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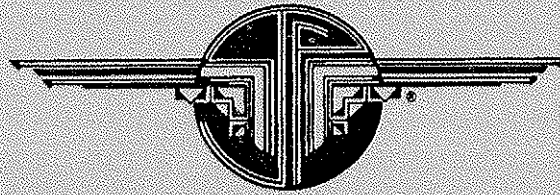
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# **Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning**

A Wingspread Special Report

by **Ellen Porter Honnet and Susan J. Poulsen**

**The Johnson Foundation, Inc.  
Racine, Wisconsin**

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# Principals of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning

These Principles result from extensive consultation with more than 70 organizations interested in service and learning. Those consultations were conducted by the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE, now known as National Society for Experiential Education, NSEE).

In May, 1989, a small advisory group met at Wingspread to compose the preamble and the language of the ten Principles.

The Johnson Foundation recognizes and thanks all of those who have had a hand in the development of these ten Principles of Good Practice For Combining Service and Learning.

## **PREAMBLE**

We are a nation founded upon active citizenship and participation in community life. We have always believed that individuals can and should serve.

It is crucial that service toward the common good be combined with reflective learning to assure that service programs of high quality can be created and sustained over time, and to help individuals appreciate how service can be a significant and ongoing part of life. Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both.

Those who serve and those who are served are thus able to develop the informed judgment, imagination, and skills that lead to a greater capacity to contribute to the common good.

The Principles that follow are a statement of what we believe are essential components of good practice. We invite you to use them in the context of your particular needs and purposes.

- 1. An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.*
- 2. An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.*
- 3. An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.*
- 4. An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.*

5. *An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.*
6. *An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.*
7. *An effective program expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.*
8. *An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.*
9. *An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.*
10. *An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The level of interest and sense of urgency in community and voluntary service grows greater every day. In every community, programs are being designed for participants from kindergartners to the elderly. Is there a set of guiding principles by which service programs can be designed and by which their effectiveness can be judged? Is there a set of ideas which have the potential for deepening and sustaining current movements?

The principles described on these pages reflect the grassroots experience and the thinking of thousands of people, hundreds of programs and numerous national organizations over the last several decades. They are offered with the hope that current initiatives to create service programs will benefit from a rich recent history.

The combination of service and learning is powerful. It creates potential benefits beyond what either service or learning can offer separately. The frequent results of the effective interplay of service and learning are that participants:

- *Develop a habit of critical reflection on their experiences, enabling them to learn more throughout life,*
- *Are more curious and motivated to learn,*
- *Are able to perform better service,*
- *Strengthen their ethic of social and civic response,*
- *Feel more committed to addressing the underlying problems behind social issues,*
- *Understand problems in a more complex way and can imagine alternative solutions,*

- *Demonstrate more sensitivity to how decisions are made and how institutional decisions affect people's lives,*
- *Learn how to work more collaboratively with other people on real problems,*
- *Realize that their lives can make a difference.*

The emphasis on learning does not mean these Principles are limited in any way to programs connected to schools. They relate to programs and policies based in all settings -- community organizations, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, corporations, government agencies, and research and policy organizations. They relate to people of all ages in all walks of life.

**1. An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.**

Participants in programs combining service and learning should engage in tasks that they and society recognize as important. These actions should require reaching beyond one's range of previous knowledge or experience. active participation - not mere being a spectator or visitor - requires accountability for one's actions, involves the right to take risks, and gives participants the opportunity to experience the consequences of those actions for others and for themselves.

**Some Examples:**

College students from the United States helped create a local primary school in Liberia; students in Ecuador work with foster and abandoned children; students in England care for mentally and physically handicapped persons; and in Jamaica, they work at a Human Rights Center and in literacy projects. In each of these cases, students are matched up with professional staff members of local agencies through the Partnership for Service-Learning, New York City.

