Code Section 51475, and NYLC definitions are examined together, service-learning in the California K-12 context consistently includes the following elements:

- **An instructional approach, not a standalone activity**
- **Intentional integration with curriculum**
- **Meaningful service focused on real-world community needs**
- **Investigation and planning through structured inquiry and problem-solving**
- **Action and implementation, connected to learning objectives**
- **Reflection as a required component of learning**

These elements provide a shared reference point for how service-learning is understood in California education policy.

For example, a student enrolled in a biology course may engage in volunteer work by picking up trash on a riverbank. If this experience is directly tied to a student's biology course, a teacher-led lesson on studying water samples under a microscope could be expanded on with a root cause analysis of the garbage situation, who is affected by shoreline garbage, and then present water test results with the expanded information to a local pollution control agency.

5.3 The Service-learning Process: Investigation, Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration (IPARD)

In both California policy guidance and national service-learning practice, service-learning is defined by its components: academic instruction, community service, and reflection. In practice, educators and policymakers have relied on the service-learning process developed and operationalized by the NYLC: Investigation, Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration (IPARD) framework.[65]

In California's civic learning context, this IPARD process aligns closely with the core objective of the California History-Social Science Framework and the criteria of the California State Seal of Civic Engagement Guidance. They all emphasize inquiry, informed civic action, and reflection as essential elements of meaningful civic engagement.[66]

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for the remainder of the report. It clarifies how civic learning is defined and positioned in California education policy, identifies service-learning as one of the recognized practices within that civic learning framework, and specifies how service-learning is understood as an instructional approach and process for the purposes of this analysis.

This chapter provides the basis for analyzing how service-learning appears in policy and practice in the following chapters. The upcoming chapters evaluate how the civic learning described here translates into policies, and how service-learning becomes visible, optional, or absent within those structures.

65. ibid
66. National Youth Leadership Council, "Service-Learning," https://nylc.org/service-learning/, accessed April 11, 2026.

Chapter 6
The Civic Learning Architecture Shaping Service-learning in California

6.1 Introduction

Today, service-learning is present in California's education system distinctively across multiple policy instruments rather than as a single, unified program.

Service learning appears within a broader civic learning environment shaped by curriculum guidance, recognition mechanisms, and local control. Understanding how service-learning exists in practice, therefore, requires attention to the policy instruments through which civic priorities are expressed, and to the governance model that distributes responsibility for acting on them.

Two state policy instruments are central to this structure.

The first is the **State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)**,[67] which establishes statewide expectations for civic engagement and recognizes student civic participation at graduation.

The second is **California Serves**,[68] which explicitly positions service-learning as a pathway within the SSCE framework and supports its implementation in participating districts.

Together, these policies signal what civic learning should **value** and what civic learning should **count**, while leaving decisions about instructional design and delivery to local actors.

In the following chapters, we describe how these policies function, how responsibility is distributed across levels of the system, and how service-learning practices enter California schools.

California History-Social Science Framework 2016

A state-adopted policy document guiding K-12 instruction in history, civics, geography, and economics that provides curriculum guidance aligned with the California History-Social Science Content Standards. It emphasizes inquiry, literacy, and diverse perspectives in social studies education.

An on-site native garden with North Idaho species educates visitors about connections between people, plants, and pollinators. [69]

67. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)," https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstateseal.asp, accessed April 11, 2026.
68. California Education Code § 51475, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=51475, accessed April 11, 2026.
69. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Ashley Garcia, "US Navy 090416-F-7522G-005 Haitian students from Emmanuel Christian School pose for a photo during a Continuing Promise 2009 community service project," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_090416-F-7522G-005_Haitian_students_from_Emmanuel_Christian_School_pose_for_a_photo_during_a_Continuing_Promise_2009_community_service_project.jpg, accessed April 13, 2026.

6.2 The State Seal of Civic Engagement

The vision articulated in the 2016 HSS Framework:

to prepare students to become informed, engaged citizens[70]

is reflected in practice in a distinct policy instrument: the SSCE. To put simply, the HSS Framework clarifies what civic learning should value, the SSCE clarifies what civic learning should count.

State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)

A statewide policy instrument that recognizes high school students for demonstrated civic engagement that provides criteria and guidance for districts to certify student achievement in civic participation. It emphasizes applied civic learning, student initiative, and community engagement.

The Seal became operational following the adoption of criteria and guidance **in 2020** by the State Board of Education (SBE). Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or School districts have the independence to choose whether and how to implement it under California's local control system.[71]

The Seal is an optional graduation recognition, which functions as an **incentive-based credential, signaling civic engagement as an achievement** worthy of formal acknowledgment alongside academic accomplishments. For students, it offers public recognition on transcripts and diplomas, and in some cases may support college applications, scholarships, or civic portfolios.[72]

The Seal establishes a set of criteria through which districts may certify that students have met the state's expectations for civic engagement.[73] In doing so, it leaves decisions about design, implementation, and verification largely to LEAs.

To earn the Seal, students must satisfy five criteria, established by the California Department of Education (CDE) and interpreted locally:

1 Academic Engagement

Students must be engaged in academic work in a productive way related to civic learning.

2 Civic Knowledge

Students must demonstrate a competent understanding of the U.S. Constitution, the California Constitution, democratic principles, civic processes, and the functions of federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

3 Informed Civic Engagement

Students must participate in one or more informed civic engagement projects addressing real-world problems, involving inquiry, consideration of multiple perspectives, action, and reflection.

4 Reflection

Students must demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection.

5 Civic Dispositions and Character

Students must exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact their school, community, or society.

Refer to Annexure 1 for detailed CDE Suggestions for implementation.

70. California Department of Education, History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools (Sacramento, 2016), Appendix H: "Service Learning," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssframeworkwhole.pdf, accessed April 11, 2026.
71. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/hssstateseal.asp, accessed April 11, 2026.
72. California Department of Education, "SSCE Frequently Asked Questions," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/sscefaq.asp, accessed April 12, 2026; Common App, "Approaching the Activities Section."
73. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/hssstateseal.asp, accessed April 11, 2026.

6.3 Governance and Implementation of the SSCE

The State Seal of Civic Engagement operates through a distributed governance structure, with authority, administration, and implementation separated across multiple levels of the education system. Each level plays a distinct role, and no single entity exercises comprehensive oversight.

6.3.1 State Board of Education[74]

Primary function: Policy authorization and criteria adoption

- Adopted statewide criteria and guidance for awarding the State Seal of Civic Engagement on September 10, 2020.
- Established the statewide criteria within California's civic-recognition framework, pursuant to statute.

What the SBE does not do:

- administer the Seal
- approve local implementation plans
- certify individual students
- monitor participation or outcomes

The State Board's role is one-time and foundational and not operational.

6.3.2 California Department of Education (CDE)[75]

Primary function: Ongoing administrative support and data publication

CDE:

- Publishes guidance, FAQs, and implementation resources.
- Maintains public-facing information on the Seal.
- Administers the annual insignia request and distribution process.
- Publishes statewide participation information based on insignia requests and, beginning with 2023-24, collects student-level SSCE data through EDCS for possible future use in the College/Career Indicator on the Dashboard.

What CDE does not do:

- Does not approve LEA criteria or programs.
- Does not audit local evidence or applications.
- Does not certify individual awards.

CDE's role is continuous but non-regulatory. It supports implementation without overseeing it.

6.3.3 County Offices of Education[76]

Primary function: Capacity building, where present

- No mandatory statutory role in SSCE governance
- Involvement varies by county
- May provide:
  - Professional development
  - Model rubrics or guidance

Cross-district coordination

County participation is entirely discretionary and, therefore, not present across the state.

6.3.4 Local Educational Agencies[77]

Primary function: Program design, eligibility determination, and certification

LEAs:

- Decide whether to offer the Seal.
- Adopt local programming and criteria aligned to the statewide criteria.
- Determine acceptable activities, timelines, and evidence.
- Review student eligibility locally.
- Administer the application process and provide eligible students with the insignia.
- Request insignias from CDE.

There is no requirement that LEAs:

- Use a service-learning model
- Require community partnerships
- Apply uniform standards across schools

LEAs are the primary decision-makers in practice.

6.3.5 Schools and Educators[78]

Primary function: Day-to-day administration and student access

- Implementation is typically absorbed into existing staff roles
- Teachers, counselors, or administrators often act as coordinators

Even within a single LEA, student experience with the Seal can differ substantially by school site.

74. California Education Code §§ 51470-51474, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=4.&title=2.&part=28.&chapter=3.&article=7., accessed April 12, 2026; California Department of Education, "SBE Items Related to the SSCE," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/sbe2ssce.asp, accessed April 12, 2026.
75. California Department of Education, "SSCE Frequently Asked Questions," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/sscefaq.asp, accessed April 12, 2026; California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) Instructions," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/dc/ssceinstruct.asp, accessed April 12, 2026; California Department of Education, "CALPADS Update Flash #268," March 15, 2024, https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/calpadsupdflash268.asp, accessed April 12, 2026.
76. California Department of Education, "SSCE Frequently Asked Questions," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/sscefaq.asp, accessed April 12, 2026.
77. Ibid
78. Ibid

6.4 California Serves[79]

In addition to curriculum guidance and recognition, California introduced a third policy instrument designed to more directly connect service-learning to the State Seal of Civic Engagement.

California Serves, 2022

A state-funded initiative designed to expand access to service-learning opportunities through the State Seal of Civic Engagement. Provides grants, metrics, and guidance to support implementation of service-learning in alignment with civic learning outcomes.

Established through the 2022 state budget and codified in Education Code §51475, **California Serves** is administered by the **California Department of Education in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers**. The program's statutory purpose is to promote access to effective service-learning opportunities for grade twelve students through the State Seal of Civic Engagement.

6.4.1 Legislative Purpose

Education Code §51475 directs the California Department of Education, in consultation with California Volunteers, to:

- Review evidence related to effective service-learning practices in grades 9-12
- Develop model uniform metrics aligned with the Seal's criteria to measure academic and civic learning outcomes
- Administer a grant program supporting service-learning implementation connected to the Seal

The statutory language explicitly links service-learning and the State Seal of Civic Engagement, positioning the program as a mechanism through which service-learning may serve as a pathway to the Seal.

6.4.2 Program Structure and Funding

California Serves is funded at up to **$5 million** annually. Grants of up to **$500,000 per LEA** may be awarded to support program development and implementation.

Allowable uses of funds include:

- Planning and program design
- Professional development for educators
- Instructional materials and curriculum development
- Personnel to coordinate service-learning initiatives
- Student participation costs
- Partnerships and implementation support connected to Seal-aligned service-learning projects

The program was launched with a pilot round of grants to a limited number of districts and has continued as an annual competitive grant program supported by ongoing state appropriations.

It operates through a competitive Request for Applications (RFA) process in which eligible local educational agencies submit proposals that are scored using a structured rubric. Applications are evaluated based on:

- the quality and clarity of the program narrative,
- the feasibility of the implementation plan,
- alignment with service-learning objectives,
- the applicant's capacity to deliver the program, and
- the appropriateness of the proposed budget.[80]

6.4.3 Eligibility Requirements for the Grant

- It should be a local educational agency
- LEA must have 55 percent unduplicated pupils (students who are low-income, English learners, or foster youth)
- Grant to be used to serve 12th-grade students

6.4.4 Administrative Design

The California Department of Education administers the program and oversees grant distribution. In partnership with California Volunteers, the Department is responsible for developing guidance and model uniform metrics to support implementation.

The requirement to develop model metrics distinguishes California Serves from earlier civic policy instruments. These metrics are intended to align service-learning implementation with the existing criteria of the State Seal of Civic Engagement, including academic engagement, civic knowledge, informed civic engagement, reflection, and civic dispositions.

Receipt of funding is contingent upon alignment with the program's service-learning framework and with the Seal's criteria.

79. California Education Code § 51475, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=51475, accessed April 11, 2026.
80. California Department of Education, California Serves Grant Program 2025–26 Request for Applications, https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r12/documents/caservesrfa26.docx, accessed April 17, 2026.

6.4.5 Position Within the SSCE Architecture

California Serves does not alter the voluntary nature of the Seal, nor does it modify the governance roles of the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, county offices, or local educational agencies.

Districts that do not participate in the program continue to implement the Seal under existing local control structures.

What California Serves does is introduce a dedicated funding stream and guidance or implementation documents around them that promote one particular approach, service-learning, as a pathway to the Seal in participating districts. In this sense, the program does not alter the Seal itself; it supports the development of Seal-aligned service-learning models within the existing framework of local control.

6.5. Conclusion

As described in this chapter, the State Seal of Civic Engagement establishes a statewide mechanism through which civic engagement is defined, interpreted, and validated across districts operating under local control.

On the other hand, within this structure, California Serves introduces targeted support for service-learning as one pathway to meeting the Seal's criteria in participating districts.

At every level of policy design, there is a defined understanding of service-learning, and in some contexts, explicitly supported; however, it is not required as a consistent instructional model across districts.

Therefore, what remains is how service-learning is assembled, interpreted, and implemented in practice across districts.

That question is taken up in the next chapter.

The next chapter turns from system design to system outcomes. It analyzes how the policies described here are translated into practice, which elements of service-learning are most consistently realized, which are uneven or absent, and what patterns emerge across districts and student experiences as a result.

> *I think the key to implementing the true service-learning Model is to show district leaders and school boards why service-learning should be an integral part of education.*
>
> **Efrain Mercado Jr.**
>
> ***Director of California Policy Learning Policy Institute, Policy Cafe by Sewa USA***

Chapter 7
When Civic Learning Expands: The Place of Service-learning in Practice

Limits of Evidence

This analysis is subject to several limitations.
Publicly available district guidance varies in detail and accessibility.
As a result, the chapter focuses on observable patterns rather than precise quantification. The findings describe how service learning appears within civic learning in practice, not how often or how effectively it does so across all contexts.

7.1. Introduction

In many California high schools, students earn recognition for civic engagement at graduation. They research public issues, reflect on their role as citizens, and complete projects meant to connect learning with the world beyond the classroom.

What those projects look like, however, varies across districts.

Some students work directly with nonprofit organizations or community groups. Others complete school-based projects that never leave campus. Both types of work can qualify for the same civic recognition.

This gap raises a simple question that sits at the center of this chapter:
Why does service-learning appear so unevenly within civic learning in practice?

This chapter begins by examining this variation. It examines how civic learning moves from state policy into local practice, and how service-learning becomes optional along the way. We aim to explain the current structure of the system with a focus on on-ground implementation.

7.2 Analytical Approach

This chapter examines how civic engagement is defined and implemented at the district level, and how service-learning emerges within these interpretations.

The analysis is based on district-level criteria developed for the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE). To ensure variation in district contexts, a structured selection approach was used.

Counties across California offering the SSCE were first identified and organized based on a normalized metric: number of seals ordered per 1,000 high school students. (Annexure 2). This allowed for comparison across counties of different sizes. Based on this distribution, counties were grouped into three bands: higher, middle, and lower levels of SSCE participation.

From this distribution, two counties were selected from each band to ensure representation across varying levels of implementation. This resulted in an initial set of six counties: San Benito and Orange (higher), Los Angeles and Santa Barbara (middle), and Placer and Stanislaus (lower).

District-level criteria were then collected through a combination of publicly available information on district websites and direct outreach to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs).

A total of 43 LEAs were contacted. Based on publicly available data and responses received, criteria from 18 LEAs were compiled and included in the analysis. This dataset reflects both the availability of information and the variation in how districts document their civic engagement requirements.

The collected criteria were systematically reviewed and coded (Annexure 3) across the criteria of SSCE: Academic Engagement, Civic Knowledge, Informed Civic Engagement, Reflection, and Civic Dispositions and Character. Each dimension was further broken down into specific elements, such as the type of civic action required, the role of community or nonprofit engagement, and the structure and expectations of reflection.

The full coding nomenclature rules and interpretation rules are detailed in Annexure 19.

This coding enabled comparison across districts, providing a contrast in how civic engagement is interpreted and operationalized. Particular attention was given to whether and how service-learning appears within these definitions, especially in relation to community engagement and real-world application.

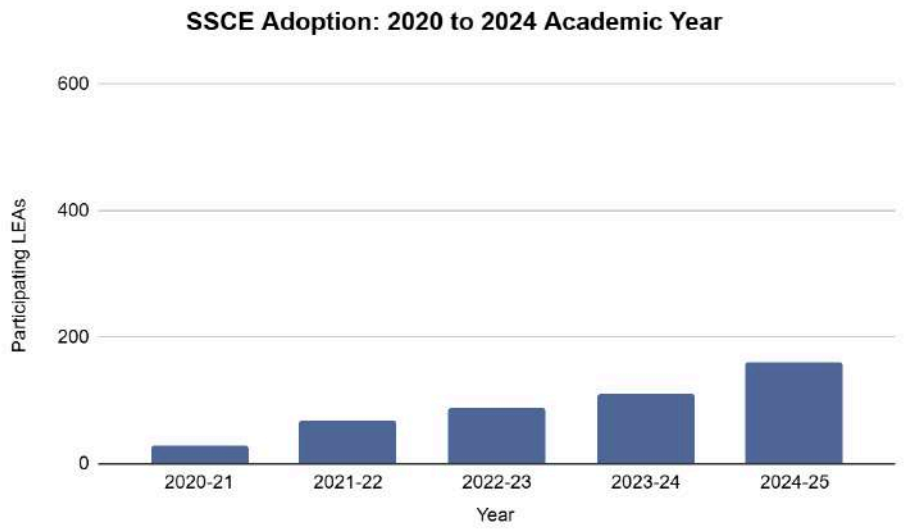
The observed variation across districts was then used to develop a classification framework (Annexure 4 to 8) that organizes implementation into stages, ranging from conceptual or limited engagement to more structured and impact-oriented approaches. This framework is derived from patterns in the data, rather than being imposed a priori, and is intended to provide a practical tool for understanding and strengthening service-learning within civic engagement pathways.

The analysis focuses on identifying structural variation and patterns in implementation, rather than evaluating the effectiveness of individual districts.

7.3 Service-learning and SSCE

Civic learning in California is not static. It is expanding, largely through the growth of the SSCE.

In the program's first year, approximately 4.5 percent of eligible LEAs (defined as those operating high schools) ordered the SSCE. By the 2024-25 school year, that figure had risen to approximately 25.8 percent.[81, 82]



If current trends continue, a growing share of California students will encounter civic learning through the structure of the Seal during their high school years.

This growth matters for the analysis that follows. As the Seal reaches more districts and more students, the way civic engagement is defined within it increasingly shapes what service-learning looks like in practice.

The Seal is structured around five criteria: academic engagement, civic knowledge, informed civic engagement, reflection, and civic dispositions and character.

1 Academic Engagement

Students must be engaged in academic work in a productive way related to civic learning.

2 Civic Knowledge

Students must demonstrate a competent understanding of the U.S. Constitution, the California Constitution, democratic principles, civic processes, and the functions of federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

3 Informed Civic Engagement

Students must participate in one or more informed civic engagement projects addressing real-world problems, involving inquiry, consideration of multiple perspectives, action, and reflection.

4 Reflection

Students must demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection.

5 Civic Dispositions and Character

Students must exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact their school, community, or society.

81. Eligible LEAs are defined as those operating at least one high school (grades 9–12), based on California Department of Education data for the 2024–25 school year.
82. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data – School Search (California, grades 9–12 filter), https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_list.asp?Search=1&InstName=&SchoolID=&Address=&City=&State=06&Zip=&Miles=&County=&PhoneAreaCode=&Phone=&DistrictName=&DistrictID=&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=10&HiGrade=13, accessed April 17, 2026.

The first two criteria establish the academic foundation for civic learning. Criterion 1 focuses on academic engagement and productive participation in school, while Criterion 2 requires students to demonstrate civic knowledge through history-social science coursework and understanding of civic systems.

Criterion 3 addresses informed civic engagement and comes closest to what is commonly understood as the service-learning IPARD process (Section 6.2) <Link to section 6.2>. State guidance encourages students to:

- identify real-world problems,
- investigate root causes,
- consider multiple perspectives,
- take action, and
- reflect on their efforts.

However, the same guidance explicitly allows that this action

- **may occur** "in the school and/or community" and
- **may be undertaken** "individually, with classmates, or in partnership with community members and organizations."

Hence, service-learning and partnerships with nonprofits or community organizations are often optional.

Criteria 4 and 5 further reinforce this process-oriented approach.

Reflection criterion is framed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning, growth story, civic values, and engagement, using formats such as essays, presentations, or portfolios.

Civic dispositions and character criterion focus on traits such as empathy, civic responsibility, respect for diverse perspectives, and commitment to the common good. These criteria emphasize how students think about and enact civic responsibility, not where that engagement takes place.

Taken together, the **five criteria cover** nearly all elements commonly associated with the service-learning process (Refer to 6.2.4 in Chapter 6).

They require academic grounding, civic knowledge, inquiry into public problems, action, structured reflection, and the development of civic identity and responsibility.

Elements of Service-learning	Covered by Criteria
An **instructional approach**, intentionally **l integrated with the curriculum**	1 and 2
Meaningful service focused on real-world community needs	3
Action and implementation, connected to learning objectives	3
Structured **inquiry** and problem-solving, including **investigation and planning**	3
Reflection as a required component of learning	3 and 4
An explicit focus on **civic engagement and civic responsibility**	2, 3, and 5
A clear **distinction from volunteering or community service** undertaken without academic integration	1,2, 3, 4, and 5

Table 1: Elements of Service-learning in the 5 Criteria of SSCE

> **Service-learning can shift power by redistributing resources and including communities that have been historically overlooked.**
>
> **Lori Heslewood,**
> ***Director of Operations, South Carolina Afterschool Alliance, Policy Cafe by Sewa USA***

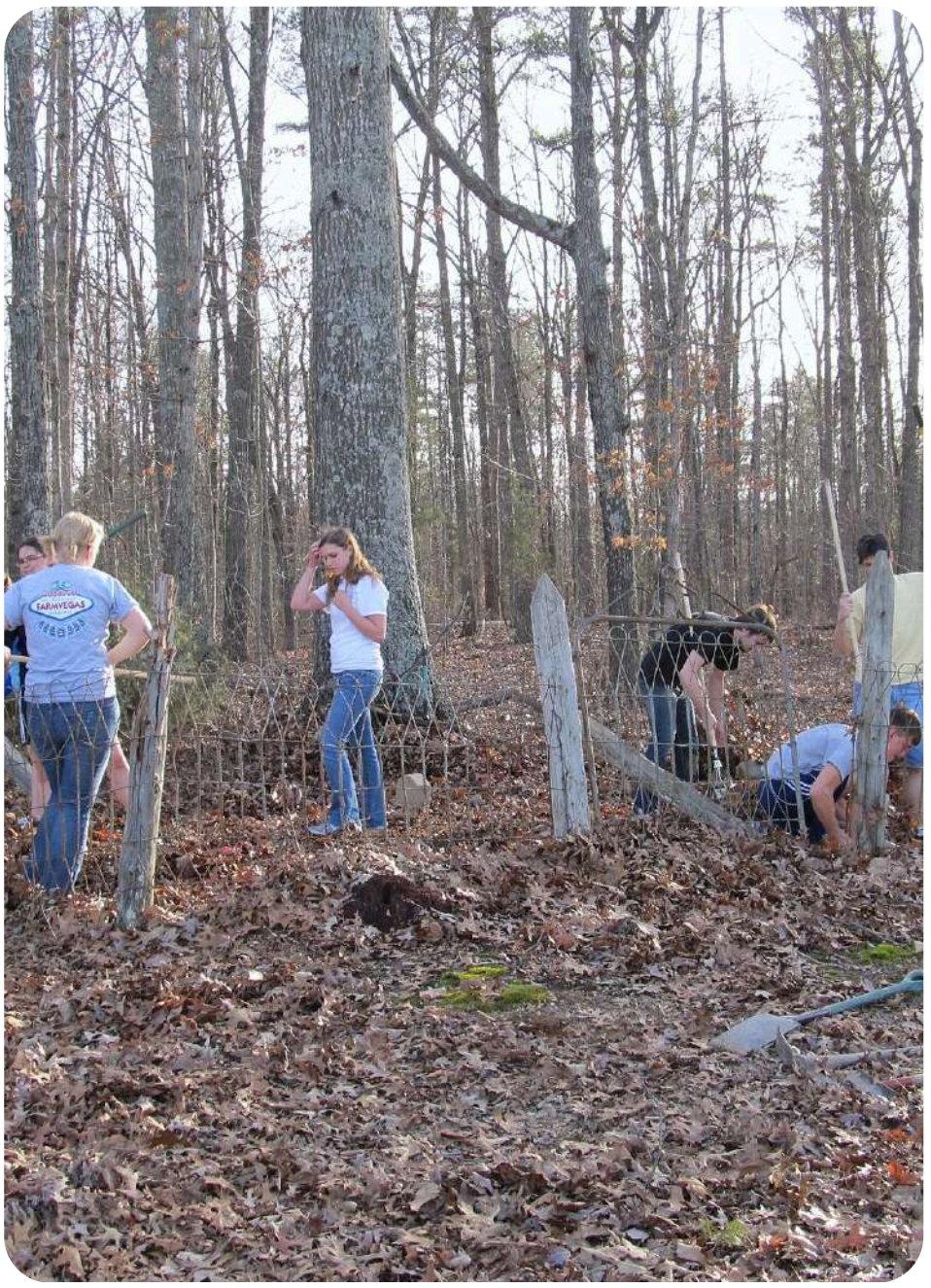
7.3.1 Criteria 1: Academic Engagement

Criteria 1 establishes the academic foundation for civic engagement within the SSCE. Service-learning and other forms of civic participation depend on the ability of students to connect real-world civic issues to the knowledge and analytical frameworks developed through academic study.

For this reason, the SSCE requires that students demonstrate engagement in academic work in a productive way. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that civic engagement activities build upon students' academic learning rather than occurring independently of the instructional program.

Code	Element	Description
A	Citizenship Marks	Students meet the district's required citizenship or conduct standard (e.g., S/O marks, limited N/U, or equivalent).
B	Overall GPA	Students meet the minimum overall GPA threshold defined by the district.
C	On track for graduation	The student is on track to graduate with a regular high school diploma per district requirements.
D	IEP Goals/ On track to earn Certificate of Completion	Non-diploma track students meet IEP goals, leading to a Certificate of Completion.
E	Academic Improvement	Students demonstrate academic improvement or return-to-track progress as defined by the district.
AOE	Any other element	Any other district-specific academic engagement requirement not captured above.

Table 3: Elements Used by Districts to Operationalize Criterion 1



Using these elements, we mapped Criterion 1's variance across the 18 districts to identify patterns in how Criterion 1 is operationalized. (Annexure 4) <Link to Annexure 4>

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	C, D, E	C; D; E	-
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	C, D, E	[C;D]+E	-
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	A, B, C, D, E	A+[(B+C); D; E]	-
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	C	C	-
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	B, D	B; D	-
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	C	C	-
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	B, D	B;D	-
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	B	B	-
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	B	B	-
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	C, AOE	C+AOE	Attendance requirement
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	B, D	B;D	-
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	C, D, AOE	AOE+(C;D)	Mandatory enrollment: Specific HSS courses
Los Angeles	Capistrano Unified	C	C	-
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	A	A	-
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	B, D	B;D	-
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	B	B	-
San Benito	San Benito High	B, D, E	B; D; E	-
Placer	Placer Union High	C	C	-

Table 3: Criterion 1: Variance Mapping; ';': 'or', '+': 'and'

Across districts, the majority of these elements relate directly to academic performance or progress. Grade Point Average (GPA) thresholds and graduation progress requirements are the most common mechanisms used to demonstrate academic engagement.

Taken together, these elements function largely as a baseline condition ensuring that students who pursue the Seal remain engaged in their academic coursework.

In a smaller number of districts, citizenship marks, which evaluate student behavior and participation within the classroom community, also appear within Criterion 1 requirements. Because these assessments relate more directly to civic dispositions and character development, their role is examined in greater detail in the discussion of Criterion 5.

Findings:

- All 18 districts require students to demonstrate academic performance or progress, typically through GPA thresholds or being on track for graduation as part of Criterion 1.
- 4 out of 18 districts (Los Angeles Unified, Long Beach Unified, ABC Unified and San Benito Unified) provide academic improvement pathways in addition to performance-based requirements, allowing students to qualify through demonstrated progress.
- These elements function largely as a baseline condition, ensuring that students who pursue the Seal remain engaged in their academic coursework.

7.3.2 Criteria 2: Civic Knowledge

Criteria 2 shifts the focus of the SSCE framework from academic engagement to civic understanding. While Criterion 1 ensures that students remain engaged in their academic program, Criterion 2 introduces the civic knowledge that informs later stages of civic participation. Students are expected to understand the principles of democratic governance, the structure of federal, state, and local institutions, and the processes through which public decisions are made.

Within the service-learning framework described earlier, this stage corresponds to the knowledge-building phase that precedes investigation in the Investigation, Planning, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration (IPARD) process. Before students identify a specific issue to investigate, they must first develop an understanding of how civic institutions function, how public problems emerge, and how decisions are made within democratic systems. Criterion 2 provides the civic literacy that helps students recognize the broader issues affecting their communities and prepares them to select and investigate a specific issue under Criterion 3.

IN PRACTICE, DISTRICTS OPERATIONALIZE CRITERION 2 THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS (ANNEXURE 3):

Code	Element	Description
F	Civic / Social Science Coursework	HSS, Grade-level equivalent or other (Canvas Course, Social Science Scholarship) courses to build civic, governmental, historical, or social-science understanding
G	Performance Requirement	Explicit academic performance condition to the civic or social-science coursework required under Element A (e.g., passing grade, minimum letter grade, or GPA).
H	Local Meetings	Required attendance at one or more local civic or public meetings for an understanding of local issues or institutions.

Table 4: Elements Used by Districts to Operationalize Criterion 2

USING THESE ELEMENTS, WE MAPPED CRITERION 2'S VARIANCE ACROSS THE 18 DISTRICTS TO IDENTIFY PATTERNS IN HOW CRITERION 2 IS OPERATIONALIZED. (ANNEXURE 5)

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	F, G, H	F+G+H
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	F, G	F+G
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	F, G	F+G
Orange	Capistrano Unified	F, G	F+G
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	F, G	F+G
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	F, G	F+G
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	F, G	F+G
San Benito	San Benito High	F, G	F+G
Placer	Placer Union High	F, G, H	F+G+H

Table 5: Elements Used by Districts to Operationalize Criterion 2

The variance mapping shows that districts primarily rely on coursework-based approaches to demonstrate civic knowledge, with relatively limited incorporation of direct exposure to civic institutions. While most districts require completion of civic or social-science coursework, only a small number include opportunities for students to observe civic processes in real-world settings.

Findings:

- 16 out of 18 districts rely on civic or social-science coursework, often paired with a performance requirement, to demonstrate civic knowledge under Criterion 2.
- Only 2 districts (Placer and ABC Unified) include attendance at local civic meetings, such as city council or school board meetings, as part of the requirement.
- As a result, while Criterion 2 is widely implemented as a civic literacy requirement, it does not consistently include forms of institutional exposure that could deepen students' understanding of real-world civic processes.

Insights

- Civic/Social Sciences coursework always appears with some performance requirement.
- Only in two LEAs (Placer and ABC Unified) are both required, along with attending local civic meetings.

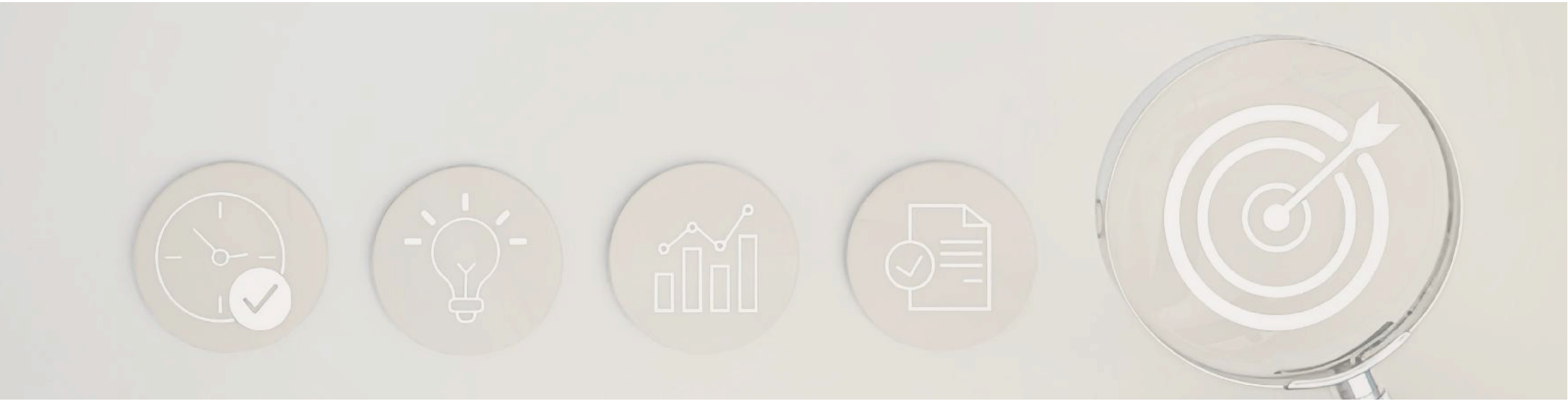
7.3.3 Criterion 3: Informed Civic Engagement

Criterion 3 represents the core of the SSCE, where students move from understanding civic systems to actively engaging with real-world issues. Students are required to participate in one or more informed civic engagement projects that address public problems through inquiry, action, and reflection.

Within the service-learning framework described earlier, this stage corresponds most directly to the core phases of the IPARD process: investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. It is at this stage that civic learning becomes experiential, requiring students not only to understand civic systems but to engage with them in meaningful ways.

SSCE Civic Engagement Process	IPARD: service-learning	How?
Identify a real-world problem	Investigation	Students identify community needs and issues that require intervention
Investigate causes and context	Investigation	Students analyze root causes and understand the broader civic and social context
Plan civic action	Preparation	Students design responses that connect academic knowledge with community needs
Take civic action	Action	Students implement service/civic action activities as a solution to the problem
Reflect on the experience	Reflection and Demonstration	Students connect action to learning outcomes, civic responsibility, and community impact through presentations, portfolios, or other forms.

Table 6: SSCE Civic Engagement Process x IPARD Service-learning Process [83]



83. California Department of Education, "State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE)," https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/hssstateseal.asp, accessed April 11, 2026; National Youth Leadership Council, "Service-Learning," https://nylc.org/service-learning/, accessed April 11, 2026.

As a result, while the SSCE framework incorporates a process that is structurally aligned with service-learning, the extent to which this process results in service-learning depends on the nature of civic action and the contexts in which it takes place, particularly whether it includes community service and engagement with community or nonprofit organizations.

In practice, districts operationalize Criterion 3 through a structured civic engagement process, but vary significantly in how that process is defined, the types of actions it includes, and the contexts in which engagement takes place.

In practice, districts operationalize Criterion 3 through the following elements (Annexure 3)

Code	Element	Description
I	Structured Civic Engagement Process	Students complete a civic project cycle: identify a real-world problem, investigate, plan, take civic action, and reflect.
I1	Civic action type: Community Service / Volunteering	Civic action to be carried out as community service or volunteering, including direct service or service hours in the community.
I2	Civic action type: Policy or institutional change actions	Influencing policies, rules, or institutional practices
I3	Civic action type: Advocacy and Awareness	Increasing public awareness or understanding, for example, through campaigns, events, and social media that aim to inform or mobilise a target audience around the civic issue.
J1	Where and with whom: School with School Community	School-based action, identifying and taking action on school-level problems
J2	Where and with whom: Local Community with Nonprofit Organizations	Working with schools'/districts' partner organizations or identifying organizations relevant to the issue and working with them, for civic action
J3	Where and with whom: Governance Community with the public officials/policymakers	Working at the governance/policy level to take action on local/state/national problems
AOE	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column

Table 7: Elements Used by Districts to Operationalize Criterion 3

USING THESE ELEMENTS, WE MAPPED CRITERION 3'S VARIANCE ACROSS THE 18 DISTRICTS TO IDENTIFY PATTERNS IN HOW CRITERION 3 IS OPERATIONALIZED

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	I, J2, J3	I+(J2;J3)	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	I, I1, I3, J1, J2	I+(I1;I3)+(J1;J2)	
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	I, I1, I2, I3, J2, J3	I+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J2+J3)	
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	I, I1, I2, I3	(I+I1)+(I1;I2;I3)	
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	I, I1, I2, I3, J1, J2, J3	I+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J1;J2;J3)	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	I, I1, I2, I3, J1, J2	I+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J1+J2)	
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	I,I2, I3, J1, J2, J3	I+(I2;I3)+ (J1;J2;J3)	
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	I	I	
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	I	I	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	I, I1, I2, I3	(I+I1)+(I1;I2;I3)	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	I, I1, I2, I3, J2, J3	(I+I1)+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J2;J3)	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	I1, I3, AOE	I1;I3;AOE	Civic Learning Project
Orange	Capistrano Unified	I	I	
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	I, I1, I3, J1, J2	I+(I1;I3)+(J1;J2)	
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	I	I	
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	I, J1, J2	I+(J1;J2)	
San Benito	San Benito High	I, J1, J2, J3	I+(J1;J2;J3)	
Placer	Placer Union High	I	I	

Table 8: Criterion 3: Variance Mapping; ';': 'or', '+': 'and'

The variance mapping shows that while most districts require a structured civic engagement process, they differ significantly in how that process is implemented. These differences arise along three dimensions: **the type of civic action** students undertake, the **context in which engagement occurs,** and the **logical structure of requirements.** Together, these dimensions determine whether civic engagement aligns closely with the service-learning process or takes on more limited forms that do not include meaningful service.

Findings:

- Overall, while most districts require participation in a civic engagement process, the inclusion of **service (I1)** and **community-based engagement (J2),** the key components necessary for service-learning, is **not structurally required in most districts.**
- Only 3 out of 18 districts require community service or volunteering (I1) as a mandatory component of the civic engagement process.
- Only 2 out of 18 districts require engagement with community or nonprofit organizations (J2) as a compulsory element of civic engagement.
- No district (0 out of 18) requires both community service (I1) and community-based engagement (J2) together as mandatory components of Criterion 3.
- 9 out of 18 districts include community service or volunteering (I1) only as an optional pathway, allowing students to fulfill the requirement through alternative forms of civic engagement such as policy engagement (I2) or advocacy (I3).
- 10 out of 18 districts include community-based engagement (J2) only as an option, therefore do not require students to work with community or nonprofit organizations.
- 5 out of 18 districts do not include either community service (I1) or community-based engagement (J2), allowing Criterion 3 to be fulfilled entirely through school-based or non-service civic activities.

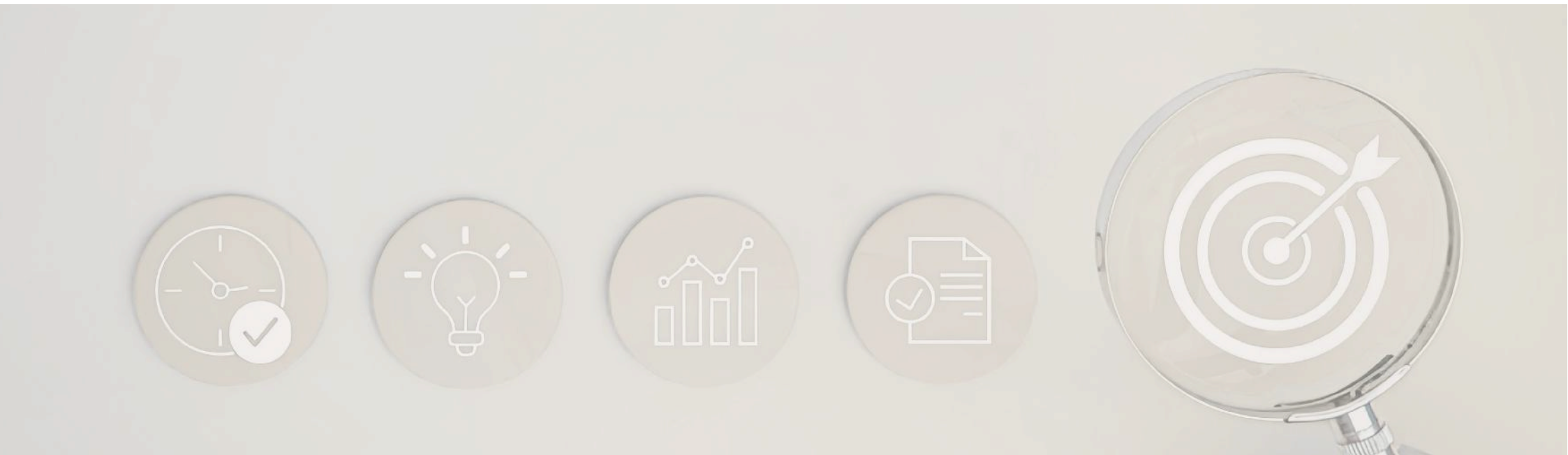
Insights

- The Civic Engagement Process is provided in all LEAs.
- Its details, however, related to ‘civic action type’ are defined only in 10 LEAs.
- Its details related to ‘where and with whom’ are also defined only in 10 LEAs.
- 5 LEAs do not provide any details except mentioning their civic engagement process in the local criteria.

These findings indicate that while Criterion 3 incorporates elements aligned with the service-learning process, its implementation across districts does not consistently require the combination of **service and community engagement** that defines high-quality service-learning.

In many districts, students may fulfill the requirement through forms of civic engagement that do not include meaningful service, such as policy engagement, advocacy, or school-based activities. While these activities support civic learning, they do not necessarily meet the criteria for service-learning as defined earlier in this report.

The absence of a requirement for both community service and **community-based engagement** suggests that service-learning remains one of several possible pathways within Criterion 3 rather than a consistently embedded instructional approach.



7.3.4 Criterion 4: Demonstration through Reflection

Criterion 4 requires students to demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection. Within the SSCE framework, this requirement focuses on how students make sense of their civic engagement experiences and articulate what they have learned.

Within the service-learning framework described earlier, this stage corresponds to the reflection and demonstration phases of the IPARD process. Reflection enables students to connect their civic engagement experiences to academic learning, assess the impact of their actions, and develop a deeper understanding of civic responsibility. Demonstration involves communicating this learning through written, oral, or portfolio-based formats, making the learning process visible.

Code	Element	Description
K	Reflection Documentation Specified	District specifies how reflection must be submitted (e.g., written essay, form, portfolio, slide deck, video, or oral presentation).
L	Guided Reflection Prompts / Rubric	District provides specific questions, prompts, or rubric criteria to guide what students reflect on (e.g., problem, impact, learning, civic growth).
M	Reflection Only Stated, No Details	District states that students must reflect, but gives no detail on format or prompts (no required mode, no guiding questions or rubric).

Table 9: Elements Used by Districts to Operationalize Criterion 4

Using these elements, we mapped Criterion 4’s variance across the 18 districts to identify patterns in how Criterion 4 is operationalized

USING THESE ELEMENTS, WE MAPPED CRITERION 4'S VARIANCE ACROSS THE 18 DISTRICTS TO IDENTIFY PATTERNS IN HOW CRITERION 4 IS OPERATIONALIZED. (ANNEXURE 7)

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	K	K
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	K	K
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	K, L	K+L
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	K	K
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	K, L	K+L
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	K, L	K+L
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	K, L	K+L
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	K	K
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	L	L
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	K	K
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	K, L	K+L
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	M	M
Orange	Capistrano Unified	M	M
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	M	M
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	K, L	K+L
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	K, L	K+L
San Benito	San Benito High	K, L	K+L
Placer	Placer Union High	K, L	K+L

Table 10: Criterion 4: Variance Mapping; ';': 'or', '+': 'and'

Unlike the previous criteria, the variance in Criterion 4 does not arise from differences in requirement structures, but from differences in how reflection itself is designed. The elements identified in the mapping (K, L, and M) do not function as alternative pathways or conditional requirements; rather, they indicate the degree of structure and depth embedded in the reflection process.

In particular, the presence of specified documentation formats (K) and guided prompts or rubrics (L) reflects a more structured approach to reflection, while the absence of these elements, captured through M, indicates that reflection is stated as a requirement without clear guidance. As a result, the mapping captures whether reflection is designed as a meaningful learning process or functions primarily as a procedural requirement.

Findings:

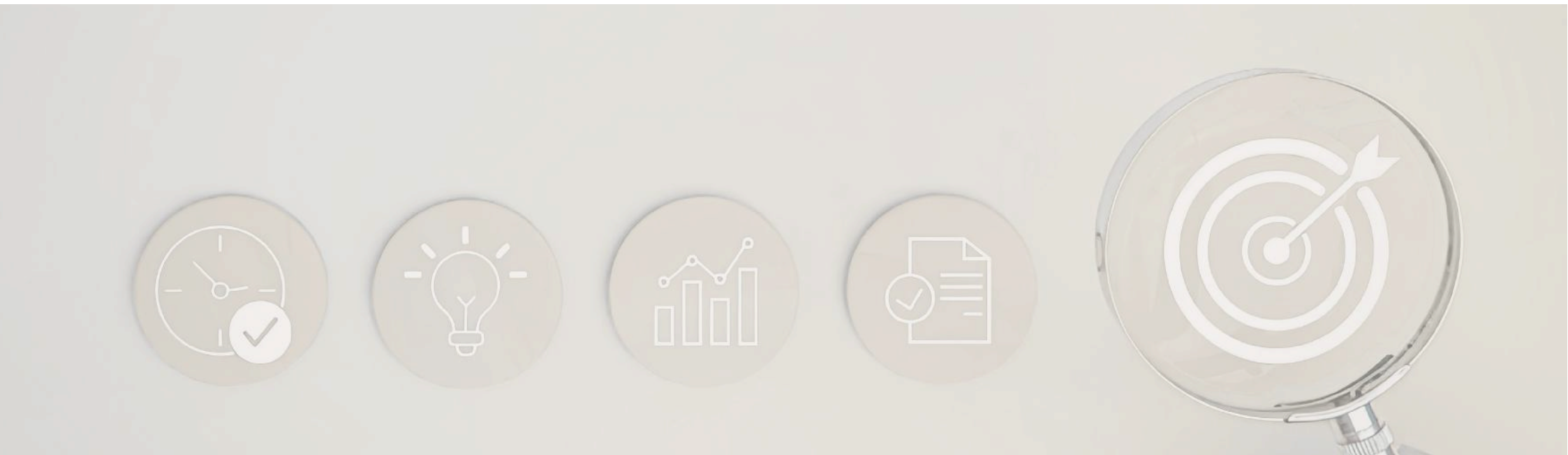
- the presence of at least one of the elements (K, L, or M).
- 14 out of 18 districts specify how reflection must be documented (K), requiring students to submit reflection through defined formats such as essays, presentations, portfolios, or other media.
- 10 out of 18 districts provide guided reflection prompts or rubrics (L), indicating a more structured approach to directing what students reflect on.
- 3 out of 18 districts include reflection only as a stated requirement without details (M), providing no specification of format or guidance.
- 9 out of 18 districts include both documentation formats (K) and guided prompts or rubrics (L), indicating a more fully structured approach to reflection that supports deeper engagement with the learning process.