A program of the Anderson YMCA/YWCA in Stockton, California, helped establish a relationship between area university students and the local Cambodian community. This enabled students to help respond to the needs of the Southeast Asian community in the aftermath of a sniper who killed nearly a dozen children. Students acted as translators, attended funeral services, and comforted grieving families.

At Grant High School in Los Angeles, in the Community Service Leadership class, students assessed community needs and helped develop projects. Additional students were recruited from the Constitutional Rights Foundation's (CRF) Youth Community Service group on campus. A child care group initiated tutoring in a local elementary school; a group working with the homeless organized collection and distribution of goods, as well as serving food at homeless shelters; an environmental committee worked on community beautification and tree planting; a group working with senior citizens "adopted grandparents" at a local convalescent home and led aerobic classes for the elderly.

The Retiree Group of Mellon Volunteer Professionals in Pittsburgh volunteers thousands of hours each year doing mailings, bookkeeping and conference registration, among other things for local charities and non-profit organizations.

Youngsters in Addison County, Vermont, know where to turn when they're in trouble, thanks to the efforts of students and teachers at Middlebury Junior High School. Under a SerVermont grant, the students produced a valuable resource guide, "If You're In Trouble, We're Here to Help." A journalist came to the school to help the students learn to interview; computer students taught their peers how to do desktop publishing, work processing, and graphics; students interviewed local service agencies and published the information in a booklet created especially for area middle school students.

In the Chestnut Ridge School District in Pennsylvania, The National Honor Society requires that members earn 20 points per year in public service to remain in the Society. Members may choose from tutoring programs, programs to install emergency road signs, and plotting of emergency call numbers for homes and businesses to assist the local fire department, among other interesting projects.

In the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program of the Golden Triangle in Columbus, Mississippi, high school student volunteers learn the value of service by working with children in need of direction. Matched up with needy youngsters, these high school students offer companionship, attitude development, self-esteem, relationship skills, recreational activities, school adjustment, male-female role models, and improvement in family function.

**2. An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.**

The service experience alone does not insure that either significant learning or effective service will occur. It is important that programs build in structured opportunities for participants to think about their experience and what they have learned. Through discussions with others and individual reflection on moral questions and relevant issues, participants can develop a better sense of social responsibility, advocacy, and active citizenship. This reflective component allows for personal growth and is most useful when it is intentional and continuous throughout the experience, and when opportunity for feedback is provided. Ideally, feedback will come from those persons being served, as well as from peers and program leaders.

**Some Examples:**

As part of "Project Motivation" at the YMCA of the University of Minnesota, students are paired with 4th and 6th graders in need of "big buddies." Volunteers attend a retreat at the beginning of the program, and meet bi-weekly throughout the school year. They are assisted by school social workers who help them learn more

about issues related to their work as volunteer and lead them in discussions of problems and successes they are having with their "little buddies."

At San Francisco State's Community Involvement Center, students working with outside agencies keep journals on their community service and meet for two hours a week in support sessions to discuss, evaluate, and solve problems relating to their work. In other high school and college level programs, students compile annual reports of service experiences that reflect different themes and personal growth. City-wide conferences scheduled throughout the year provide opportunities for high school level volunteers to exchange ideas, interact with community representatives about pressing ideas, and reflect on leadership, philanthropy, and service.

Some school programs link reflection more formally with the curriculum. In Indiana, Goshen College students are required to submit extensive journals reporting on their international service experiences. "Project Community" at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor complements field experience with an academic program back on campus that includes reading and writing, as well as a weekly seminar that helps students integrate their experiences with their reading.

As part of the Center for Service-Learning's Vermont Internship Program, students at the University of Vermont participate in one of three courses which provide structured reflection and articulation of learning from the service experience. Students may earn from 1 - 18 credits and participate in weekly or bi-weekly seminars with other students, keep journals, and write critical essays on aspects of the service experience. One course, the Field Studies Internship, is portable, in that it provides a service curriculum and reading material that can be taken to a service assignment in a foreign country or other setting outside Vermont.