These findings indicate that while Criterion 4 is consistently implemented across districts, it varies significantly in terms of the structure and instructional support provided for reflection.

Half the districts that include both specified documentation formats (K) and guided prompts or rubrics (L) are more likely to support deeper and more meaningful reflection. In these cases, students are not only required to document their experiences but are also guided in how to analyze those experiences, connect them to learning, and articulate their growth.

In contrast, districts that include only documentation requirements (K) without accompanying guidance (L) and vice versa, or that rely solely on broad reflection requirements (M), provide limited structure for how students should engage with reflection. In such cases, reflection would function primarily as a procedural requirement.

Be it civic engagement or service-learning, without reflection and demonstration, the connection between action and learning may remain implicit rather than explicit. As a result, while Criterion 4 completes the service-learning or civic engagement cycle in principle, its effectiveness in practice varies significantly across districts.



7.3.5 Criterion 5: Civic Dispositions and Character

Criterion 5 focuses on students' civic dispositions, including their behavior, participation, and demonstration of civic responsibility within and beyond the classroom. Within the SSCE framework, this criterion is intended to capture the extent to which students exhibit the attitudes and values associated with engaged citizenship.

Unlike Criterion 4, which focuses on the demonstration of learning through structured reflection and articulation, Criterion 5 focuses on the demonstration of values and dispositions that emerge through participation in civic engagement activities. While Criterion 4 captures what students are able to explain and communicate about their experiences, Criterion 5 reflects how those experiences are expressed through behavior, participation, and broader indicators of civic-mindedness.

Within the service-learning framework, civic dispositions represent an outcome of the process, emerging from engagement, reflection, and interaction with communities.

In practice, districts operationalize Criterion 3 through the following elements (Annexure 3)

Code	Element	Description
N	Recommendation / Testimonial Evidence of Civic-Mindedness	Any adult (e.g., teacher, counselor, community leader, public official, supervisor, peer) or peer formally attests to the student's civic-mindedness via a letter, reference form, or rubric.
O	Behaviour and/or Citizenship Grades	Internal citizenship and/or behaviour marks are part of the disposition decision
P	Participation in Civic / Service Activities	The student's participation in district-specified civic, service, or leadership activities is used as evidence of civic-mindedness.
Q	Minimum GPA Requirement for Dispositions	A minimum GPA is required under Criterion 5, either as an overall GPA or a subject-specific GPA (e.g., HSS GPA).
R	Character Traits: Only Stated, No Details	Mentioned that character traits should be exhibited. No 'how' is mentioned.
AOE	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column

Table 11: Elements Used by Districts to Operationalize Criterion 5

USING THESE ELEMENTS, WE MAPPED CRITERION 5'S VARIANCE ACROSS THE 18 DISTRICTS TO IDENTIFY PATTERNS IN HOW CRITERION 5 IS OPERATIONALIZED. (ANNEXURE 8)

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Other element
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	N	N	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	P, AOE	P+AOE	Self assessment
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	N	N	
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	N	N	
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	N, O, Q	N+O+Q	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	N, P	N;P	
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	N, O, Q	N+O+Q	
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	N, O, Q	N+O+Q	
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	N	N	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	N	N	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	N	N	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	N, O, Q	N+O+Q	
Orange	Capistrano Unified	R	R	
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	N	N	
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	N, P	N;P	
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	N	N	
San Benito	San Benito High	N	N	
Placer	Placer Union High	N	N	

Table 12: Criterion 5: Variance Mapping; ';': 'or', '+': 'and'

Findings:

- All 18 districts include some form of assessment of civic dispositions under Criterion 5, but differ in how many forms of evidence are required and how they are combined.
- 15 out of 18 districts include testimonial or recommendation-based evidence (N), making it the most commonly used baseline indicator of civic-mindedness. In many districts, N appears as a standalone requirement or as the minimum condition for demonstrating dispositions.
- In a smaller number of districts (4 out of 18), civic dispositions are assessed through a combined requirement (N + O + Q), where testimonial evidence is supplemented with behavior/citizenship grades (O) and GPA-based requirements (Q).
- In contrast, some districts allow civic dispositions to be demonstrated through alternative indicators (e.g., N; P), where participation in civic or service activities (P) can serve as an alternative to testimonial evidence.
- 2 out of 18 districts include character traits without specifying how they are demonstrated (R), indicating that civic dispositions are stated as expectations without defined evidence or structure.

These findings indicate that while all districts assess civic dispositions, they differ in the degree of evidentiary rigor required to demonstrate them.

In districts where multiple elements are required together (e.g., N + O + Q), civic dispositions are assessed through a composite approach, combining external validation, behavioral indicators, and academic performance. This structure requires students to meet several criteria simultaneously, suggesting a more formalized and multi-dimensional assessment of civic character.

In contrast, districts that rely on single elements or alternative pathways (e.g., N alone or N; P) adopt a more flexible approach, where civic dispositions can be demonstrated through one form of evidence or another.

Where dispositions are defined only in general terms (R), without specified evidence, the assessment remains loosely structured.

In contrast to Criterion 4, which structures how learning is demonstrated, Criterion 5 reflects how civic values are recognized, with variation in how rigorously those values are evidenced.

7.4 Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter shows that civic learning, as structured through the State Seal of Civic Engagement, contains within it all the elements of service-learning. In principle, this alignment suggests that service-learning could emerge as a central instructional approach within civic learning.

In practice, however, this potential is not consistently realized.

Across districts, civic learning is implemented through a combination of required processes and optional pathways. While most districts require participation in a structured civic engagement process, the specific forms that this engagement takes vary significantly.

In particular, the two elements that most clearly distinguish service-learning, community service and engagement with community or nonprofit organizations, are rarely required together. As a result, students may complete civic engagement projects without engaging in meaningful service or without working in real-world community contexts.

The result is a civic learning environment in which service-learning remains one among several possible pathways rather than a consistently embedded practice. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond understanding variation to identifying how service-learning can be more consistently structured within existing systems.

The next chapter builds on this analysis to outline a set of recommendations that provide a clear pathway for districts to strengthen service-learning, moving from loosely defined civic engagement toward more structured, real-world, and impactful learning experiences.

Chapter 8
Pathways to Strengthen Service-Learning in California

8.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters establish that California has developed a strong policy foundation for civic learning, articulated through the History-Social Science Framework, operationalized through the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and supported through initiatives such as California Serves.

At the same time, the analysis highlights that the translation of these policy intentions into consistent, high-quality service-learning practice remains uneven across districts. Variations in interpretation, design, and implementation continue to shape how service-learning is experienced by students.

This chapter builds on these insights to present a set of targeted, system-aligned recommendations. The objective is not to introduce new policy directions, but to strengthen the implementation pathways within the existing framework, enabling greater coherence, accessibility, and quality in service-learning practice across the state.

The recommendations focus on three key areas: enabling districts to assess and improve their own service-learning practice, expanding access to state-supported implementation mechanisms, and strengthening the ecosystem of partnerships that underpin effective service-learning. Together, these pathways aim to support a more structured, scalable, and community-connected approach to civic learning in California.

8.2 Recommendation 1: A Framework for Assessing and Implementing Quality Service-Learning in Practice

> **Participatory budgeting is a powerful backdrop for service-learning because it brings excluded voices into decision-making.**
>
> **Isabel Luciano,**
> ***Director of Training, Participatory Budgeting Project, Policy Cafe by Sewa USA***

Chapter 7 demonstrates that while the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) establishes a common structure for civic learning, the way that structure is translated into practice, especially service-learning practice, varies significantly across districts.

While these variations can be described across individual criteria, they do not provide a systematic way to assess the overall quality of service-learning.

To address this, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) should enable a district-level assessment and progression framework that allows them to:

- Assess their current approach to service-learning within SSCE
- Identify gaps in implementation, especially in design, curriculum, partnerships, and reflection
- define clear pathways to strengthen service-learning practice over time

The framework should organize district implementation across progressive stages:

- **Conceptual or classroom-based engagement:** Civic engagement is primarily interpreted through classroom activities complemented by civic projects, with limited connection to service-learning.
- **Structured but variable student action:** Districts introduce opportunities for service-learning, but these vary in consistency and integration with curriculum and learning outcomes.
- **Coherent, community-connected experience**: Service-learning is designed as a structured and sustained process, where students engage with real-world issues through partnerships, guided implementation, and reflection, leading to deeper learning and potential impact.

Importantly, this framework should function as a diagnostic and developmental instrument, enabling districts to move from fragmented or school-based activities toward more structured and community-connected models of service-learning.

The design of this framework can be derived from patterns observed in district-level implementation in Chapter 7, particularly the variation in how civic engagement criteria are operationalized.

Building on this progression, the report develops a structured assessment framework: Idea to Impact service-learning Framework for Districts (I2I-SL Framework for Districts) presented in Annexure 9. This can be used by districts, state agencies, and policymakers to assess and strengthen service-learning within civic engagement.

8.3 Recommendation 2: Transition the California Serves Program to a Tiered, Statewide Access Model

As discussed in Chapter 6 , the California Serves Program has established a strong foundation for supporting service-learning through grants, technical guidance, and metrics development. However, its current design as a targeted, competitive grant program has limited its reach.

Across grant cycles, only 11-12 districts receive funding each year, constraining the program's ability to enable service-learning at scale across the state. A detailed list of funded districts across years is provided in Annexure 11.

To address this limitation, it should reform the California Serves Program to enable universal, voluntary access to service-learning for all districts, while retaining its current equity prioritization and strengthening system-level implementation.

1 Establish an Open Access Pathway While Retaining Priority Targeting

The current eligibility requirement, restricting participation to LEAs with at least 55% unduplicated pupils, limits access to a subset of districts.

- Introduce an **open-access pathway** allowing all districts to apply on a recurring basis
- Retain a **priority tier** for high-need districts

This shifts the program from selective, eligibility-restricted participation to system-wide **availability with equity prioritization**.

2 Replace Eligibility Restriction with Tiered Funding Design

Along with restricting eligibility to districts meeting a fixed threshold of unduplicated pupils, the program should expand funding and adopt a tiered funding structure based on district fiscal capacity, while retaining priority for districts serving high proportions of unduplicated pupils.

Tier 1 Priority Access Grants

Highest level of funding for districts with:

- Low fiscal capacity (based on state funding indicators)
- High proportion of unduplicated pupils

Small, standardized grants for:

- Personnel (service-learning coordinators)
- Teacher planning time
- Professional development
- Instructional materials
- Participation costs
- Evaluation

Tier 2 Moderate-Capacity Grants

Moderate level of funding for districts with:

- Moderate fiscal capacity
- Mixed levels of student need

Small, standardized grants for:

- Professional development
- Instructional materials
- Participation costs
- Evaluation

Tier 3 General Access Grants

Lower, catalytic funding for districts with:

- Higher fiscal capacity
- Lower reliance on supplemental funding

Small, standardized grants for:

- Professional development
- Instructional materials

This ensures all districts can begin participation, and funding intensity aligns with readiness and capacity.

3 Align Expansion with Budget Reality Through Phased Scaling

Given current funding constraints (approximately $5 million annually), universal full funding is not immediately feasible.

The state should:

- **Implement phased** expansion, increasing coverage over time
- Allocate resources across tiers to:
  - maximize reach
  - maintain depth where needed

This enables:
gradual system expansion without overextending fiscal capacity

4 Strengthen Incentives Without Altering Legislative Intent

To encourage district uptake without mandating participation or altering the structure of the SSCE, the state should introduce **non-mandatory incentive mechanisms** :

a. District-Level Recognition
Establish a state-recognized designation (e.g., “California service-learning District) for districts implementing service-learning based on:

- depth and quality of implementation

b. service-learning Pathway within SSCE
Add a service-learning Pathway Tag within the SSCE Seal: “Achieved through service-learning Pathway.”

5 Ensure Administrative Feasibility Through Tiered Oversight

Expanding access will increase administrative demands on:

- California Department of Education
- California Volunteers

The tiered model should be paired with differentiated oversight:

- lighter monitoring for entry-tier districts
- deeper engagement for higher tiers

This maintains scalability and administrative feasibility

8.4 Recommendation 3: Establish a Structured School-Nonprofit Partnership System through California Volunteers

The state should establish a structured school-nonprofit partnership system by leveraging California Volunteers as the primary intermediary platform to facilitate partnerships between schools and community organizations within the SSCE and California Serves Program ecosystem.

While partnerships are currently encouraged, they remain largely ad hoc and dependent on local relationships. A structured, system-level approach is required to ensure that partnerships are predictable, scalable, and aligned with service-learning objectives. This recommendation builds on the existing platform and coordination capabilities of California Volunteers, adapting its model of state-enabled, intermediary-led collaboration to the K-12 context, without creating new institutional structures.

1. System Design

The partnership system should be structured as a state-enabled, platform-coordinated, and district-implemented model, with clearly defined roles aligned to both institutional responsibilities and the service-learning process.

1.1 SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The partnership system should connect:

STATE AGENCIES (CDE + California Volunteers) ⟷ **DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS** ⟷ **NONPROFIT AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

Within this structure, each partner plays the following roles:

STATE (CDE + California Volunteers)	• Define program standards and alignment with SSCE (does already) • Enable system-wide coordination
CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS (INTERMEDIARY PLATFORM)	• Maintain a vetted network of partner organizations • Facilitate partnerships and matching • Provide partnership frameworks and coordination support
DISTRICTS	• Identify local priorities and support implementation • Coordinate across schools
SCHOOLS	• Implement service-learning within the curriculum • Manage student participation
NONPROFITS	• Provide service opportunities • Supervise field engagement

2. Role Definition Aligned to the Service-Learning Process

Roles should be explicitly defined across the service-learning cycle to ensure both academic rigor and meaningful community engagement. This requires a clear division of responsibility between schools and nonprofit partners in implementing the State Seal of Civic Engagement through service-learning as a pathway.

For each component of the service-learning process, a single stakeholder should hold lead responsibility, with the other providing complementary support. This ensures clarity in ownership, reduces duplication of effort, and enables more effective coordination across actors.

The allocation of roles should be guided by the institutional strengths of schools and nonprofit partners, allowing each to lead areas where they are best positioned to contribute, while supporting the overall delivery of a coherent service-learning experience.

A structured role division, developed as part of this report, outlines how responsibilities can be distributed across the service-learning cycle based on the complementary strengths of schools and nonprofit partners. This is presented in Annexure 10 as a suggested model for enabling clear and coordinated implementation.

3. Funding Alignment for Partnership Facilitation by California Volunteers

No separate funding stream should be created for partnership infrastructure; instead, existing California Serves grant allocations can be increased to fund California Volunteers' roles. This includes supporting the role of California Volunteers as the intermediary platform responsible for partnership development, coordination, and facilitation.

4. System Operation

Partnerships between schools and nonprofit organizations should be structured through a standardized lifecycle and supported by a **platform-enabled, user-driven matching system** led and facilitated by California Volunteers.

This lifecycle should include:

PARTNERSHIP LIFECYCLE

The partnership system should follow a structured lifecycle to ensure quality, accountability, and continuity.

1 IDENTIFICATION

Development of a pool of potential partner organizations through outreach and nominations.

- California Volunteers conducts outreach to community organizations, public agencies, and other potential partners.
- Organizations may also be nominated by districts, schools, or other partners.
- Results in a diverse and inclusive pool of potential partners aligned with local needs.

2 VETTING AND APPROVAL

Assessment of organizations based on relevance, capacity, and alignment with the service-learning process and goals.

- California Volunteers reviews organizations using standardized criteria and a clear vetting framework.
- Criteria include mission alignment, experience, capacity, safety protocols, and ability to support student learning.
- Approved organizations are added to the vetted partner network on the platform.

3 PLATFORM-BASED MATCHING

A centralized platform maintained by California Volunteers should enable:

- Districts and schools to identify and initiate partnerships with organizations offering service-learning opportunities in their area.
- Nonprofits to view and connect with schools seeking to implement service-learning.

This creates a bi-directional matching system, where partnerships are initiated by participating actors rather than centrally assigned.

4 REVIEW, REPORTING, AND CONTINUITY

The platform should support:

- Standardized reporting from districts and schools on partnership activities and student outcomes.
- Visibility into active partnerships across districts.
- Feedback mechanisms to assess partnership quality, identify improvement opportunities, and inform future partnerships.

This lifecycle ensures that partnerships are high-quality, well-matched, accountable, and sustainable—advancing impactful service-learning experiences for students and communities across California.

Part III:

Service-learning Models

Introduction

As societies look toward the future, the role of education extends beyond academic achievement to preparing young people to participate meaningfully in civic and community life. The strength of democratic systems depends on how students engage with real-world challenges, institutions, and collective responsibility.

Service-learning offers one of the most direct ways to bridge this connection between learning and civic life. Parts I and II establish how this approach has evolved over time and how it is positioned within California's policy landscape. Together, they show that while the direction for service-learning is clearly articulated, its realization depends on how programs are designed and implemented within real institutional contexts.

Part III focuses on this ***level of practice.***

While policy provides direction, implementation depends on how service-learning is structured, through curriculum integration, partnerships, delivery models, and student experience. These design choices shape how service-learning is experienced on the ground.

Rather than presenting programs as isolated examples, this section examines them as models, structured approaches that translate service-learning principles into operational systems. Each model highlights how service-learning is organized, delivered, and sustained within specific institutional contexts.

Part III examines three such models.

The first explores the **Earth Team's Sustainable Youth Internship Program,** which integrates environmental science, field-based service, and sustained student engagement through school-linked cohorts.

The second examines **Sewa USA's Design to LEAD program,** which combines service with design thinking to enable students to identify and address community challenges through structured project cycles.

The third model focuses on the **Center for Cities + Schools Y-PLAN initiative**, which connects classrooms with civic institutions and positions students as contributors to real-world planning processes.

Together, these models illustrate how service-learning can be implemented through different pathways, each shaped by distinct design choices, partnerships, and institutional structures.

Methodology: Part III

Part III uses a qualitative, case-based approach combining secondary research with primary data collected through targeted interviews to examine how service learning can be designed and implemented through structured program models.

The analysis is conducted in three stages:

1. A set of organizations was identified (10) through a structured review of programs related to civic engagement, civic learning, or service learning, including those with explicitly defined models as well as those with similar design elements. An initial set of organizations was screened, from which a smaller group (4) was shortlisted based on defined criteria. These included:
    - the presence of a clearly defined program structure;
    - integration of learning with community-based engagement;
    - structured partnerships with external organizations or communities;
    - engagement with K-12 participants; and
    - evidence of sustained implementation.

2. A standardized framework was developed to structure each case, ensuring consistency, comparability, and clarity in how program design, delivery mechanisms, partnerships, and student engagement processes are presented. Case models were then constructed in this standardized framework using publicly available information, including program documentation, organizational reports, and website content. This step focused on translating diverse program information into coherent and replicable models.

3. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews to validate and refine the constructed models. Interview schedules were designed to address gaps in publicly available information and to clarify key aspects of program structure and implementation. The interview schedules are provided in Annexure 12-14. Outreach was conducted with four shortlisted organizations, of which three provided responses.

The three models presented here are not intended to be representative of all service-learning models, nor do they imply any comparative judgment about the quality or effectiveness of other programs. Instead, they are used as illustrative examples to understand how service-learning can be structured and implemented in different contexts. The purpose of this section is to develop depth of understanding rather than breadth of coverage.

The resulting representations are not direct reproductions of program descriptions, but analytical interpretations developed to make underlying structures visible.

The programs described in this section are designed and implemented by the respective organizations. The representation of these programs as structured models is an analytical interpretation developed for this report. All case material has been developed in consultation with the organizations and is presented with their knowledge and consent.

Model Case Study 1: Earth Team's Sustainable Youth Internship Program[84]

1. About Earth Team

Earth Team is a collaborative conservation network connecting Bay Area youth, teachers, and young leaders with numerous environmental, educational, and government organizations. Founded in 1994, it empowers urban youth to become lifelong environmental stewards through experiential education, skills development, and community connections.

Its Sustainable Youth Internship Program combines environmental science learning, service-learning, and youth leadership development. Earth Team works primarily with schools in California's East Bay and positions its youth programming as a pathway to college and environmental science and technology careers.

2. Framing the Model

Earth Team's Sustainable Youth Internship program is a service-learning, **applied environmental science, and field-based problem-solving** program, embedded within school communities. It is a year-long and paid model delivered through school-linked cohorts and operates as one unified internship model funded through multiple grants, rather than separate project streams.

The model integrates three elements rarely combined within youth service programs: **STEM-based environmental investigation, sustained cohort engagement, and measurable environmental outputs.**

This STEM-first orientation is not just environmental volunteering; students are trained to understand local environmental systems, collect and interpret field data, and act on real community needs through structured projects. The internship is tailored to local environmental needs such as watershed health, litter, and urban forestry.

3. MODEL SNAPSHOT

Organization:
Earth Team

Program:
Sustainable Youth Internship Program

Geography:
East Bay region, California
(Alameda and Contra Costa Counties)

Setting:
School-partnered after-school internship

Program Duration:
~36 weeks, ~120 hours per intern annually

Eligibility:
Grades 9-12

Cadence:
Weekly after-school meetings (2-3 hours)
+ periodic weekend field events (5-6 hours)

Cohort Structure:
14-16 interns per school-based team,
~120 interns across 8 schools

Incentive Structure:
Paid internship with stipends up to $700
per annum, depending on hours completed.

Years Active:
3+ decades

84. Earth Team, https://www.earthteam.net/, accessed April 20, 2026.

4. Front-End Design: What Participants Experience

A Cohort Structure

Students participate through school-based internship teams, with each team anchored within a single high school. Earth Team runs 8 teams across 8 public high schools, with each team consisting of approximately 14–16 students from grades 9–12.

Teams do not mix across schools; each cohort operates independently within its school context.

Each team is led by an Earth Team campus coordinator, who facilitates weekly sessions, manages student engagement, and accompanies students to field activities.