### **3. An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.**

From the outset of the project, participants and service recipients alike must have a clear sense of: (1) what is to be accomplished and (2) what is to be learned. These service and learning goals must be agreed upon through negotiations with all parties, and in the context of the traditions and cultures of the local community. These goals should reflect the creative and imaginative input of those providing the service, as well as those receiving it. Attention to this important factor of mutuality in the service-learning exchange protects the "service" from becoming patronizing charity.

#### **Some Examples:**

Students from Hinesburg, Vermont, in the Champlain Valley Union High School DUO (do Unto Others) service program design a learning program with their school supervisor and the agency in which they'll serve. This is done during the student's interview for the service opportunity. Activities and goals are agreed upon by all

parties at that time, and are used in the evaluation process throughout the experience.

At-risk students in two San Antonio school districts are identified as "valued youths" and trained to tutor youngsters at nearby elementary schools. The "valued youths" are given training in communications skills, child development theory, and economic opportunities. Volunteers meet their service goals by tutoring the children; they meet their learning goals by reinforcing their own academic skills as well as those of the younger students. Participants in this program have also been found to be much less likely to drop out of high school, and they cite the development of relationships with the children as a key factor to staying in school. (Valued Youth Partnership Program, Intercultural Development Research Association.)

The University of Minnesota YMCA conducts informational meetings for nearly every program and requires an interview for all program participants. Volunteers in some programs are asked to sign learning contracts.

Stanford University's Ravenswood Tutoring Program, serving a primarily minority and low-income population, stipulates that tutors must make a minimum two-quarter commitment to work with an individual student. Before beginning tutoring, the Stanford student meets with the pupil's teacher to discuss and outline a set of learning goals and objectives for the sessions.

"Project DownEast SERVE" in Lubec, Maine, works with rural low-income community members to motivate students who have limited educational and vocational aspirations. The learning goal of the project is to encourage students to complete high school and further education and to move on to satisfying careers. Students volunteer in clerical, health care, social services, teaching, day care, and fundraising activities to help local agencies as part of their service.

#### **4. An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.**

The actual recipients of service, as well as the community groups and constituencies to which they belong, must have the primary role in defining their own service needs. Community service programs, government agencies, and private organizations can also be helpful in defining what service tasks are needed and when and how these tasks should be performed. This collaboration to define needs will insure that service by participants will: (1) not take jobs from the local community, and (2) involve tasks that will otherwise go undone.

#### **Some Examples:**

In a successful student-generated community service project sponsored by SerVermont in Chester, Vermont, senior citizens were included as "SerVermont Seniors." Students were required to include a senior citizen and a teacher on each planning team.



The Murray State University YMCA in Murray, Kentucky, held a college day for sixth graders. After a full day of participating in classes, recreation, and meals, the sixth grade guests were given a needs assessment to identify what they felt to be critical needs and issues of their peers. Together with college student volunteers, they developed a plan for several program activities.

Employee volunteers in one corporation's "Public Affairs Action Committee" invite speakers from local agencies to make presentations during monthly lunch meetings to learn about service opportunities and find innovative ways in which employee can be involved in service work.

College students at Virginia Tech, through their YMCA responded to a call for assistance in the small community of Ivanhoe. During their spring break, students helped renovate a community center. Community members provided potluck meals, home stays, and evening social activities for the students. Students continue to travel the 40 miles to Ivanhoe on weekends and school holidays to be of further help. A community organizer from Ivanhoe now teaches a course in community development at Virginia Tech.

The Atherton YMCA in Honolulu includes both student volunteers and the developmentally delayed teens they work with in the process of planning events and activities.

#### **5. An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.**

Several parties are potentially involved in any service and learning program: participants (students and teachers, volunteers of all ages), community leaders, service supervisors, and sponsoring organizations, as well as those individuals and groups receiving the services. It is important to clarify roles and responsibilities of these parties through a negotiation process as the program is being developed. This negotiation should include identifying and assigning responsibility for the tasks to be done, while acknowledging the values and principles important to all the parties involved.