8 schools / 8 teams

14–16 students per team
Grades 9–12

Campus coordinator-led

B. Program Rhythm

The internship follows a consistent year-long rhythm (~36 weeks, ~120 hours per student) combining classroom-based learning and field-based work.

Weekly after-school sessions (2–3 hours): Held on campus, focused on curriculum instruction, project planning, data analysis, and preparation for field activities.

Periodic weekend field days (5–6 hours): Conducted at community sites such as creeks, parks, and shorelines, where students carry out hands-on environmental work.

The program progresses through a clear annual arc:

FALL (Onboarding & Foundations)
- Recruitment, orientation, and foundational learning in climate science, watershed ecology, species identification, and data collection protocols

MID-YEAR (Fieldwork & Service)
- Active engagement in environmental research and service projects such as water quality monitoring, road dust sampling, habitat restoration, and litter assessments

SPRING (Synthesis & Outreach)
- Data analysis, development of outreach materials, and presentations to public stakeholders such as school boards, city councils, and agencies

C. Core Activities

Interns engage in a combination of scientific investigation, field-based service, and community engagement, with a strong emphasis on real-world environmental data and applications.

1. SCIENTIFIC DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

- Road dust sampling near freeway corridors, with lab-based pollutant analysis
- Water quality monitoring using GLOBE protocols (pH, dissolved oxygen, nitrates, etc.)
- On-Land Visual Trash Assessments (OVTA) using Survey123 and the TRADE mapping platform
- Bird monitoring along migration corridors using field observation tools

2. FIELD-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICE

- Habitat restoration and native planting
- Invasive species removal
- Litter cleanup and watershed protection activities

3. TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS USAGE

- Data collection platforms (Survey123, TRADE)
- Environmental monitoring tools (water testing kits, air quality tools)
- Emissions and air quality analysis tools (e.g., TAP calculator)

4. COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

- Development of bilingual (English/Spanish) outreach materials
- Peer education on campus
- Presentations to school boards, city councils, and public agencies

REAL-WORLD IMPACT OF STUDENT DATA

A defining feature of these activities is that student-generated data is used by real agencies.

- OVTA data has been used by the City of Richmond for stormwater permit compliance.
- GLOBE water quality data contributes to watershed management.
- CARB-funded road dust samples undergo ICP-MS lab analysis.
- This is not simulated science; it is contributory research performed by high school students under professional guidance.

D. Program Cycle

While the diagram is circular, in practice, the cycle often begins with measurement and observation of environmental conditions, which then informs subsequent student action.

Students first measure environmental conditions in their communities, such as litter levels, water quality, or stormwater pollution. These measurements generate data that students analyze and interpret. Through this process, students learn about local environmental systems and the causes of environmental problems.

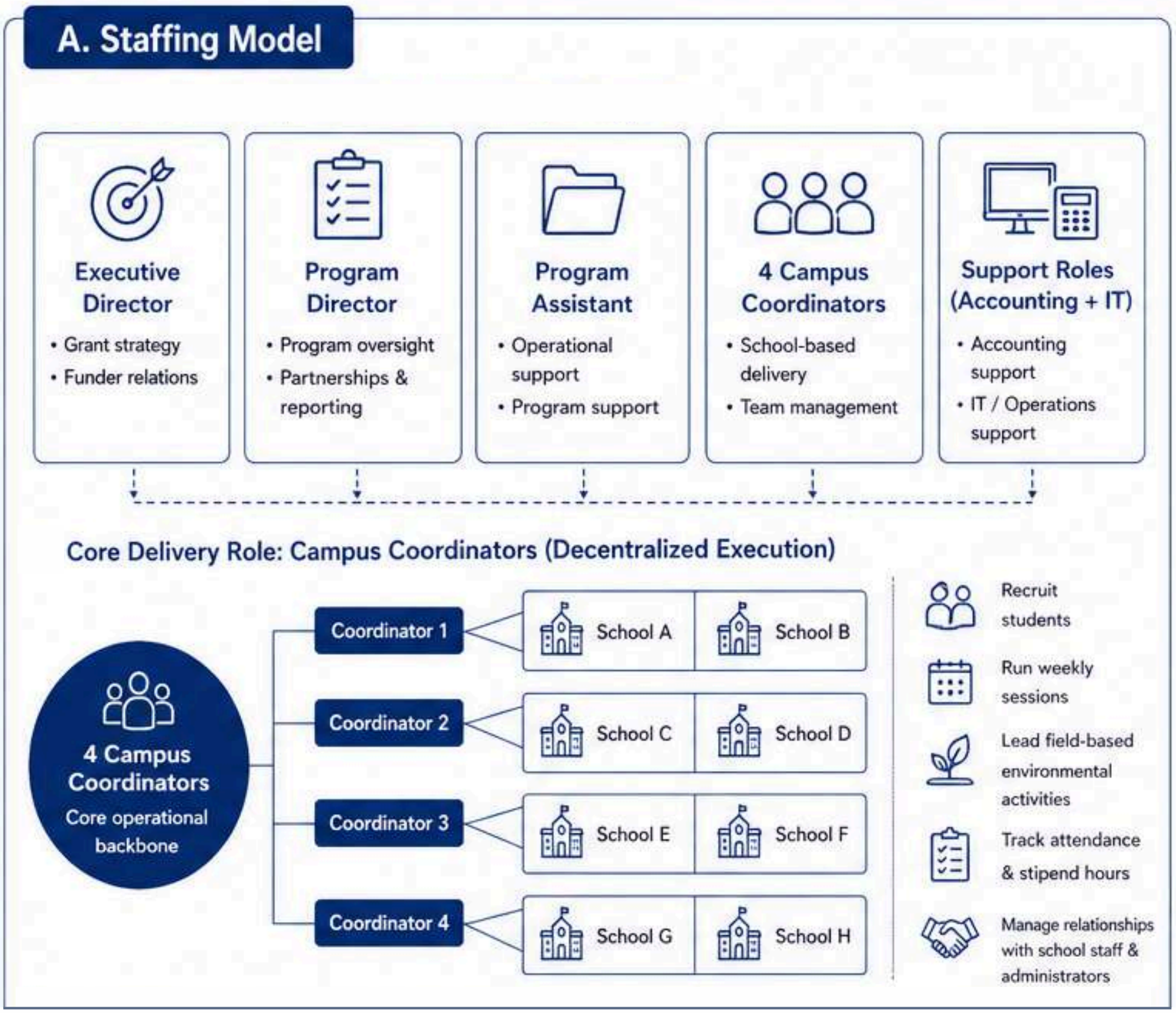
Based on these insights, students generate ideas for potential solutions. They then build interventions or initiatives, such as awareness campaigns, restoration activities, or waste reduction strategies that are implemented through community service activities.

This service generates new environmental observations and measurements, allowing the cycle to begin again.

Example: On-Land Visual Trash Assessment (OVTA) conducted at the Antioch Marina Harbor

1. At Antioch Marina Harbor, interns from Antioch High School and Pittsburg High School began by conducting an On-Land Visual Trash Assessment (OVTA). Students walked designated survey zones and documented every piece of litter encountered.
2. Interns recorded observations using Survey123, noting litter type, quantity, and location across the assessment zones. This process generated detailed, site-specific data on the distribution of waste across the harbor area.
3. Students reviewed the collected data to identify patterns in litter accumulation. Discussions focused on how plastics, food packaging, and cigarette butts enter stormwater systems and eventually impact nearby waterways.
4. Based on these insights, interns explored possible responses to the pollution they observed. They discussed actions such as targeted cleanup activities, improved waste sorting, and awareness campaigns about stormwater pollution.
5. Students organized the logistics for their planned intervention. Teams prepared equipment, assigned responsibilities, and planned how the cleanup would be conducted across the same survey zones identified during the assessment.
6. Interns returned to the harbor to remove the litter documented during the OVTA. Wearing gloves and using grabbers, they collected plastics, glass bottles, food containers, and cigarette butts, sorting the materials for appropriate disposal.

5. Backend Architecture



B. School Integration Mechanism

1. School Integration (Hybrid Model)

Contracts / Agreements

Vendor contracts or letters of agreement with districts/schools

After-School Programming

Weekly sessions held on campus after school hours

Club-Based Entry (Optional)

Integration through existing school club structures

2. Recruitment & Selection Funnel

Classrooms (15+)

Coordinators present internship in 15+ classrooms per school (~800+ students reached per school)

→

Information Session

Interested students attend an after-school information session

→

Phone Interview

Final selection made through a phone interview process

→

Selected Students

Students from priority populations are selected

~800+ students reached per school

3. Adaptation Across Schools

Paid Internship (Not Academic)

Students participate as paid interns, not as part of coursework

Stipend-Based

No academic credit or service hours due to stipend compensation

Flexible Schedules

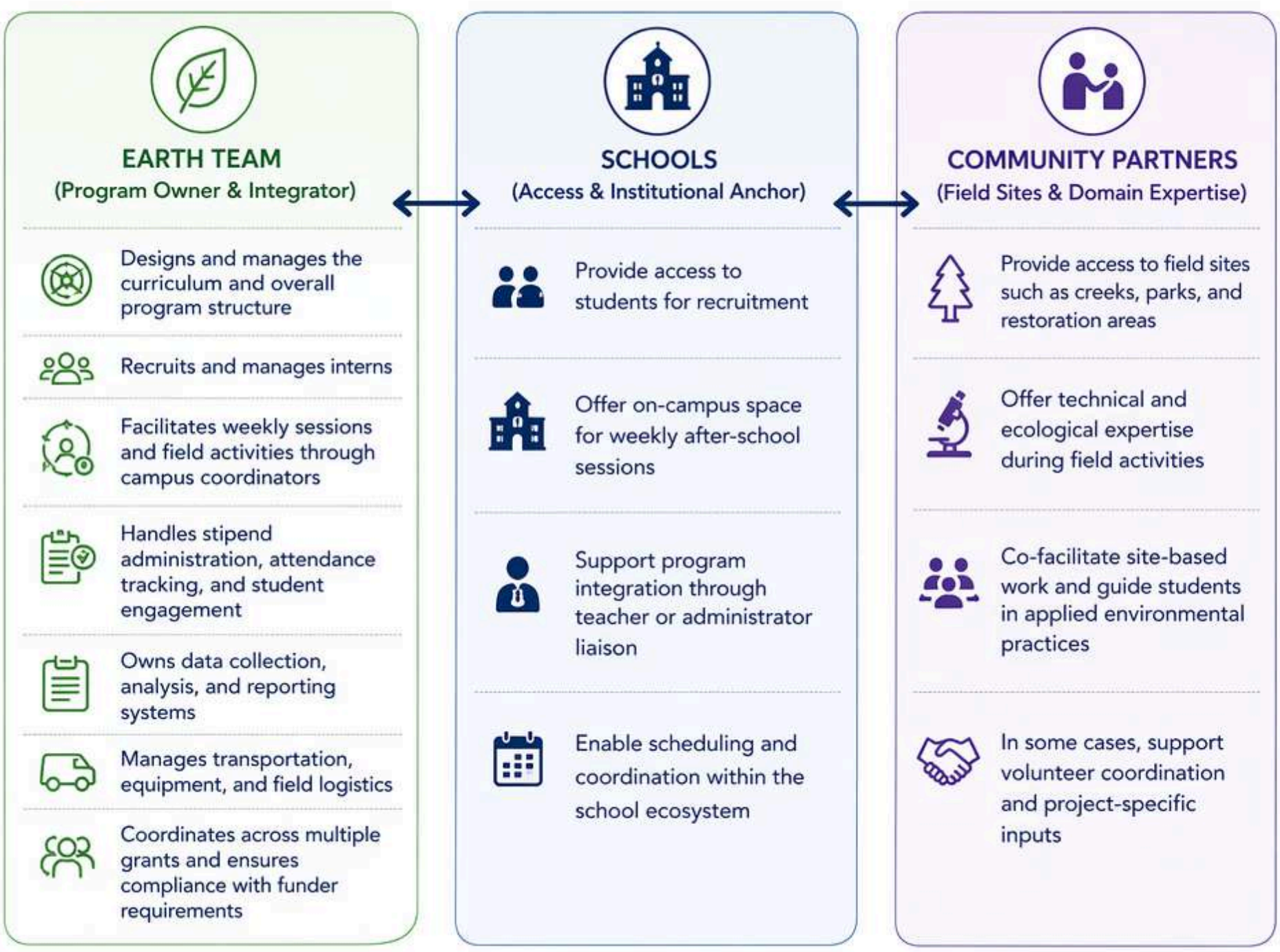
Meeting times adapt to school timetables and space availability

Localized Project Focus

Projects adapt to local environmental needs (e.g., air quality, watersheds, etc.)

C. Partner & Site Management

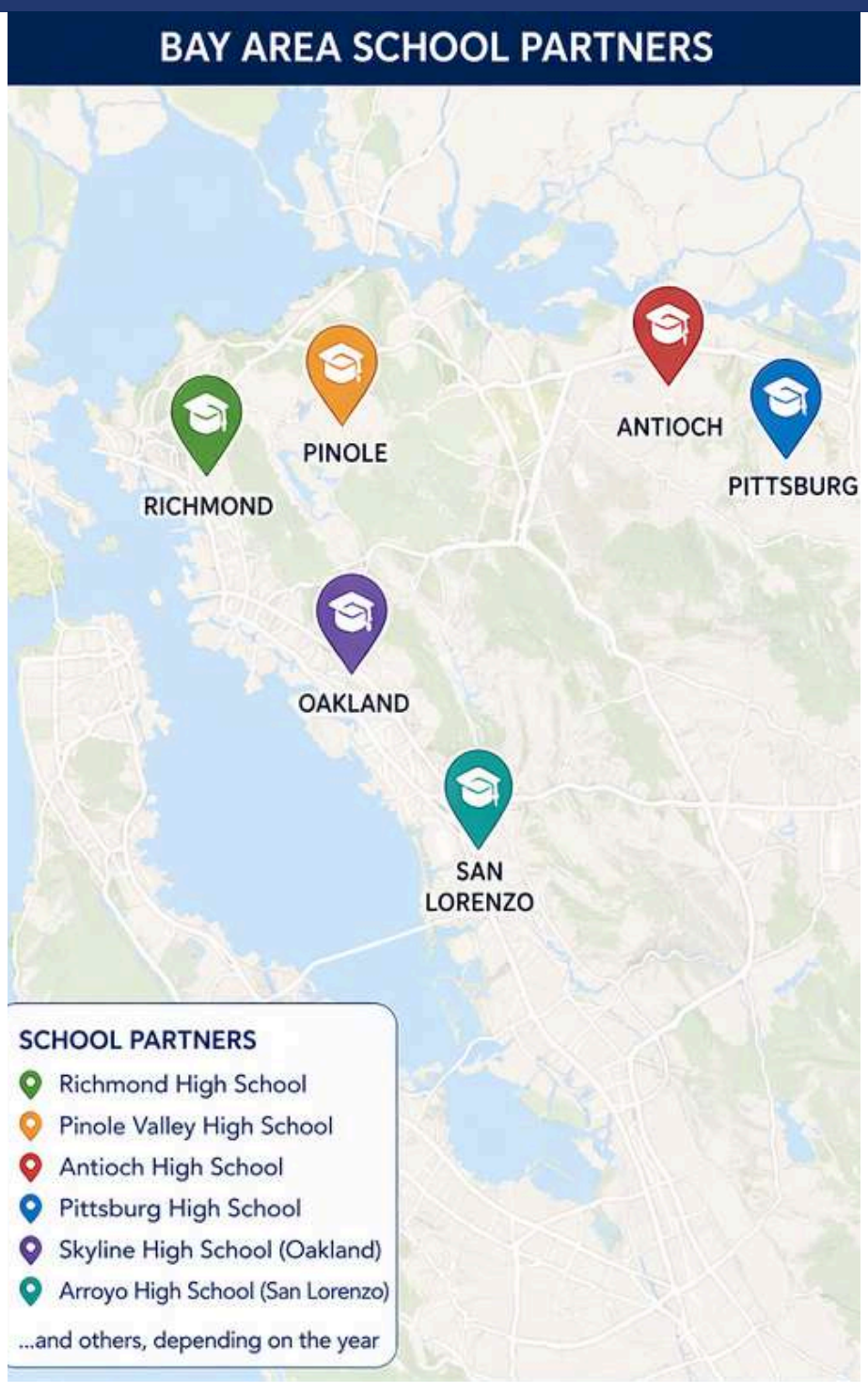
Earth Team operates through a multi-stakeholder partnership model involving community organizations, public agencies, and schools, with clearly differentiated responsibilities.



Partner Glimpse

CONTRA COSTA RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT
Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed
East Bay Regional Park District
FRIENDS OF SAUSAL CREEK
the watershed project
URBAN TILTH GROW YOUR OWN RICHMOND, CA
Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District
EBMUD

Model Case Study 1: Earth Team's Sustainable Youth Internship Program



D. Financial Model

Earth Team operates a grant-funded, integrated financial model, where multiple funding streams support a single unified program. The model also includes ongoing grant applications for new program areas and multi-year funding relationships across agencies.

A). Overall Budget

- Annual operating budget: ~$600,000-$700,000
- Supports:
  - ~120 paid interns
  - 8 school-based teams
  - year-long programming (~36 weeks)
  - field operations across multiple sites

B). Revenue Model

Revenue is primarily derived from government and institutional grants, supplemented by foundation support.

Major funders include:

- California Air Resources Board (CARB)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- CalEPA / NOAA
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)
- California Coastal Commission

C) Cost Structure

Major cost drivers:

- Staff salaries (largest share)
- Intern stipends (~$750 per student annually)
- Transportation (field visits)
- Equipment and supplies (monitoring tools, tablets, testing kits)

Stipend costs:

- ~$9,100 per team (14 interns)
- ~$78,000-$80,000 annually across ~120 interns

D) Structural Feature: Multi-Grant Integration

A defining feature of the model is its integrated grant architecture.

- Submits ~50 grant applications annually and secures ~10-12.
- Manages ~11 concurrent grants, each with distinct requirements
- A single program activity (e.g., a field restoration event) is designed to fulfill multiple grant deliverables simultaneously
- Matching fund requirements (sometimes up to ~50%) are met through this overlap

6. Distinctiveness

STEM-First Design and Scientific Investigation Paired with Service

Projects integrate scientific investigation directly into service-learning. Students are trained in real environmental data collection methods, including water quality monitoring, road dust sampling, and ecological surveys, alongside volunteer activities.

Integrated Multi-Grant Delivery Architecture

Earth Team runs a single program funded through multiple grants, with each activity designed to meet several funder requirements simultaneously. This enables a $600,000-$700,000 budget to deliver outcomes that would otherwise require significantly higher funding.

Real Data, Real Use

Student work generates real data used by public agencies, such as OVTA data for stormwater compliance and GLOBE water data for watershed management. This is not simulated science, but contributory research performed by high school students under professional guidance.

Model Case Study 1: Earth Team's Sustainable Youth Internship Program

7. Impact

Evidence

Earth Team tracks program impact through a **three-stage evaluation model :**

- Front-end (pre-surveys): Establish baseline across students
- Formative (mid-year): Field assessments, presentation rubrics, and check-ins
- Summative (post-surveys): Compare outcomes against baseline

This system with AI project management tracks individual **student information, attendance and participation, project activities, and learning and program outcomes**. All data is stored in a custom Salesforce relational database.

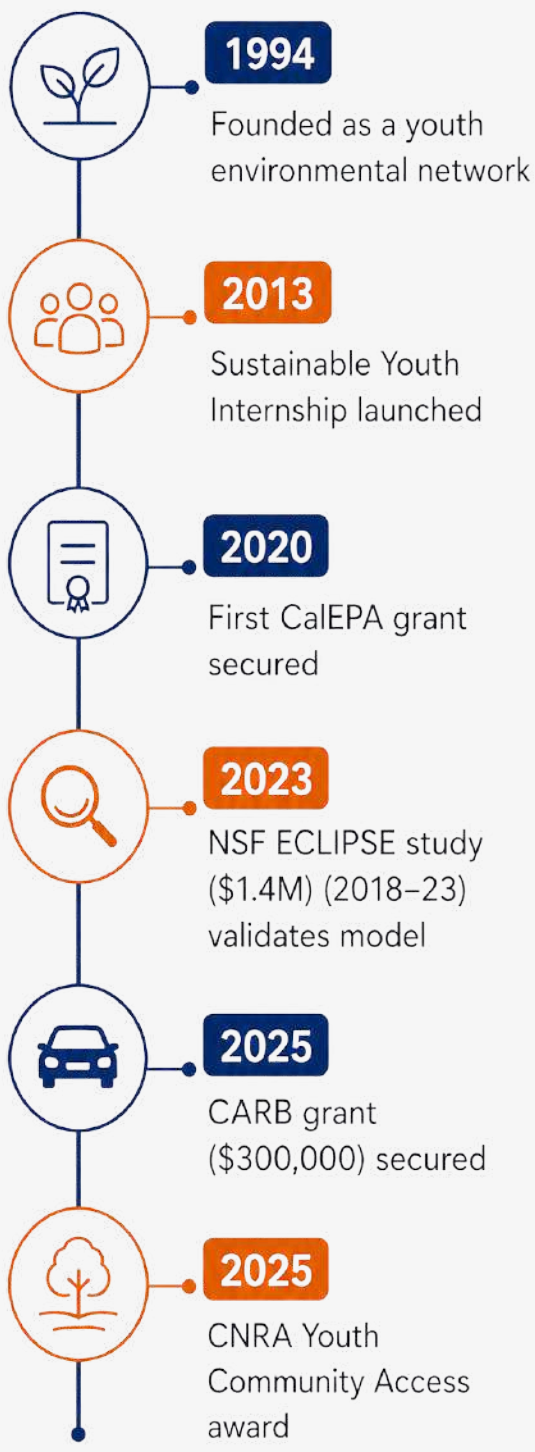
In addition, specific outcome areas are measured through structured tools:

- **Social-emotional development:** Measured using the Covitality Index (self-agency, character, competence, connection, empathy)
- **Workforce readiness:** Tracked through career interest and readiness assessments

8. Project Replication Pointers

1. **Specific Geography Focus**: Choose one area and build long-term expertise, tools, and partnerships around it.
2. **Campus coordinator-led delivery**: Dedicated school-facing roles to manage recruitment, weekly sessions, field logistics, and student engagement.
3. **School-linked, after-school structure**: Use schools for access and infrastructure, while operating outside formal classroom systems to retain program flexibility.
4. **Multi-Stakeholder Implementation Architecture**: Align roles across schools (access), community partners (field sites and expertise), and program operators (delivery and coordination).

9. Evolution & Institutional Maturity



10. Closing Insight

The Sustainable Youth Internship Program demonstrates how service-learning can be embedded within environmental education to produce both community impact and deep experiential learning for students.

The integration of scientific inquiry with community service allows students to see the real-world implications of the concepts they encounter in STEM classrooms, while contributing to tangible improvements in local ecosystems.

In doing so, the program reflects many of the core principles of service-learning. Students investigate environmental problems, plan and implement interventions with community partners, and generate data and insights that inform future action.

Through this process, the program not only advances environmental stewardship but also builds students' capacity to think critically about complex ecological challenges.

Learn More

Model Case Study 2: Sewa USA's Design to LEAD

1. About Sewa USA

Sewa International is a volunteer-driven humanitarian nonprofit active in 30+ countries. The organization operates at a significant scale while retaining a strong grassroots orientation.

In the United States, it has built a nationwide volunteer ecosystem with 45+ chapters across 25+ states, enabling sustained community engagement across diverse geographies. Through this distributed yet coordinated model, Sewa delivers programs spanning education, disaster management, health, family services, and youth engagement, positioning itself as one of the more structured volunteer-led service organizations in the ecosystem.

A defining feature of the model is that it is largely volunteer-led. Student mobilization, mentoring, and local coordination are anchored within Sewa's chapter network through volunteers, including parent mentors and karyakartas, rather than a fully staffed delivery structure.

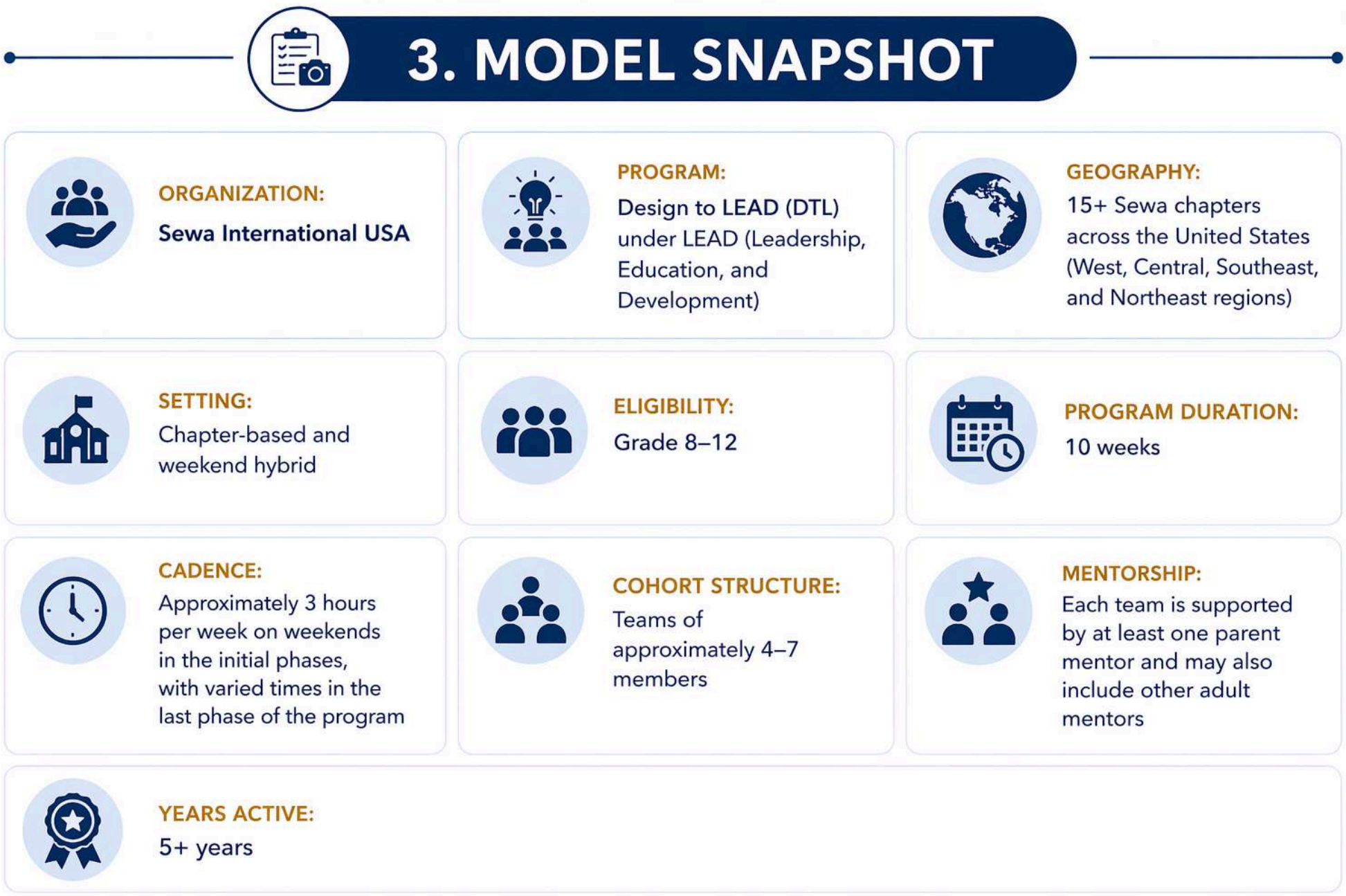
2. Framing the Model

Sewa USA's youth engagement platform, LEAD, brings high school students into community service through local chapters across the United States. Within this broader ecosystem, **Design to LEAD (DTL)** functions as an advanced program focused o**n** applying design thinking to social problem-solving.

DTL combines service orientation with a design-thinking methodology over a 10-week cycle. It was developed under the guidance of Dr. Anurag Mairal, Director of Global Outreach Programs at Stanford Mussallem Center for Biodesign, and Dr. Megha Agrawal, Professor of Practice, Luxembourg School of Business & Alumna, Stanford-India Biodesign.

Rooted in Sewa's broader community network, the program benefits from strong participation and support from Indian-origin families and volunteers, while remaining open to students from all backgrounds.

3. Model Snapshot : Organization :- Sewa International USA



85. Sewa International USA, "Design to Lead (DTL)," https://sewausa.org/DTL, accessed April 20, 2026.

4. Front-End Design: What Participants Experience

A. COHORT STRUCTURE

Students first enroll in LEAD, Sewa's youth leadership and service program, which is structured across three levels. **Design to LEAD (DTL)** is embedded within Level 2 of this progression.

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
Explore	**Design to LEAD (DTL)**	**Lead**
Build awareness and foundational skills	Social innovation and project development	Advanced leadership and larger impact projects

Within each chapter, students are organized into teams of 4–7 members, typically including participants from different grade levels.

Each team is supported by a **parent mentor**, usually a volunteer parent who receives orientation from Sewa on supporting the team through the program.

Teams also work with a **community partner organization** that provides the real-world context for the project.

B. CORE ACTIVITIES

Students progress through a structured social innovation process that includes:

- Understanding social problems
- Engaging with stakeholders
- Researching community needs
- Brainstorming solutions
- Developing prototypes
- Implementing solutions through community projects
- Writing a research paper documenting the project

C. PROGRAM CYCLE AND RHYTHM

The DTL program follows a three-stage design-thinking process:

1 IDENTIFY 4 weeks Jan–Feb	2 INVENT 4 weeks Mar–Apr	3 IMPLEMENT 2 weeks Apr
• Identifying unmet needs • Interacting with stakeholders • Conducting secondary research • Defining a problem to address	• Brainstorming ideas • Evaluating options using "must-have" and "nice-to-have" criteria • Selecting a solution • Building a prototype	• Planning implementation • Identifying partners and resources • Deploying the solution through community engagement
~3 hrs/week (online LMS + guided sessions)	**~3 hrs/week** (online LMS + mentor and instructor led work)	**After school + weekends** (variable team preferred hours)

EXAMPLE: FOOD INSECURITY AMONG IMMIGRANTS, MAINE CHAPTER[86]

1 IDENTIFY

Students researched food insecurity among immigrant families in Maine and mapped organizations supporting immigrant communities. They conducted stakeholder interviews to understand barriers immigrants faced in accessing food resources.

2 INVENT

The team generated multiple solution ideas and evaluated them based on feasibility and impact. They designed a community-based food support initiative in collaboration with local partners.

3 IMPLEMENT

Students partnered with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition to organize food donation and distribution efforts for immigrant families living in local hotels.

86. Sewa International USA, "Design to Lead (DTL) Projects," https://sewausa.org/DTL/Projects, accessed April 20, 2026.

5. Backend Architecture

A. STAFFING MODEL

The program operates through a combination of national coordination and chapter-level implementation.

NATIONAL TEAM

1 Director and 2 Mission Oriented Staff (MOS)

- Curriculum & program design
- Registration & program launch
- Instructor coordination (Phase 1 & 2)
- Mentor training & orientation
- Monitoring & quality oversight

CHAPTER LEVEL (EXECUTION ENGINE)

LEAD COORDINATORS FOR EACH CHAPTER

- Student mobilization
- Program logistics
- Team support
- Mentor coordination
- National team communication

KARYAKARTAS (VOLUNTEERS)

- Student outreach
- Partner onboarding
- Local coordination

B. PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

Each student team works with a community partner organization that provides the real-world context for their project. A maximum of two teams can work with one partner organization.

Partners are typically sourced through local Sewa volunteer networks and existing chapter or national partners, and may include organizations working on issues such as:

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS HELP TEAMS:

Partner Glimpse

AmeriCorps

Hunger at Home — Bridge the Gap

SOLUTIONS FOR CHANGE

TOP DRIVER

GRASSROOTS ECOLOGY

Habitat for Humanity®

American Heart Association.

CADRE — Collaborating Agencies' Disaster Relief Effort

THE JACOBS & CUSHMAN San Diego Food Bank

Asian Americans for Community Involvement

PACIFICA SENIOR LIVING

Helping Hands OF GEORGETOWN

DURHAM RESCUE MISSION

isha FOUNDATION

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GiGi's Playhouse™ — Down Syndrome Achievement Centers — educate. inspire. believe.

SECOR CARES

6. Distinctiveness

7. Impact

6. Distinctiveness

Design-thinking-first structure
DTL is explicitly built around design-thinking methodology and a three-phase process of Identify, Invent, and Implement.

Combination of service and innovation
The program is not only about serving but about understanding unmet needs, exploring solutions, and implementing them.

Research-Based Output
Each team produces a research paper documenting its project, which undergoes peer review before publication.

> Design to Lead has been an amazing experience that has allowed me to have a deeper connection to my community. This past year working on DTL has also taught me how to conduct research and find solutions, so it has a positive effect on society. -
> **Akshar Kothapalli, Sophomore, Atlanta Chapter.**

7. Impact

> The fact that these high schoolers rose to the challenge to identify and tackle various community issues is a testament to their resourcefulness as well as current and future leadership potential. -
> **Ravi Deva, Mentor, Chicago Chapter.**

Taken together, these reflections suggest several areas of youth development fostered by the program:

- leadership and initiative in addressing civic issues
- research and problem-solving skills
- teamwork and collaboration
- communication with real stakeholders
- understanding of community and equity issues
- ability to translate ideas into actionable solutions

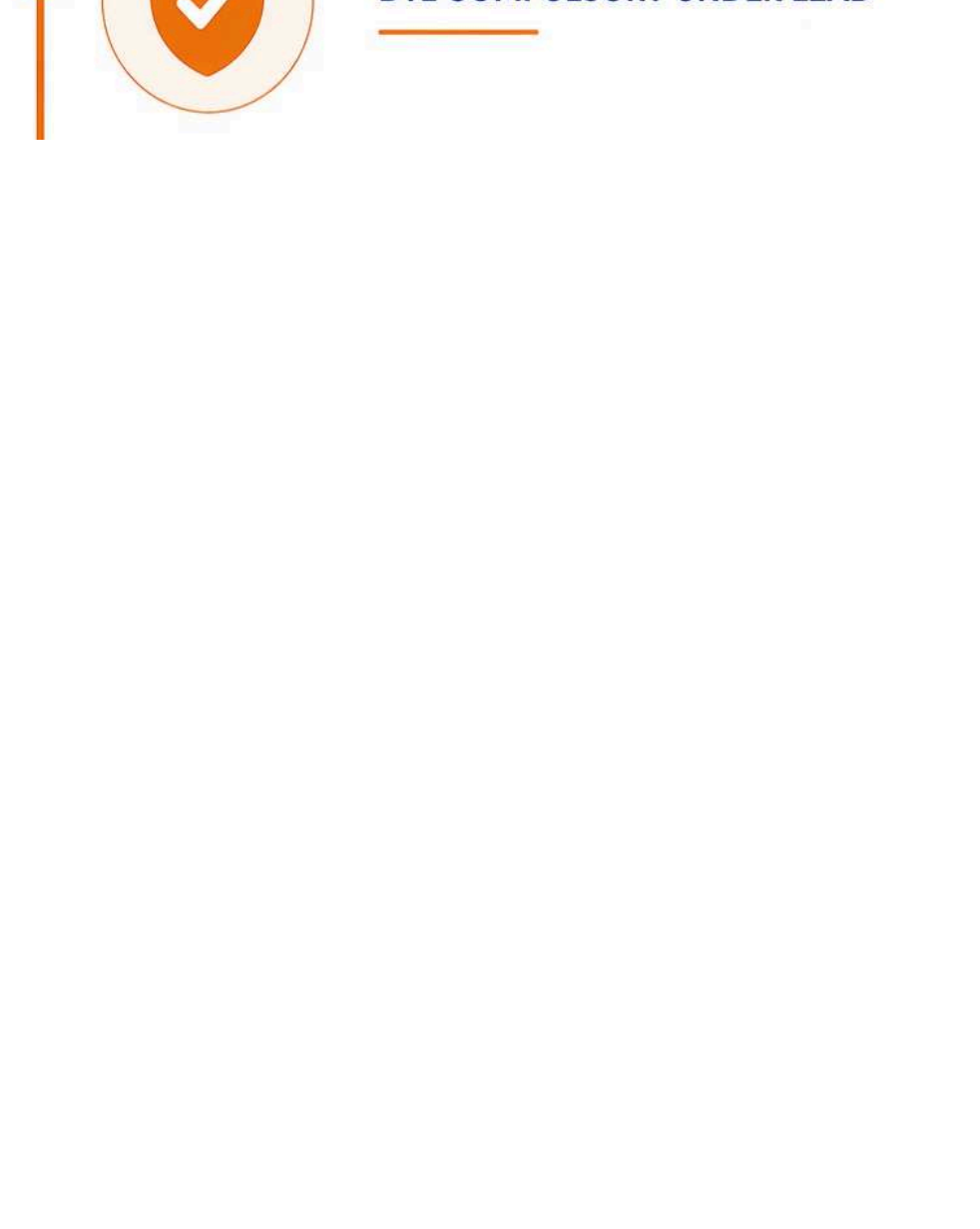
8. Project Replication Pointers

1. **A Centralised Curriculum Backbone:** Maintain a single structured curriculum across all chapters to ensure consistency in learning outcomes while allowing decentralized program delivery.

2. **Community-Anchored Participation**: Build the program within a clearly defined community to strengthen participation, belonging, and long-term engagement.

3. **Strong Volunteer Infrastructure:** Develop a robust volunteer base that can support recruitment, mentoring, and local program coordination across chapters for a lean structure.

9. Evolution & Institutional Maturity



10. Closing Insight

Design to LEAD shows how structured service experiences can be combined with design thinking to shape how young people engage with their communities. The program moves beyond one-time volunteer activities by guiding students through a design-thinking process that begins with understanding real needs, develops through collaborative solution design, and culminates in on-ground implementation.

In this structure, the core principles of service learning take clear form. Students investigate community challenges, design responses, and take action through projects implemented with partner organizations.

What makes the model particularly instructive is that it operates through a largely volunteer-led system. Local chapters, mentors, and community members sustain delivery across geographies, allowing the program to function with relatively limited resources while maintaining continuity in student engagement.

Learn More

Model Case Study 3: Center for Cities + Schools' Y-PLAN[87]

1. About Center for Cities + Schools

The Center for Cities + Schools (CC+S) is a research and practice center based at the University of California, Berkeley. It focuses on the intersection of urban planning, education, and public policy, working to strengthen connections between schools and the communities they serve. Through research, partnerships, and applied initiatives, CC+S supports more equitable and integrated approaches to city and school system development.

2. Framing the Model

Y-PLAN (Youth - Plan, Learn, Act Now) is a civic learning model developed by the Center for Cities + Schools (CC+S) at UC Berkeley. It engages students directly in real-world city planning processes by connecting K-12 classrooms with civic institutions and higher education partners. It aims to break silos between these domains and create an interdisciplinary, intergenerational "community of practice."

The model positions students not as passive learners or volunteers, but as youth consultants working on authentic civic challenges posed by public agencies, community organizations, or planning bodies. It operates through structured classroom integration, field-based inquiry, and public-facing outputs, with a dual focus on student learning and contribution to ongoing planning processes.

3. Model Snapshot

Organization:
CC + S

Program:
Y-PLAN

Setting:
School day integrated

Areas of Practice:
Housing, Transportation, Public Space, and Schools, Services, & Amenities

Program Duration:
One week to several months; 4–8 weeks most common

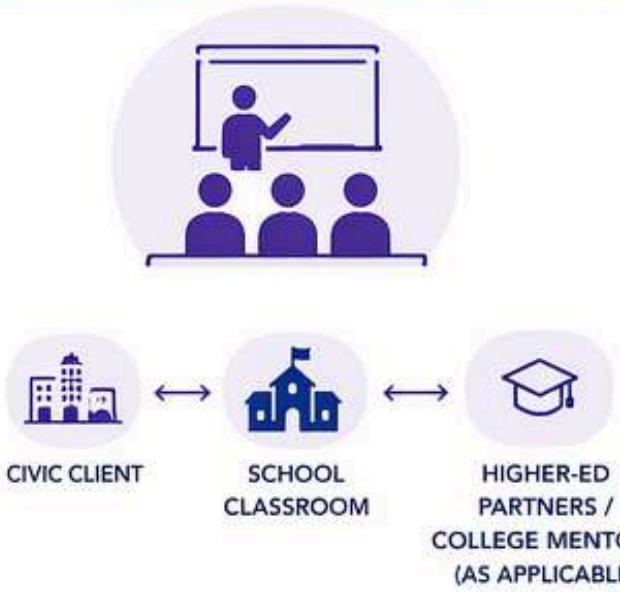
Eligibility:
K–12

Years Active:
25+ years

87. Center for Cities + Schools, UC Berkeley "Y-PLAN," https://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/, accessed April 20, 2026.

4. Front-End Design: What Participants Experience

A. COHORT STRUCTURE



Students participate through **classroom-based cohorts** within K-12 schools, working in teams on a shared project question introduced by a civic client.

The model is designed to operate within regular classroom settings, with **teachers** facilitating the process and **civic clients**, and in some cases, **higher-ed partners or college mentors**, engaging at specific stages.

Students collaborate in groups and are encouraged to function as a "**community of practice**," where each participant brings distinct perspectives, skills, and lived experiences into the project.

B. PROGRAM RHYTHM

Y-PLAN projects can range from one week to several months, though **four to eight weeks** is the most common duration.

1. PROJECT INTRO & ORIENTATION

Understanding the project question, the community context, and the Y-PLAN process.

2. FIELD INQUIRY & DATA COLLECTION

Site visit, observations, interviews, surveys, and collection of primary and secondary data.

3. ANALYSIS & SYNTHESIS

Interpreting data, identifying key insights, and analyzing site opportunities and challenges.

4. IDEATION & PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Generating ideas, evaluating options, and developing policy and/or design proposals.

5. PUBLIC PRESENTATION & REFLECTION

Presenting recommendations, receiving feedback, and reflecting on learning.

EARLY TOUCHPOINT: CIVIC CLIENT CLASSROOM VISIT

Civic client visits the classroom to introduce the project and share real-world context.

MIDPOINT TOUCHPIONT: SITE VISIT

Students visit the project location with the civic client to observe and understand site conditions and issues.

FINAL TOUCHPOINT: PUBLIC PRESENTATION

Students present final recommendations to civic clients and community stakeholders.

C. CORE ACTIVITIES

1 PROJECT FRAMING & ORIENTATION

- Introduction to the project question and civic client
- Overview of the Y-PLAN methodology
- Activities that build group identity and a "community of practice"

2 FIELD-BASED INQUIRY & OBSERVATION

- Site visits to the project location
- Guided observation and mapping of the built environment
- Interaction with civic clients to understand site conditions and relevant issues

3 DATA COLLECTION & RESEARCH

- Develop and conduct surveys and interviews with stakeholders
- Collect and analyze primary data (site observations, surveys, interviews)
- Review secondary data (city planning docs, historical records, etc.)

4 ANALYSIS & SYNTHESIS

- Use tools such as SWOT analysis
- Interpret findings
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the project site

5 IDEATION & PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

- Review examples of planning and urban design interventions
- Brainstorm solutions through structured charrettes
- Evaluate ideas using social & health, physical & environmental, and fiscal tradeoffs
- Develop policy and/or design proposals

6 COMMUNICATION & PRESENTATION

- Prepare presentations and deliverables (slide decks, posters, websites, etc.)
- Participate in critique sessions ("desk critiques") with mentors/professionals
- Present final recommendations to civic clients and stakeholders; Q&A and feedback

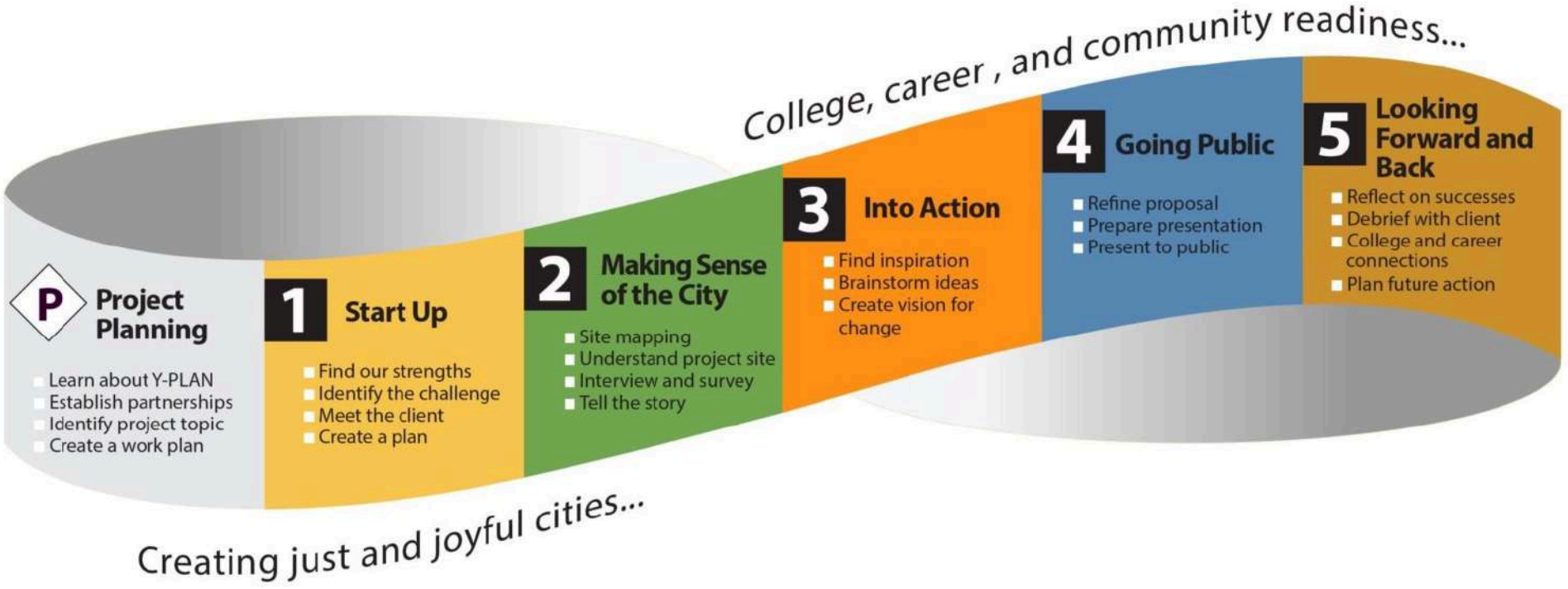
7 REFLECTION AND FOLLOW-THROUGH

- Reflecting on learning and skills developed
- Writing letters to civic clients
- Connecting the experience to future civic, academic, or professional pathways

Students engage in a structured sequence of activities aligned with the five-module Y-PLAN process.

D. Program Cycle

Y-PLAN follows a structured five-stage cycle:



While the model is presented as a linear sequence, in practice it operates as a cumulative process in which each stage builds on the evidence, reflections, and proposals developed in the previous one.

Students first begin with Start Up, where they are introduced to the Y-PLAN methodology, orient themselves to the project, and hear the project question directly from the civic client. This stage also includes activities that help participants identify what they bring to the process as a team.

The process then moves into Making Sense of the City, where students investigate the project site through observation, mapping, SWOT analysis, surveys, interviews, and other forms of primary and secondary research. This stage is designed to help students build an evidence base before moving to solutions.

In Into Action, students review examples of planning or design interventions, participate in brainstorming charrettes, assess proposals through trade-offs, and begin shaping policy and/or design recommendations.

This is followed by Going Public, where students refine their work through critique, prepare their final deliverables, and present their recommendations to civic clients and other stakeholders in a formal public-facing session.

The cycle concludes with Looking Forward and Back, where students reflect on what they learned, communicate with civic clients about next steps, and connect the experience to future civic, academic, or professional pathways.

Example: Green Infrastructure, Oakland

Start Up

In this project, 11th-grade students from Skyline High School, part of a sustainability class in the Green Energy Pathway, were introduced to a live civic question: how green infrastructure can address climate impacts and equity issues in Oakland, particularly in relation to urban tree canopy, flooding, and heat islands.

The project was anchored by a civic client from the City of Oakland's Climate Program, who requested youth-generated proposals that reflect community priorities and contribute to ongoing climate action planning. Students began by understanding the scope of the problem, including the broader context of climate change impacts in California and inequities across neighborhoods.

Making Sense of the City

Students moved into a structured inquiry phase through multiple site visits and field-based exploration. Their first visit was to the Oakland Unified School District's Central Kitchen, Instructional Farm, and Education Center, where they observed how urban agriculture, forestry, and green spaces contribute to food systems and community access.

They then conducted additional site visits to Damon Slough, Sausal Creek, and Arrowhead Marsh, where they examined shoreline conditions, urban water systems, and the impact of runoff and sea-level rise. During these visits, students carried out SWOT analyses, assessing factors such as tree canopy coverage, permeability of surfaces, access to water and recreation, and surrounding land use patterns.

Students also engaged with layered data on pollution, health disparities, and climate vulnerability, identifying how low-income communities and communities of color were disproportionately affected by environmental risks such as air pollution and urban heat.

Into Action

Based on their research and observations, students began developing proposals focused on green infrastructure solutions. Their ideas reflected a range of priorities, including stormwater management, public park and green space access, community gardens, and enhancement of urban tree canopy.
Students worked in groups to define specific project concepts. For example, one group proposed a "South Oakland Arterial Revitalization" plan aimed at improving drainage, reducing pollution, and enhancing quality of life through green street design. Another group proposed converting an unused commercial space into a community garden that would provide food access, employment opportunities, and a safe communal space. A third group focused on tree-line interventions along highways to improve air quality and reduce noise.

Each proposal included not only the concept but also a structured breakdown of benefits, barriers, and implementation steps, such as securing permits, engaging community stakeholders, and establishing maintenance systems.

Going Public

Students translated their proposals into structured outputs and presented them as recommendations for real-world application. Their work articulated clear problem definitions, evidence from field research, and detailed solutions supported by implementation logic.

The presentation phase enabled students to communicate their ideas to stakeholders connected to the project, aligning their proposals with ongoing planning processes within the city. The structure of their outputs, including defined benefits, anticipated challenges, and step-by-step implementation plans, reflected an attempt to make their ideas actionable within real civic systems.

Looking Forward and Back

The project concluded with reflection and forward planning. Students identified potential partners across government agencies, non-profits, community groups, and private organizations who could support implementation of their proposals.

The next steps included building partnerships with the City of Oakland and other stakeholders to ensure that student recommendations could inform future climate policy and planning efforts. The project also fed into future iterations of Y-PLAN, with the possibility of continued engagement and deeper collaboration in subsequent cohorts.

5. Backend Architecture

A. STAFFING MODEL

Y-PLAN is implemented through a distributed set of roles across the project cycle.

TEACHER / INSTRUCTOR ⟷ CIVIC CLIENT / PROBLEM SPONSOR / EXTERNAL REVIEWER ⟷ STUDENTS ⟷ HIGHER-ED PARTNERS / COLLEGE MENTORS (e.g., UC BERKELEY)

1 TEACHER / INSTRUCTOR

The main day-to-day implementer of the model using the Y-PLAN Teacher Guide and toolkit.

Role includes:

- Planning how the project fits into classroom instruction
- Preparing students for different stages of the cycle
- Facilitating classroom lessons and group work
- Coordinating with civic clients and, where relevant, college mentors
- Guiding students from research to proposal development to final presentation

2 CIVIC CLIENT / PROBLEM SPONSOR / EXTERNAL REVIEWER

External partner who brings the real-world problem and context into the classroom.

Role includes:

- Bringing the live project question into the classroom through a project presentation
- Explaining background information and project context
- Helping students understand the real issue during the site visit
- Listening to and responding to final student recommendations

3 STUDENTS

Work in teams to research, analyze, and develop feasible, equitable recommendations.

Role includes:

- Asking questions and investigating the issue
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Synthesizing findings
- Generating ideas and evaluating solutions
- Developing and presenting final proposals
- Reflecting on learning and impact

4 HIGHER-ED PARTNERS / COLLEGE MENTORS

Provide expertise, mentorship, and critique at key stages (when available).

Role includes:

- Supporting stakeholder research and survey design
- Providing feedback during brainstorming and proposal refinement
- Participating in desk critique sessions before final presentation
- Bringing domain-specific technical knowledge into the project (e.g., design challenges, engineering expertise)

B. SCHOOL INTEGRATION MECHANISM

Y-PLAN operates within regular K-12 classroom settings through a structured curriculum sequence.

CURRICULUM SEQUENCE
Project planning followed by five learning modules, each with lesson plans, student worksheets, and pacing tools.

SCHOOL-DAY IMPLEMENTATION
Many projects take place during the school day, supporting equity, access, and full participation for all students.

FLEXIBLE DURATION
Projects can range from one week to several months, with four to eight weeks being the most common.

ACADEMIC ALIGNMENT
Designed to fit formal academic requirements and aligns with major standards, including Common Core and career pathways. Toolkit includes Common Core alignment handouts.

C. PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

Y-PLAN collaborates with partners across planning, education, higher education, and the community to ground projects in real-world contexts.

- City of Oakland Climate Program
- Oakland Unified School District
- Skyline High School
- UC Berkeley Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Local Non-profits, Neighborhood Groups
- Consulting Firms (Community & Civic Ecosystem)

Y-PLAN is a collaborative model—where educators, community partners, higher-ed experts, and students work together to build equitable, actionable solutions for their communities.

88. Center for Cities + Schools, UC Berkeley, https://y-plan.berkeley.edu/toolkit/, accessed April 20, 2026.

6. Distinctiveness

Authentic Civic Client as Core Design Anchor
Y-PLAN is built around a live project question brought by a civic client, rather than a teacher-generated classroom prompt. This gives the model a direct connection to real planning processes and public decision-making contexts.

Strong Classroom Integration with External Stakeholder Access
Y-PLAN remains embedded within regular classroom instruction while still creating structured touchpoints with civic clients and, in some cases, higher-ed partners. This combination allows the model to stay academically anchored without losing real-world relevance.

Highly Codified for Replication
The model is supported by role-specific guides for teachers, civic partners, and higher-ed partners, along with module-wise lesson plans, worksheets, planners, scorecards, and surveys. This level of codification makes the approach highly replicable.

Intergenerational Civic Collaboration (K-12 + Higher Education)
Y-PLAN creates structured opportunities for K-12 students and higher education partners, often undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral students, to work together on the same civic problem. These participants do not engage only as instructors or observers, but contribute within the same process of research, ideation, and critique. This creates an intergenerational learning environment where both younger and higher ed students are exposed to practical experience in civic problem-solving.

7. Impact

> "I realized that I needed to step up to have my voice heard. In the end, I was able to bring change to my city, and I am proud that I was able to make a difference."
> **- Bonnie, Former Y-PLAN Student**

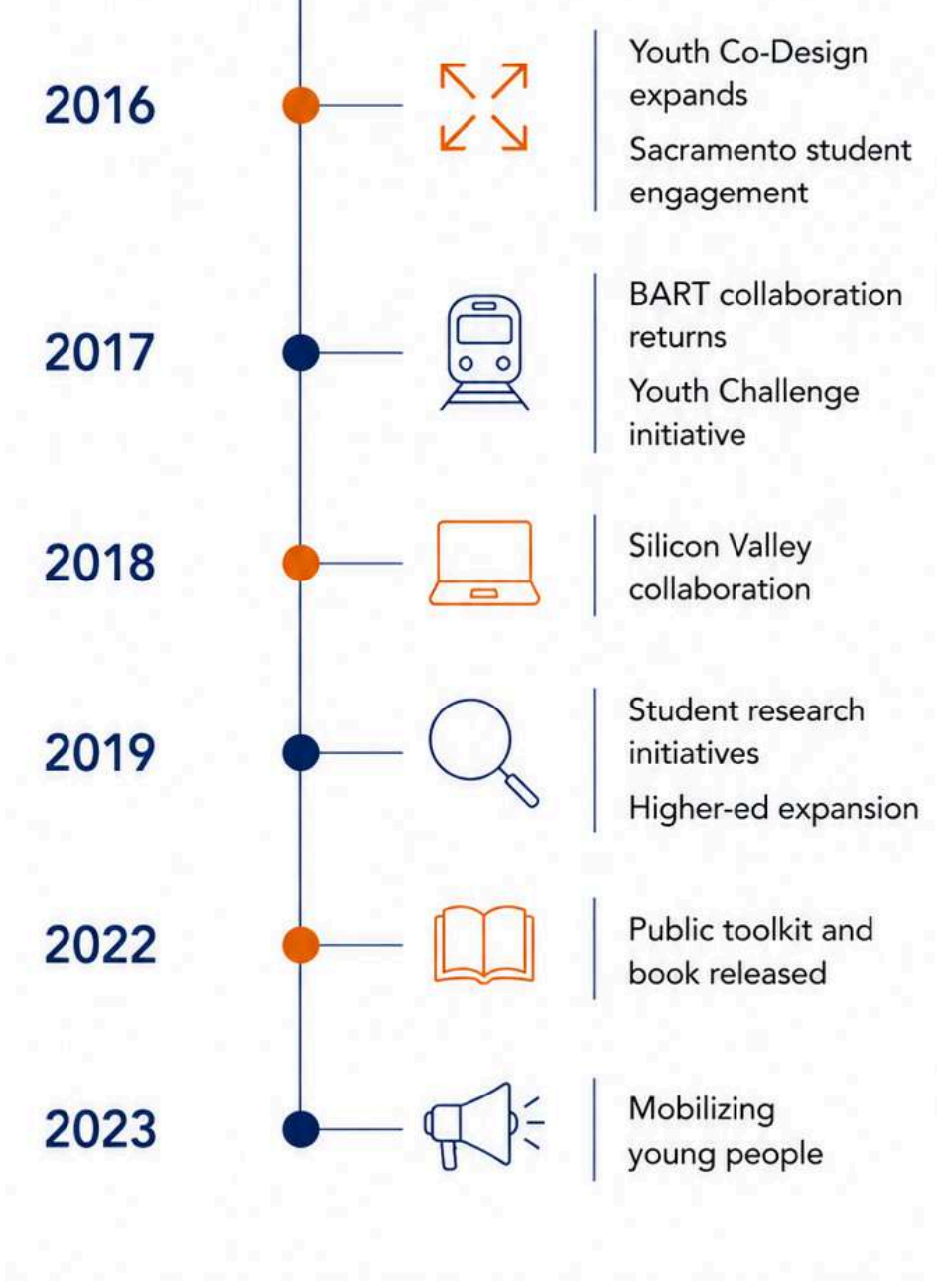
Taken together, these reflections suggest several areas of youth development fostered by the program:

- leadership and initiative in addressing social issues
- teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- communication with community stakeholders
- empathy and understanding of community challenges
- ability to translate ideas into practical solutions
- design thinking for problem-solving

8. Project Replication Pointers

1. Three-part partnership model: Requires alignment across three actors, K-12 schools (delivery), civic partners (problem source), and higher-ed partners (mentorship and technical support)
2. Deep classroom integration: Designed to run within regular school-day instruction, not as an add-on, making teacher ownership and curriculum fit critical
3. Highly codified implementation: Supported by module-wise toolkits, lesson plans, worksheets, and partner-specific guides, enabling structured delivery with limited additional effort or external facilitation.
4. Not a service-learning model, but adaptable to it: The model is designed to culminate in proposals rather than direct implementation. However, it can be extended by building on the "Into Action" phase to include small-scale student-led service components.

9. Evolution & Institutional Maturity



10. Closing Insight

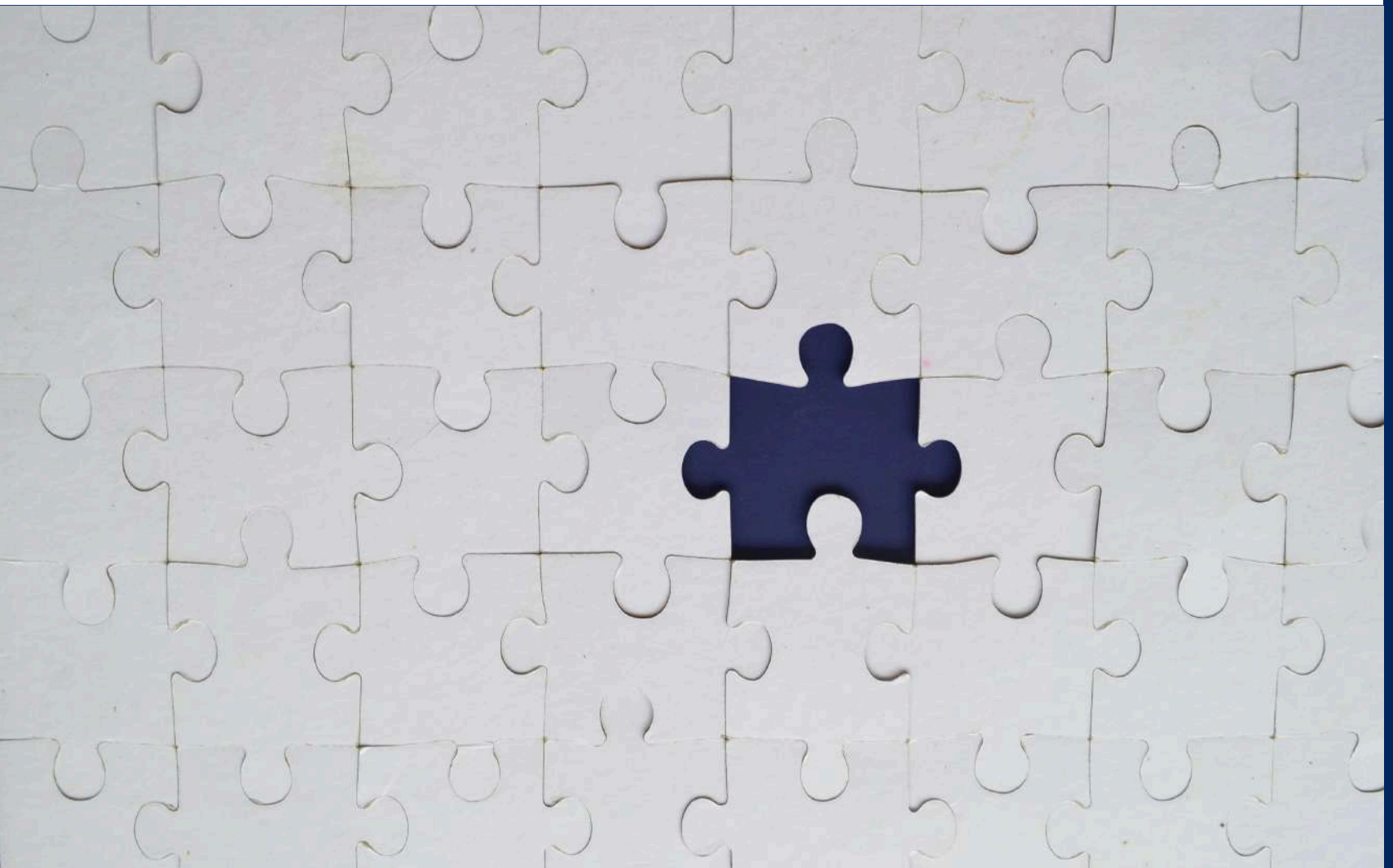
Y-PLAN demonstrates how civic engagement can be embedded within formal education without being reduced to simulation or awareness-building.

Its strength lies in aligning three elements that are often disconnected: real problems, structured learning, and institutional participation. Students are not working on hypothetical cases, but on live questions shaped by civic actors, within a process that is academically grounded and operationally structured.

Importantly, Y-PLAN is not a traditional service-learning model. It stops at generating proposals rather than requiring students to implement solutions. However, the structure makes it possible to extend into service, where students can take on small, defined roles in implementation without altering the core cycle.

Learn More

Annexures



Annexure 1: SSCE Implementation Guidance by CDE

Criteria 1: Be engaged in academic work in a productive way.

Districts may establish their own requirements for a student to be considered engaged in work in a productive way. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Being enrolled in and attending classes, and/or on track to graduate or earn a Certificate of Completion—using district or state requirements
- Demonstrating academic improvement for all youth (challenges faced by students who are English Learners [EL], homeless, in foster care, incarcerated, and/or in alternative school settings, should be considered)
- Building constructive relationship(s) with the school community, (e.g., prosocial behaviors)
- LEAs may also consider using student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to specify levels needed for students to be on track to receive a Certificate of Completion or otherwise productively engaged in academic work.

Criteria 2: Demonstrate a competent understanding of U.S. and California constitutions; functions and governance of local governments; tribal government structures and organizations; the role of the citizen in a constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes.

Students must complete grade-level history-social science (HSS) course requirements, or their equivalent, in World History, U.S. History, and American Government with a passing grade. Interdisciplinary coursework may also include civic aspects of government, law, history, geography, culture, ethnic studies, international governments, economics, and current events, as well as how to apply such knowledge in different settings and circumstances. LEAs may determine, through local board of education policy, their local definitions of a passing grade. LEAs may choose to measure fulfillment of HSS course requirements with a district-specific content benchmark or civic assessment. LEA encouragement of student participation in local meetings related to all three branches of government may also be considered. LEAs may encourage the integration of experiential learning opportunities into these courses, including civic discussions and simulations. LEAs may also consider encouraging grade eleven student fulfillment of the criteria in order for a seal to be affixed to a transcript for use in post-secondary college applications.

Criteria 3: Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts.

When taking informed action, students may be encouraged to choose and define problems in their own communities, investigate root causes and possible solutions, develop and implement plans to address those problems, and reflect on their actions to help them develop identities as citizens with rights and responsibilities. This type of civic engagement augments service-learning by encouraging students to consider influencing institutional policies along with other options for addressing problems. Students ’ informed action should be significant as evidenced by the duration, depth, and/or impact of their engagement in the school and/or community. Efforts may be undertaken individually, with classmates, or in partnership with community members and organizations. LEAs are encouraged to form ongoing partnerships with community organizations that may help guide students to acts of civic engagement unique to their own community. LEAs may also encourage students to develop ongoing civic engagement projects that develop over time as their communities ’ needs also change. By forming long-term community partnerships, this could present LEAs with an opportunity to incentivize ongoing civic engagement for students beginning at preschool and kindergarten.

Participation in informed civic engagement activities may take many forms. Students may choose to spearhead new initiatives or projects; alternatively, students may also choose to participate in projects that improve upon a pre-existing opportunity. In order to promote student use of inquiry, educators are encouraged to use the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning (PDF) document, which is available on the Education Commission of the States web page. This document can help educators support students as they build civic skills during class and on the school campus as a whole, and in the community. In addition, to support students as they gain civic skills, educators may want to consider several complementary streams of practice such as digital media literacy education, social-emotional learning, and school climate reform, as noted in The Republic is (Still) at Risk—and Civics is Part of the Solution (PDF) document, which is available on the CivXNow web page. Both of these documents provide information to support students ’ civic knowledge and skill development as they endeavor to earn the SSCE.

Annexure 1: SSCE Implementation Guidance by CDE

Additional information on civic engagement activities can be found in the Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint for Action(PDF) document, which is available on the California Department of Education (CDE) Resources to Support Civic Engagement web page. Students are encouraged to pursue projects that relate to issues that matter to them and their communities and that incorporate social action and policy change that could range from local to global. Civic engagement projects may integrate skills and knowledge across content areas.

The Resources to Support Civic Engagement web page provides a variety of resources to help guide student civic engagement and satisfy Criteria 3 for the SSCE. Civic engagement may look different in different LEA contexts, and the wide variety of resources available may be considered a starting point for local decision making. The goal is for all students to have opportunities for experiential learning to advance democratic ideals.

Note that volunteering may be considered an act of civic engagement; however, volunteering alone does not constitute a project to address a real-world problem. Additionally, some acts of civil disobedience, such as walk-outs or sit-ins, may be considered acts of civic engagement, when taken in context of the student 's community. Historic examples of this include the 1960 Greensboro lunch sit-ins and the 1963 Birmingham Children 's March, and fall under the category of what Congressman John Lewis referred to as "good trouble." LEAs may refer to guidance regarding civic mindedness in Criteria 5 when considering how to approach acts of civil disobedience as an acceptable form of civic engagement. LEAs may refer to chapter 17 of the HSS Framework(PDF) for additional information on the role of dissent and civil disobedience in the American democratic system.

Criteria 4: Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection.

Not only do the abilities to analyze and critique their own work, collaborate, take action, and self-reflect help students fulfill the SSCE criteria, but they also ensure that an eligible candidate for the SSCE is college, career, and civic ready.
Through self-reflection, the student will demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Some options for student self-reflection include, but are not limited to:

- How the student engaged with individuals, groups, and/or organizations to advance a common good (for the student's community and/or society as a whole) or a democratic ideal, such as equity and justice;
- What the student learned and how the student has personally grown through the civic engagement activity;
- The extent to which the efforts had their desired impact, and what might be done differently or additionally to create deeper or more lasting change; and
- How the student was involved in the project or engagement activity over an extended period of time.

Self-reflection may be exhibited in a variety of formats (written, oral, digital, audio, video, multimedia, etc.), and may include the project's impact on the student's learning and growth in civic skills. This may include working with others, the interdisciplinary skills applied, the effectiveness of the action taken for the community the student endeavored to serve, and ideas for further or future work. Some examples include:

- A capstone project or portfolio with self-reflection on project activities, including successes and challenges;
- A public presentation regarding information on roadblocks, or issues that happened within the civic engagement activity;
- A public presentation such as (but not limited to) a video, slide show, speech, meeting with a policy maker;
- A written essay explaining why an activity was chosen; what activities were undertaken; what was learned; what civic skills, competencies, and knowledge were gained; how the efforts impacted the community; and how the activity may inspire future civic engagement activities for the student or others.

The reflection or presentation should reflect a student's choice of civic engagement activities. LEAs might consider an annual or bi-yearly civics showcase event for students to have a platform to present their civics engagement work.

Annexure 1: SSCE Implementation Guidance by CDE

Criteria 5: Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society.

1. Civic mindedness may encompass:
    - Concern for the rights and well-being of all and a desire to contribute to the common good, including members of groups historically disenfranchised by virtue of race, ethnicity, language background, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other social identity;
    - A proactive commitment to equity, inclusivity, racial and ethnic diversity, fairness, and dismantling structures and practices that have previously excluded select groups from civic participation (e.g., connecting the Fifteenth Amendment's suffrage protections to address anti Black racism, racism and discrimination against other racial minorities and immigrants, including but not limited to Native Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans and other language minorities protected by the Voting Rights Act; and the Nineteenth Amendment's protection of women's right to vote);
    - Appreciating and seeking out a variety of perspectives and valuing differences, including those voices that are underrepresented or marginalized;
    - Having a sense of civic duty at local, state, national, and global levels;
    - Being aware of the value of their own experiences, their knowledge of their community, and their power to change things for the better, as well as respect for contributions of other members of the polity who do not share the same racial, cultural, or economic background.
2. Evidence of observed character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to supporting the school, community, and/or society may include:
    - Speaking and engaging others with respect, civility, and welcome, especially those who are different and/or have diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds or opposing views;
    - Demonstrating empathy and understanding through inclusion and helping to elevate the voices of others; standing up for oneself or another student who is experiencing bullying, harassment, discrimination, exclusion or unwanted attention; and leading a group to work toward providing a common good.
3. Evidence of ongoing civic engagement may include:
    - Demonstrating civic engagement at various points throughout one's schooling experiences by engaging with one or more groups or organizations that attend to community or societal priorities in addition to forms of engagement that are part of a required classroom experience.

Additional information on civic values may be found in the Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint for Action(PDF) document, which is available on the CDE Resources to Support Civic Engagement web page.

Evidence on these points may be supported by one or more recommendations from a peer, educator, mentor, local, state, or national official, or non-familial community member. Recommenders may choose the format of their recommendation. Formats may include:

- Written letters of recommendation
- Videos
- Audio clips
- Digital presentations

Students may submit recommendations from peers who hold an appointed or elected position in a school or civic related organization, or from a coworker at a salary-earning job, volunteer or paid internship, or a mentor who has earned the SSCE.

Students may submit recommendations from adults who are educators, coworkers/supervisors, civic leaders, local, state, or national officials, mentors, or coaches. LEAs may want to consider a letter of recommendation template or an endorsement form that is translated into multiple languages and could be easily completed and more accessible to a range of community members.

Annexure 2: Number of Seals Ordered in Participating LEAs

Counties that ordered Seals	Seals Ordered, 2024-25	Students enrolled in High School (Grade 9-12)	Seals ordered per 1000 high school students
San Benito	198	3,707	53
Orange	5024	146,810	34
Riverside	3222	133,581	24
San Diego	2876	152,613	19
Kern	982	61,152	16
Contra Costa	876	54,636	16
Sacremento	1417	89,582	16
Yolo	122	9,147	13
Monterey	294	23,063	13
Tulare	403	31,882	13
Santa Clara	965	76,680	13
Santa Cruz	153	12,503	12
Alameda	808	66,798	12
San Mateo	250	27,089	9
Los Angeles	3736	422,635	9
Santa Barbara	180	20,886	9

Annexure 2: Number of Seals Ordered in Participating LEAs

Fresno	545	65,188	8
Ventura	343	41,215	8
Madera	36	9,846	4
Nevada	14	4,410	3
Sonoma	58	20,620	3
Mendocino	11	4,080	3
San Bernardino	325	127,157	3
Humboldt	12	5,341	2
San Joaquin	110	50,035	2
Shasta	13	8,416	2
Glenn	2	1,996	1
Stanislaus	30	34,104	1
San Luis Obispo	8	10,932	1
Placer	13	25,045	1
El Dorado	5	9,901	1
Solano	8	18,625	0
Napa	1	6,351	0

Annexure 3: Codified Elements of SSCE Criteria

Criterion 1: Academic Engagement

Code	Element	Description
A	Citizenship Marks	Students meet the district's required citizenship or conduct standard (e.g., S/O marks, limited N/U, or equivalent).
B	Overall GPA	Students meet the minimum overall GPA threshold defined by the district.
C	On track for graduation	Students are on track to graduate with a regular high school diploma per district requirements.
D	IEP Goals/ On track to earn Certificate of Completion	Non-diploma track students meet IEP goals leading to a Certificate of Completion.
E	Academic Improvement	Students demonstrate academic improvement or return-to-track progress as defined by the district.
AOE	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column of the respective criterion variance mapping.

Criterion 2: Civic Knowledge

Code	Element	Description
F	Civic / Social Science Coursework	HSS, Grade-level equivalent or other (Canvas Course, Social Science Scholarship) courses to build civic, governmental, historical, or social-science understanding
G	Performance Requirement	Explicit academic performance condition to the civic or social-science coursework required under Element A (e.g., passing grade, minimum letter grade, or GPA).
H	Local Meetings	Required attendance at one or more local civic or public meetings for an understanding of local issues or institutions.

Annexure 3: Codified Elements of SSCE Criteria

Criterion 3: Informed Civic Engagement

Code	Element	Description
I	Structured Civic Engagement Process	Students complete a civic project cycle: identify a real-world problem, investigate, plan, take civic action, and reflect.
I1	Civic action type: Community Service / Volunteering	Civic action to be carried out as community service or volunteering, including direct service or service hours in the community.
I2	Civic action type: Policy or institutional change actions	Influencing policies, rules, or institutional practices
I3	Civic action type: Advocacy and Awareness	Increasing public awareness or understanding, for example, through campaigns, events, and social media that aims to inform or mobilise a target audience around the civic issue.
J1	Where and with whom: School with School Community	School-based action, identifying and taking action on school-level problems
J2	Where and with whom: Local Community with Nonprofit Organizations	Working with schools'/district's partner organizations or identifying organizations relevant to the issue and working with the, for civic action
J3	Where and with whom: Governance Community with the public officials/policymakers	Working at the governance/policy level to take action on local/state/national problems
AOE	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column of the respective criterion variance mapping.

Annexure 3: Codified Elements of SSCE Criteria

Criterion 4: Reflection

Code	Element	Description
K	Reflection Documentation Specified	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column
L	Guided Reflection Prompts / Rubric	The district provides specific questions, prompts, or rubric criteria to guide what students reflect on (e.g. problem, impact, learning, civic growth).
M	Reflection Only Stated, No Details	The district states that students must reflect, but gives no detail on format or prompts (no required mode, no guiding questions or rubric).

Annexure 3: Codified Elements of SSCE Criteria

Criterion 5: Civic Dispositions and Character

Code	Element	Description
N	Recommendation / Testimonial Evidence of Civic-Mindedness	Any adult (E.G. teacher, counselor, community leader, public official, supervisor, peer) or peer formally attests to the student's civic-mindedness via a letter, reference form, or rubric.
O	Behaviour and/or Citizenship Grades	Internal citizenship and/or behaviour marks being part of the dispositions decision
P	Participation in Civic / Service Activities	The student's participation in district-specified civic, service, or leadership activities is used as evidence of civic-mindedness.
Q	Minimum GPA Requirement for Dispositions	A minimum GPA is required under Criterion 5, either as an overall GPA or a subject-specific GPA (e.g. HSS GPA).
R	Character Traits: Only Stated, No Details	Mentioned that character traits should be exhibited. No 'how' is mentioned.
AOE	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column of the respective criterion variance mapping.

Combination Codes

Code	Element
";"	or
"+"	and

Annexure 4: Criterion 1 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	C, D, E	C;D;E		879	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	C, D, E	[C;D]+E		748	
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	A, B, C, D, E	A+[(B+C);D;E]		153	
Orange	Capistrano Unified	C	C		78	Annexure 15
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	C	C		70	
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	B, D	B;D		60	Annexure 16
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	A	A		57	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	C	C		53	Annexure 17
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	B, D	B;D		37	Annexure 18
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	B	B		36	

Annexure 4: Criterion 1 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	B, D	B;D		34	
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	B	B		32	
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	B	B		15	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	C, S1	C+S1	Attendance requirement	7	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	B, D	B;D		2	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	C, D, S1	R1+(C;D)	Mandatory enrollment in specific History-Social Science courses	1	
San Benito	San Benito High	B, D, E	B;D;E		198	
Placer	Placer Union High	C	C		7	

Annexure 5: Criterion 2 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	F, G	F+G	879	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	F, G	F+G	748	
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	F, G, H	F+G+H	153	
Orange	Capistrano Unified	F, G	F+G	78	Annexure 15
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	F, G	F+G	70	
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	F, G	F+G	60	Annexure 16

Annexure 5: Criterion 2 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	F, G	F+G	57	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	F, G	F+G	53	Annexure 17
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	F, G	F+G	37	Annexure 18
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	F, G	F+G	36	
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	F, G	F+G	34	
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	F, G	F+G	32	

Annexure 5: Criterion 2 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	F, G	F+G	15	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	F, G	F+G	7	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	F, G	F+G	2	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	F, G	F+G	1	
San Benito	San Benito High	F, G	F+G	198	
Placer	Placer Union High	F, G, H	F+G+H	7	

Annexure 6: Criterion 3 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	I, J2, J3	I+(J2;J3)		879	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	I, I1, I3, J1, J2	I+(I1;I3)+ (J1;J2)		748	
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	I, I1, I2, I3, J2, J3	I+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J2+J3)		153	
Orange	Capistrano Unified	I	I		78	Annexure 15
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	I, I1, I2, I3	(I+I1)+ (J1;IJ2;J3)		70	

Annexure 6: Criterion 3 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	I, I1, I2, I3, J1, J2, J3	I+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J1;J2;J3)		60	Annexure 16
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	I, I1, I3, J1, J2	I+(I1;I3)+ (J1;J2)		57	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	I, I1, I2, I3, J1, J2	I+(I1;I2;I3)+ (J1+J2)		53	Annexure 17
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	I	I		37	Annexure 18
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	I, J1, J2	I+(J1;J2)		36	
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	I, I2, I3, J1, J2, J3	I+(I2;I3)+ (J1;J2;J3)		34	

Annexure 6: Criterion 3 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	I	I		32	
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	I	I		15	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	I, I1, I2, I3	(I+I1)+ (I1;I2;I3)		7	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	I, I1, I2, I3, J2, J3	(I+I1)+ (I1;I2;I3)+ (J2;J3)		2	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	I1, I3, R3	I1;I3;AOE	Civic Learning Project	1	
San Benito	San Benito High	I, J1, J2, J3	I+(J1;J2;J3)		198	
Placer	Placer Union High	I	I		7	

Annexure 7: Criterion 4 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	K	K	879	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	K	K	748	
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	K, L	K+L	153	
Orange	Capistrano Unified	M	M	78	Annexure 15
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	K	K	70	
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	K, L	K+L	60	Annexure 16

Annexure 7: Criterion 4 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	M	M	57	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	K, L	K+L	53	Annexure 17
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	K, L	K+L	37	Annexure 18
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	K, L	K+L	36	
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	K, L	K+L	34	
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	K	K	32	

Annexure 7: Criterion 4 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	L	L	15	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	K	K	7	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	K, L	K+L	2	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	M	M	1	
San Benito	San Benito High	K, L	K+L	198	
Placer	Placer Union High	K, L	K+L	7	

Annexure 8: Criterion 5 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	N	N		879	
Los Angeles	Long Beach Unified	P, S5	P+AOE	Self assessment	748	
Los Angeles	ABC Unified	N	N		153	
Orange	Capistrano Unified	R	R		78	Annexure 15
Los Angeles	Las Virgenes Unified	N	N		70	

Annexure 8: Criterion 5 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Temple City Unified	N, O, Q	N+O+Q		60	Annexure 16
Orange	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	N	N		57	
Los Angeles	Animo Pat Brown	N, P	N;P		53	Annexure 17
Orange	Laguna Beach Unified	N, P	N;P		37	Annexure 18
Orange	Santa Ana Unified	N	N		36	
Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	N, O, Q	N+O+Q		34	

Annexure 8: Criterion 5 Variance Mapping

County	Participating LEAs	Elements Present	Elements' Requirement Rule	Any other element	Seals Ordered (2024-25)	Source
Los Angeles	Centinela Valley Union High	N, O, Q	N+O+Q		32	
Los Angeles	Redondo Beach Unified	N	N		15	
Los Angeles	Monrovia Unified	N	N		7	
Los Angeles	Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified	N	N		2	
Los Angeles	Santa Monica-Malibu Unified	N, O, Q	N+O+Q		1	
San Benito	San Benito High	N	N		198	
Placer	Placer Union High	N	N		7	

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

1. **Purpose of the Framework**

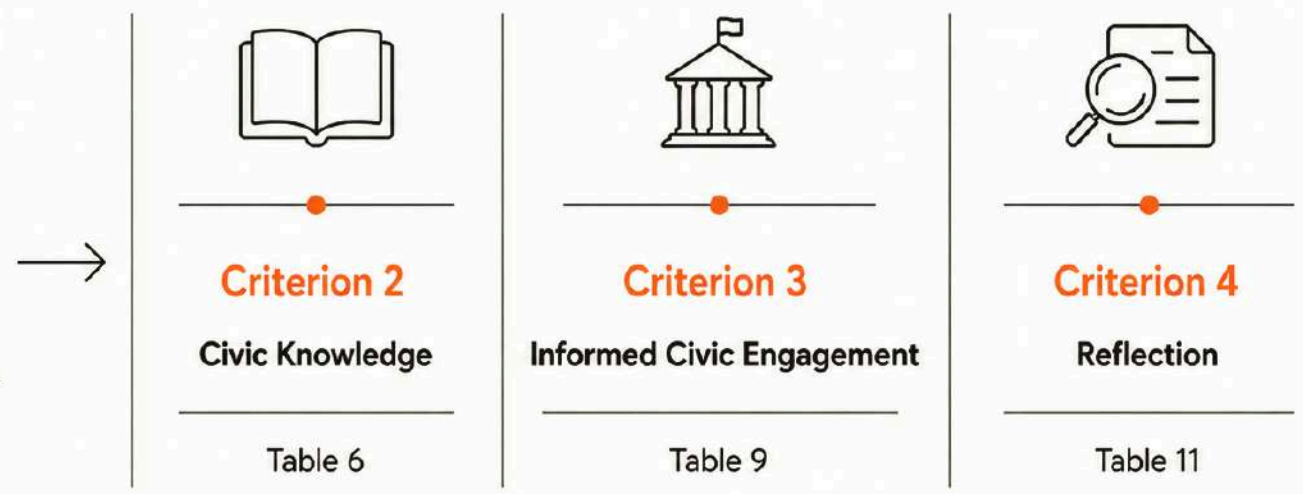
While the State Seal of Civic Engagement establishes a common structure for civic learning, the way that structure is translated into practice, especially service-learning practice, varies significantly across districts.

While these variations can be described across individual criteria, they do not provide a systematic way to assess the overall quality of service-learning.

This section introduces a framework that translates these observed variations into a structured method for classification and comparison. The framework enables districts to assess their current approach to service-learning and identify the specific structural changes required to strengthen it.

2. Analytical Basis

The framework is derived from coded analysis of district requirements (Chapter 8), building on variance mapping across key civic learning criteria.



These tables identify how districts operationalize each criterion through specific elements and requirement structures. The framework does not introduce new elements; rather, it organizes these observed elements into a consistent analytical structure that enables comparison across districts.

Criteria 1 (Academic Engagement) and 5 (Civic Dispositions) are not included in the framework. While both are important to the broader civic learning ecosystem, they do not structure the learning process itself. Criterion 1 functions as a baseline condition for participation, while Criterion 5 captures outcomes of civic learning rather than the instructional process through which those outcomes are developed.

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

3. Methodological Construction of the Framework

A. Coding Structure

Each criterion is operationalized through coded elements:

Criterion 1: Academic Engagement

Code	Element	Description
A	Citizenship Marks	Students meet the district's required citizenship or conduct standard (e.g., S/O marks, limited N/U, or equivalent).
B	Overall GPA	Students meet the minimum overall GPA threshold defined by the district.
C	On track for graduation	Students are on track to graduate with a regular high school diploma per district requirements.
D	IEP Goals/ On track to earn Certificate of Completion	Non-diploma track students meet IEP goals leading to a Certificate of Completion.
E	Academic Improvement	Students demonstrate academic improvement or return-to-track progress as defined by the district.
S1	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column of the respective criterion variance mapping.

Criterion 2: Civic Knowledge

Code	Element	Description
F	Civic / Social Science Coursework	HSS, Grade-level equivalent or other (Canvas Course, Social Science Scholarship) courses to build civic, governmental, historical, or social-science understanding
G	Performance Requirement	Explicit academic performance condition to the civic or social-science coursework required under Element A (e.g., passing grade, minimum letter grade, or GPA).
H	Local Meetings	Required attendance at one or more local civic or public meetings for understanding of local issues or institutions.

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

Criterion 3: Informed Civic Engagement

Code	Element	Description
I	Structured Civic Engagement Process	Students complete a civic project cycle: identify a real-world problem, investigate, plan, take civic action, and reflect.
I1	Civic action type: Community Service / Volunteering	Civic action to be carried out as community service or volunteering, including direct service or service hours in the community.
I2	Civic action type: Policy or institutional change actions	Influencing policies, rules, or institutional practices
I3	Civic action type: Advocacy and Awareness	Increasing public awareness or understanding, for example, through campaigns, events, and social media that aims to inform or mobilise a target audience around the civic issue.
J1	Where and with whom: School with School Community	School-based action, identifying and taking action on school-level problems
J2	Where and with whom: Local Community with Nonprofit Organizations	Working with schools'/district's partner organizations or identifying organizations relevant to the issue and working with the, for civic action
J3	Where and with whom: Governance Community with the public officials/policymakers	Working at the governance/policy level to take action on local/state/national problems
S3	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column of the respective criterion variance mapping.

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

Criterion 4: Reflection

Code	Element	Description
K	Reflection Documentation Specified	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column
L	Guided Reflection Prompts / Rubric	The district provides specific questions, prompts, or rubric criteria to guide what students reflect on (e.g. problem, impact, learning, civic growth).
M	Reflection Only Stated, No Details	The district states that students must reflect, but gives no detail on format or prompts (no required mode, no guiding questions or rubric).

Criterion 5: Civic Dispositions and Character

Code	Element	Description
N	Recommendation / Testimonial Evidence of Civic-Mindedness	Any adult (E.G. teacher, counselor, community leader, public official, supervisor, peer) or peer formally attests to the student's civic-mindedness via a letter, reference form, or rubric.
O	Behaviour and/or Citizenship Grades	Internal citizenship and/or behaviour marks being part of the dispositions decision
P	Participation in Civic / Service Activities	The student's participation in district-specified civic, service, or leadership activities is used as evidence of civic-mindedness.
Q	Minimum GPA Requirement for Dispositions	A minimum GPA is required under Criterion 5, either as an overall GPA or a subject-specific GPA (e.g. HSS GPA).

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

Criterion 5: Civic Dispositions and Character

Code	Element	Description
R	Character Traits: Only Stated, No Details	Mentioned that character traits should be exhibited. No 'how' is mentioned.
S5	Any other element	Any other element that shows up is specified in the 'Other element' column of the respective criterion variance mapping.

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

B. Variance Mapping

These identified elements are then mapped across districts to derive patterns. We mapped them across 18 districts in California. Refer to Chapter 7 for the same.

C. Stage Construction

The framework defines three stages: **Idea, Activity, and Impact.**

- **Idea (Weak / Aspirant)** reflects configurations where meaningful civic action is not guaranteed. Engagement may be defined at the level of process or context, but the type or requirement of action remains unclear or optional.
- **Activity (Adequate / Performer)** reflects configurations where elements of meaningful engagement are present but not fully integrated. Students may engage in service or community-based activities, but these are not consistently required together.
- **Impact (Strong / Achiever)** reflects configurations where service-learning is fully structured. Civic action is required, and it is carried out in real-world contexts through engagement with community or nonprofit organizations.

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

Stage	Assessment	C3			C2			C4		
		Condition	What this means	Score	Condition	What this means	Score	Condition	What this means	Score
Idea	Weak/Aspirant	I, I+(I1; any I elements), I+(J2; any J elements), or a combination of the above	Any of the following: 1. Only process stated 2. Process with either service or working with nonprofits is optional, or both are optional	1	F;G	Either coursework or performance requirement provided for	2	M	Reflection only stated	**1**
Activity	Adequate/ Performer	I+I1 (+ or ; any I element), or I+J2 (+ or ; any J element)	Either service or working with nonprofits is compulsory as a part of the process	2	F+G	Coursework with defined performance requirement	4	K or L	Either of these provided: Reflection guided through prompts or a demonstration format provided	**2**
Impact	Strong/Achiever	I+I1 (+ or ; any I element)+ J2 (+ or ; any J element)	Both service and working with nonprofits are compulsory as part of the process	3	F+G+H	Stakeholder engagement with coursework and performance requirement	6	K+L	Reflection prompts provided with demonstration format	**3**

D. Scoring Model

The framework uses a weighted scoring model to determine the overall stage.

A weighted scoring model is used to determine the overall stage of service-learning. Civic engagement is assigned greater weight as the defining component of service-learning, while civic knowledge and reflection contribute to the depth of learning.

Total Score	Overall Stage
4 to 6	Idea
7 to 9	Activity
10 to 12	Impact

Annexure 9: I2I-SL Framework for Districts: Idea to Impact Service-Learning Framework for Districts

How to assess your overall stage?

1. Identify the stage for each criterion using the framework tables
2. Determine the score for each stage under all three criteria
3. Calculate the total score using the weighted scoring model

4. Recommendations for Improving Stages

The framework developed in this section enables districts to assess their current stage of service-learning. However, assessment alone is insufficient. Districts also require clear guidance on how to move from one stage to the next.

This section outlines actionable pathways for strengthening service-learning within SSCE. They provide recommendations to level up and reach the given stage.

Criteria	Stage	Assessment	Gap	Recommendation
C3	Activity	Performer	Districts at the Idea stage typically define civic processes, in some cases with an action type or type of engagement, but do not require meaningful service or engagement with nonprofits. This, therefore, at times becomes civic engagement but not service-learning.	**Districts should include meaningful service or working with nonprofits for a start. This will build the first steps toward service-learning.**
	Impact	Achiever	Either service or nonprofit engagement is present, but not both. Civic action lacks full integration with real-world contexts.	**Require both service and nonprofit engagement as core components of civic projects to make service-learning an impactful pathway to get SSCE. Ensure that all students engage in service within real-world nonprofit settings.**
C2	Activity	Performer	Civic knowledge is limited to either coursework or performance requirements, but not both. Learning is not consistently measured.	**Ensure that civic or social science coursework or any other course is paired with explicit performance requirements, such as minimum grades or completion standards.**
	Impact	Achiever	Civic knowledge lacks connection to real-world civic/community systems.	**Integrate real-world civic exposure, such as participation in local government meetings, community interaction, or stakeholder interactions.**
C4	Activity	Performer	Reflection is only stated, with no guidance on format or content. Student learning is not structured or consistently captured.	**Introduce structured reflection through defined output formats and/or guided prompts to support student thinking and articulation of learning.**
	Impact	Achiever	Reflection includes either output format or prompts, but not both.	**Require both structured output formats and guided prompts, ensuring that students both reflect and demonstrate their learning.**

Annexure 10: Role Definition Aligned to the Service-Learning Process

Stage	Lead Actor	Supporting Actor(s)	Role of Schools / Districts	Role of Nonprofits
Curriculum Integration	Schools / Districts	Nonprofits	Align service-learning with curriculum and academic goals	Provide contextual inputs on real-world issues
Investigation	Nonprofits	Schools	Guide inquiry and connect to academic frameworks	Identify community needs and define problem areas
Planning	Nonprofits	Schools	Ensure feasibility within academic structures	Co-design service activities and approaches
Action (Service)	Nonprofits	Schools	Facilitate student participation	Lead service implementation and supervision
Reflection	Schools	Nonprofits	Design and facilitate reflection prompts linked to learning	Provide experiential feedback
Demonstration	Schools	Nonprofits	Guide presentation of learning outcomes through different acceptable formats	Validate community relevance and impact

Annexure 11: California Serves Grant Allocation

County	Grantee/Primary Recipient	Total Awarded Amount	Project Year
Los Angeles	We the People High School	$199,890	2023-25
Santa Clara	Santa Clara County Office of Education	$500,000	2023-25
San Joaquin	San Joaquin County Office of Education	$500,000	2023-25
San Bernardino	Rialto Unified School District	$500,000	2023-25
Los Angeles	New Village Girls Academy	$24,343	2023-25
Kern	Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office	$500,000	2023-24
Kern	John Muir Charter School	$344,409	2023-25
San Diego	Health Sciences High and Middle College	$499,833	2023-25
Los Angeles	Hacienda La Puente USD	$500,000	2023-25
Glenn	Glenn County Office of Education	$431,614	2023-25
Contra Costa	Antioch Unified School District	$499,911	2023-25
Fresno	Fresno County Office of Education	$500,000	2023-25
Alameda	Alameda County Office of Education	$335,840	2023-26

Annexure 11: California Serves Grant Allocation

County	Grantee/Primary Recipient	Total Awarded Amount	Project Year
San Bernardino	Chaffey Joint Union High School District	$500,000	2023-26
Los Angeles	Environmental Charter High School - Lawndale	$381,442	2023-26
Riverside	Jurupa Unified	$500,000	2023-26
Alameda	SBE - Latitude 37.8 High	$500,000	2023-26
Santa Cruz	Pajaro Valley Unified School District	$500,000	2023-26
Riverside	Riverside Unified School District	$499,996	2023-26
Sacramento	Sacramento City Unified School District	$325,301	2023-26
Sacramento	Sacramento County Office of Education	$457,421	2023-26
San Diego	San Diego Unified School District	$500,000	2023-26
Tulare	Tulare County Office of Education	$500,000	2023-26
Yuba	Yuba County Office of Education	$194,354	2025-27
Yolo	Yolo County Office of Education	$525,728	2025-27

Annexure 11: California Serves Grant Allocation

County	Grantee/Primary Recipient	Total Awarded Amount	Project Year
San Diego	Sweetwater Union High School District	$499,194	2025-27
Siskiyou	Siskiyou County Office of Education	$393,500	2025-27
San Bernardino	San Bernardino City Unified School District	$226,698	2025-27
Ventura	Oxnard Union High School District	$500,000	2025-27
Alameda	Oakland Unified School District	$499,986	2025-27
Sacramento	Natomas Unified School District	$500,000	2025-27
Napa	Napa County Office of Education	$500,000	2025-27
Monterey	Monterey Peninsula Unified School District	$500,000	2025-27
Stanislaus County	Modesto City High School District	$500,000	2025-27
Sonoma County	Caloverdale Unified School District	$160,540	2025-27

Annexure 12: Interview Questionnaire, Earth Team

Cohort Structure

Q1. Can you walk us through who typically joins the internship, like which grades, how students are selected, and how teams are formed within a school? Also, who usually leads or anchors the team on the school campus?

Program Rhythm

Q2. What does a typical week or month look like for a student in the program, in terms of after-school sessions, weekend fieldwork, and overall time commitment across the year?

School Integration

Q3. How does the program actually sit within a school, like when and where sessions happen, whether it's treated like a club or class, and if students get any formal recognition, like credits or service hours?

Staffing Model

Q4. Who are the key people involved in running the program day-to-day, across schools and partners, and what roles do they each play?

Partner & Site Management

Q5. How do you typically work with community partners and sites, in terms of who does what between Earth Team, schools, and partners, and how long these partnerships usually last?

Financial Model

Q6. What is the annual cost to run the program? At a high level, how is the program funded and what are the main cost components, like staff, transportation, stipends, and materials?

Impact

Q7. How do you understand whether the program is actually creating impact, both for students and for the environment?

Q8. What kind of numbers do you track to understand the scale of the program, like the number of students, hours, field activities, assessments, or sites worked on?

Use of Data Collected

Q9. When students collect environmental data during their projects, what happens to that data afterwards, like how it is used, who uses it, and whether it feeds into any decisions, reports, or partner work?

Evolution

Q10. How has the program evolved over time, in terms of expansion to more schools, changes in project areas, or shifts in how the model is delivered? What are the major milestones?

Annexure 13: Interview Questionnaire, Sewa USA

Cohort Structure

Q1. Who typically joins Design to LEAD, including grade levels, eligibility criteria, and how students are selected from LEAD?
Q2. How many students participate per chapter, and how teams are formed, including whether they mix grades? Average no. of students per chapter?

Program Rhythm

Q3. What does the full six-month journey look like for a student in terms of time commitment, especially how weekly sessions are structured in the early phases, and how much time students typically spend during the implementation phase?

Staffing + Mentor Training

Q4. How is the program run across national and chapter levels, including who does what between the central team, chapter coordinators, volunteers, and parent mentors?
Q5. Training process of parent/adult mentors?

Partner & Site Management

Q6. What role do partners play across the Identify-Invent-Implement stages, and can you share our partner organizations to be added to the case model?

Financial Model

Q7.What is the program cost, including major cost components? At a high level, how is the program funded and managed financially? Typical funding sources (Government grants, foundation grants, corporate, individual donations, contracts)?

Impact Metrics

Q8. What kind of numbers do you track to understand the impact of the program, like

- **Participation and delivery**

Interns engaged:
Total program hours delivered:
Number of field events conducted:
Projects completed:

- **Service footprint**

Community sites engaged/Projects Completed:
Service hours:

Evolution & Institutional Growth

Q9. How has the Design to LEAD program evolved since it started? What are the major milestones? What all chapters/states is DTL provided?

Annexure 14: Interview Questionnaire, Center for Cities + Schools, University of California

Cohort Structure

Q1. Can you walk us through who typically participates in a Y-PLAN project, such as grade levels, types of classes or subjects, and how student teams are formed?

Q2. Also, what is generally the number of students per class/team and are teams fixed or reshuffled during modules?

Program Rhythm

Q3. What does a typical Y-PLAN project look like on a meta level and also in terms of duration and weekly flow?

Q4. If you were to divide the project into phases, what would they be and how long?

School Integration

Q5. How does Y-PLAN typically sit within a school system and context? Is it usually integrated into regular classroom instruction during school hours, or are there variations such as after-school or hybrid formats?

Q6. Also, is student participation formally recognized in any way, like credits or service hours?

Staffing Model

Q7. Could you help us understand how implementation is structured across different actors, especially the roles of teachers, civic clients, higher-ed partners, and CC+S? For instance, who anchors the project on a day-to-day basis, and how responsibilities are typically distributed across the full cycle.

Partner Ecosystem

Q8. How are civic partners usually identified and brought into a Y-PLAN project? Are these typically one-time collaborations or longer-term relationships, and is there a broader set of recurring partners you work with across projects?

Q9. Can you provide a list of partners you would want included in the case study?

Geography

Q10. We'd also like to understand the geography of Y-PLAN and include it in the model through a map. Could you share where the model is currently active (cities, districts)? If there is any existing list or map of locations, that would be very helpful

Financial Model

Q11. At a high level, how does the financial model for Y-PLAN work in practice? For example, we'd love to understand:

- what it typically costs to run a Y-PLAN project, and what are the major cost components?
- how the program is usually funded (e.g., university support, grants, school/district funding, philanthropy)
- whether civic partners or schools contribute financially in any way
- whether there is a recurring funding structure across projects, or if each project is funded separately

Impact & Measurement

Q12. How do you typically assess impact in Y-PLAN, both in terms of student learning and the usefulness of student recommendations for civic partners? Are there any tools, frameworks, or studies that you use to measure this?

Use of Outputs

Q13. Once students develop their proposals, how are these typically used?
For example, do they feed into actual planning processes, get taken forward by civic partners, or influence policy or implementation decisions in any way?

Annexure 15: Capistrano Unified, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

Capistrano Unified School District

Seal of Civic Engagement Application–Graduating Seniors 2025-2026

School: _____Name: _____ Student ID:_____ DOB: _____

I,_____, **a graduating senior for the 2025-2026 school year, am applying for the Seal of Civic Engagement Recognition Award.** I understand the eligibility requirements will be verified by the designated school or district staff. I understand my high school transcript and diploma will be noted with the California State Seal of Civic Engagement, if I meet all requirements. I am on track to complete all CUSD high school graduation requirements, and will provide necessary documents by April 3, 2026.

Student signature: _____ Date: _____

Eligibility Data – On track or completed

Criteria	*Description*	*Results*	*Met*	*Signature Required*
1	*Total Credits (As of 2/20/2026)*			***Guidance office:***
2	*Social Studies Coursework GPA Overall 2.0 or above (Attach transcripts)*			***Guidance office:***
3	*On target to earn a C or better in Government. Enter current grade as a percentage.*			***Gov. Teacher Signature:***
Project Information	*Completes a project that follows the following criteria:*	***TitleofProject andGrade LevelComplete***		
	☐ *Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts*			
	☐ *Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection*			
	☐ *Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society. (No "Us", outstanding discipline, or suspensions in senior year.)*			***Student Services Office:*** ***One Current Teacher:***

***Documentation required (attach copy of transcript)**

NOTES:

OFFICE USE ONLY (Attachverification documents)

☐ **The student has met the CUSD graduation requirements, the socialstudies proficiency criteria, and is approved for the Seal of Civic Engagement Recognition Award.**

☐ **The student has not met the criteria for the award.**

Counselor's Name (print) **Counselor's Signature** **Date**

Annexure 16: Temple City Unified, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

Temple City Unified School District
STATE SEAL OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CRITERIA

California State Seal of Civic Engagement Criteria TCUSD Seal Measures of Completion Outline	
Upon application submission and satisfactory completion of the below criteria both 11th and 12th grade students are eligible to be awarded the CA State Seal of Civic Engagement	
STUDENT ELIGIBILITY:	● HighSchoolstudentsgradesninethroughtwelve ● StudentsmayearnaTCUSDSSCEineithergradeelevenor twelve ● Studentswillberecognizedintheir12thgradeyear:Sealon Diploma
PURPOSE	Purpose: The criteria awards a SSCE to students who have demonstrated excellence in civics education and participation, as well as an understanding of the following: the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government by satisfactorily meeting the 5 criteria noted below.
EXPECTATIONS	Project Expectations: ● SlideDeckPresentation ● WrittenEssay Encourage students to examine a local issue by researching the concern,proposing, and then implementing a plan/project that works towards a solution. After the plan implementation students will present the following in their project: (1) their knowledge of the role of local government within their issue, (2) how they proposed to solve the problem, (3) actions taken to solve the problem and the outcome(s)
SEAL INSIGNIA AWARDED:	High School Diplomas Certificates of Completion Transcripts (grades eleven and/or twelve)

Annexure 16: Temple City Unified, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

CA State Seal of Civic Engagement Criteria	TCUSD Measure of Completion Criteria
CRITERIA 1: Be engaged in academic work in a productive way.	Minimum Overall GPA: 3.0 For non-diploma track students, meet all IEP goals for a Certificate of Completion
CRITERIA 2: Demonstrate a competent understanding of one or more of the following: United States and California constitutions, functions and governance of local governments, tribal government structures and organizations, the role of the citizen in a constitutional democracy, and democratic principles, concepts, and processes.	History Social Science GPA Criteria: 3.0 cumulative GPA for all courses taken in high school
CRITERIA 3: Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire in to civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts.	Criteria 3 Steps: Inquiry & Investigation: 1.Begin your inquiry by identifying a community based Problem:(Problem can be addressed by a teenager working with community structures or organisations) Identify why you selected this issue to solve. What does it mean to you? 2. Collect research into the subject area 3.Propose a solution(s)to address the problem. Civic Dialogue & Informed Action: 4. Work with(or through)an established institution(i.e. City Council, City or State department or agency, candidate or elected official, School Board, neighborhood group, special interest group) to help solve the problem 5. Record action steps in a log and relevant data(i.e. dates, communication, action steps) 6. Complete the application for an award to explain your inquiry, investigation, civic engagement, and actions in your Junior or Senior year before January 31. 7. Design and present summary of project/conclusion in a slide deck presentation or written essay before April 1.
CRITERIA 4: Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through	Project Reflection: This reflection is embedded within the slide deck or written essay.The project must identify the following reflections:

Annexure 16: Temple City Unified, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

self-reflection.	● Theproblemyouidentifiedtosolveandwhy? ● Whatdoesitmeantoyou? ● Whatconnectionsdidyoumakebetweencriteria2and 3? ● Whatdidyoulearnaboutdemocraticprocesses?
CRITERIA 5: Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society.	• One letter of recommendation that can speak to your participation in your submitted project (teacher, mentor, government official, non-familial community member submitted before April 1. • After receiving your project and recommendation, the counselor will review a holistic look at behavior (using discipline file, cumulative citizenship grades, references) • Upon Completion Counselor verification - unofficial transcript showing overall gpa (3.0), H/SS gpa (3.0), and confirmation of positive citizenship (as noted in above bullet)

The following documents can be uploaded into Canvas by the following dates during a student's Junior or Senior year:

Feb.1	ApplicationtoapplyforStateSealofCivicEngagement
April1	CivicEngagementProject: ● SlideDeckPresentation ● WrittenEssay Required Elements: (1) their knowledge of the role of local government within their issue (2) how they proposed to solve the problem (3) actions taken to solve the problem and the outcome(s) (4) Personal Reflection questions: ● The problem you identified to solve and why? ● What does it mean to you? ● What connections did you make between criteria 2 and 3? ● What did you learn about democratic processes?
April 1	Letter of recommendation

Upon completion and final verification of the award, the counselor will log the SSCE award in Aeries on the Award and Activities Table. School staff may use this query to place seals on diplomas:

LIST STU ACT STU.ID STU.NM STU.GR STU.HSG ACT.CD IF ACT.CD = SSCE AND STU.GR = 12

A designated TCUSD staff should order Insignias from this website:
https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/hssstateseal.asp

Annexure 17: Antimo Pat Brown School District, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

Green Dot Public Schools
California State Seal of Civic Engagement Eligibility Requirements
Information on the State Seal from the California Department of Education here

Criterion		Pathway
1	**Be engaged in academic work in a productive way**	Student should be on track to graduate based on each student's unique graduation plan
2	**Demonstrate understanding of U.S. and CA Constitutions and democratic principles; functions and governance of local governments tribal government structures and organizations; the role of the citizen in a constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes**	Student earned a B (3.0) or higher in U.S. Government and U.S. History (C or higher in APUSH or AP Government)
3	**Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts**	a) Student showed evidence of a civics project completed as part of a school-based course or b) Student showed evidence of regular participation (minimum of 20 hours) in school-site or district-based programs as verified by the school/district sponsor. Example: GDPS Youth Organizers Institute, school-site student government, membership on SAC or DELAC, civics club, Model United Nations, Junior State of America, etc. or c) Student showed evidence of regular volunteer work (minimum 20 hours) with an external community-based organization or agency (verification via a district-issued form)

Annexure 17: Antimo Pat Brown School District, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

4	**Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection**	a) Student completed a self-reflection based on teacher-generated prompts in conjunction with the civics project assigned as part of a school-based course (see Criterion 3) or b) Student completed a self-reflection, in writing or a video format, in response to district-provided prompts
5	**Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community, and/or society**	a) Student submitted a letter of recommendation testifying to the student's civic-mindedness and commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community, or society from one of the following sources: ● teacher or counselor college letter of recommendation ● mentor ● employer/supervisor ● community member or b) Student showed evidence of regular volunteer work (minimum 20 hours) with an external community-based organization or agency (verification via a district-issued form)

Annexure 18: Laguna Beach Unified, Local Implementation Criteria, SSCE

LBUSD State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) Criteria

Criterion #1: Productively Engaged in Academic Work

Qualifications:
- Minimum Overall GPA: 2.0
- For non-diploma track students, meet all, IEP goals for a Certificate of Completion

Criterion #2: Demonstrated understanding of civic knowledge
Student content knowledge should demonstrate a competent understanding of U.S. and California constitutions; functions and governance of local governments; tribal government structures and organizations; the role of the citizen in a constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes.

Qualifications:
History/Social Science GPA: At least 2.0 in all H/SS classes
- 10th World History or AP Euro GPA: 2.0
- 11th grade US History or AP U.S. History GPA: 2.0
- 12th grade Govt, AP Govt, Economics, or AP Econ 1st semester GPA: 2.0

Criterion #3: Demonstrated civic skills and action through projects/activities
Participate in an informed civic engagement project that addresses real-world problems and requires students to identify and inquire into civic/community needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts.

Examples: Ocean Project (11th), Civics Forum (12th), Urban Planning (12th)

Criterion #4: Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection

This self-reflection can be embedded within one of the following 3 options for the review panel: essay, slide deck, or oral presentation. The self-reflection must identify the following:
- ***INQUIRY:*** What problem were you trying to better understand or solve through the project/activities? How did you intend to make a positive difference for yourself or others?
- ***INVESTIGATION:*** How did you investigate the root causes of the problem?
- ***DISCOURSE:*** How did you engage with others to understand multiple perspectives? What additional insights did you gain?
- ***INFORMED ACTION:*** What type of action plan did you create to build awareness of and improve the issue? How did you engage with your school community, governing entities, and/or other avenues to influence change?
- ***REFLECTION:*** What did you learn about how democratic processes in our society work? What civic knowledge/skills did you apply? How did your efforts impact the community for the common good (or not)? What else could have been done, or could continue to be done, to create deeper or more lasting change?

Criterion #5: Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community, and/or society.
- 30 hours of verified community service or LBHS Counselor Letter of Recommendation for college application(s)

Annexure 19: Coding Framework and Nomenclature System

1. **Purpose**
This annexure presents the coding framework used to analyze district-level implementation of the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE). The framework translates diverse district criteria into a standardized structure, enabling systematic comparison across districts.
Each coded expression represents the minimum logical condition required for a student to qualify under a given criterion, as interpreted from district guidelines.

2. **Structure of Codes**
Elements identified across district criteria are assigned alphabetical codes (A–Z). These codes are sequential and continuous across all criteria and do not reset for each criterion. This creates a single, unified coding structure for the full dataset.
For instance, elements identified under Criterion 1 are coded A, B, C, and so on. Subsequent criteria continue this sequence (e.g., F, G, H), ensuring that each element is uniquely identified across the analysis.

3. **Types of Elements**
The coding system distinguishes between three types of elements based on how they function within district requirements.

- **Independent elements** are those that can exist on their own as complete conditions. These are represented by a single alphabetical code (e.g., A, B, I).
- **Extended elements** include additional layers of specification and are represented through a numeric suffix (e.g., I1, I2, I3). In such cases, the base element (I) can exist independently, while the sub-elements provide further detail. For example, I may indicate the presence of a structured civic engagement process, while I1, I2, and I3 specify the type of civic action undertaken.
- **Dependent elements** do not exist independently and are defined only through their sub-components. These are represented only in their extended form (e.g., J1, J2, J3). The base code (J) functions as a category label but is not used as a standalone element. For example, J1, J2, and J3 specify the context of civic engagement (school, community, or governance), and only these forms carry meaning.
- **Residual Category**: The code AOE (Any Other Element) is used to capture elements that do not fall within predefined categories. This ensures that district-specific variations are not excluded from the analysis. Wherever used, AOE is accompanied by a brief description of the element it represents.

4. **Logical Operators**
The relationships between elements within district requirements are expressed using two logical operators.
The symbol “+” denotes a cumulative requirement, where all listed elements must be satisfied. The symbol “;” denotes alternative pathways, where any one of the listed elements is sufficient.

5. **Logical Grouping and Use of Brackets**
Brackets are used to define grouping and order of evaluation within coded expressions. Their function is analogous to their use in mathematical expressions, where conditions within brackets are evaluated together before being combined with other elements.

This allows complex requirement structures to be represented clearly. For example, an expression such as:
A + (B ; C)
indicates that A is mandatory, along with either B or C.

More complex structures may include nested conditions. For instance:
A + [(B + C) ; D]
indicates that A is required, along with either the combination of B and C, or D.
Where expressions are unambiguous, brackets are not used.

6. **Interpretation**
Each coded expression represents the logical structure of district requirements. The combination of elements, operators, and grouping reflects how districts define eligibility conditions under each criterion.

This approach enables qualitative policy language to be translated into structured logical forms, making variation across districts visible and comparable.

Annexure 19: Coding Framework and Nomenclature System

7. **Illustrative Example**
An expression such as:
A + [(B + C) ; D ; E]
indicates that A is mandatory, along with one of the following conditions: B and C together, D, or E.

8. **Analytical Use**
This coding framework forms the basis for all variance mapping and classification presented in Chapter 7 and related annexures. It enables the identification of patterns in how civic engagement is structured across districts, including the distinction between required and optional elements and the relative strength of different implementation pathways.

About the Report:

For over two centuries, the United States has grappled with how to prepare young people not just for work, but for citizenship. Service learning has emerged as a powerful way to connect classrooms with real-world challenges, enabling students to engage with their communities while learning.

In California, this vision is strongly embedded across policy. Yet, how it takes shape varies widely across districts. Flexibility enables innovation, but also leads to uneven implementation and access.

This report explores this gap through history, policy, and practice. It finds that California already has a strong foundation, and that small but targeted system-level improvements can unlock service learning at scale, making it a consistent and accessible pathway for civic learning.

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