#### **Some Examples:**

Agencies accepting students from San Francisco State's Community Involvement Program are given written guidelines on the agencies' responsibilities to volunteers, including the requirement for supervision and evaluation of students. They remind the agencies that students need direct personal contact with clients, and that there should be minimal, if any, clerical and clean-up work. Students, in turn are given detailed requirements, including number of hours required, the importance of keeping a journal, and the need to attend support sessions.

In programs sponsored by the Partnership for Service-Learning, the student, the faculty, and agency personnel work together to achieve the goals of service and learning. Job descriptions and schedules are defined by the agencies. Learning is matched to the individual service experience, and all involved provide evaluation and reflection on the value and achievements of the learning and the service.

The United Negro College Fund (UNCF) and New York City work together to provide a mentorship opportunity each year for one male and one female entering freshman from each UNCF college. The students must have demonstrated outstanding academic and leadership potential, as well as community and school service. A Citicorp executive volunteers as a mentor for each selected student. Mentors are screened and assigned for four years. They help students with academic and personal problems, summer work, and internships.

Many community service agencies have found it useful to have clear job descriptions, not only for staff, but also for board members, student staff, and volunteers. Ideally, the responsibilities and expectations of the volunteers are reviewed during early orientation sessions and periodically throughout the experience.

Some business people and lawyers, in cooperation with a local Chicago youth agency (The Centre, Inc.), helped a group of urban young people follow through on their idea to organize a small storefront office supply business. Clear divisions of responsibilities were set out for all those involved. The business people and lawyers consulted with agency staff and advised the youth, who actually ran the business. The young people involved gained valuable skills and enhanced their sense of self-worth and alternatives for their futures.

**6. An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.**

Because people are often changed by the service and learning experience, effective programs must build in opportunities for continuous feedback about the changing service needs and growing service skills of those involved. Ideally, participation in the service partnership affects personal development in areas such as intellect, ethics, cross-cultural understanding, empathy, leadership, and citizenship. In effective service and learning programs, the relationships among groups and individuals are dynamic and often create dilemmas. Such dilemmas may lead to unintended outcomes. They can require recognizing and dealing with differences.

**Some Examples:**

At the University of California-Berkeley's Student Volunteer Clearinghouse (Cal Corps), a graduate student has developed software that, within two or three minutes, can provide a list of volunteer opportunities based on the student's interests, preferred location, schedule, and need for public transportation. To help spread the knowledge of how to develop and use this kind of resource, Operation

Civic Serve in San Francisco funded a trip for this student to participate in a conference with students from other campuses in California.

The Lee Honors College at Western Michigan University works with the local Voluntary Action Center in identifying appropriate sites for students. To help broaden the connections, the Collage hosted a Volunteer Opportunities Fair involving many area service agencies.

The Literacy Council in Bedford County, Pennsylvania is one of several programs run by students. The students make most of the decisions, assist trainers, apply for funding, produce television spots, do public relations, and recruit adults to work as tutors. While this is primarily a tutoring project, only a few of the students actually tutor due to the difficulty of daytime scheduling, students' safety concerns, and adult embarrassment in admitting to a high school student that they can't read.

High school students in Los Angeles help match their interests to community service needs through a 60-Minute Community Search Activity provided by the Constitutional Rights Foundation. The students use the session to go out into their communities, identify resources, assess their own abilities and interests, and connect with agencies and businesses in need of volunteers.

Recognizing that initial matching of volunteer to service opportunity is only the beginning, Partnership for Service-Learning programs incorporate ongoing evaluations into all service experiences. These are conducted jointly by the volunteer, the coordinating agency, and the recipients of the service as a basis for responding to changes and reshaping the program for subsequent participants.

High school students in the Vermont DUO Program establish a clear understanding of talents and skills as well as goals for the volunteer experience through an initial meeting involving a school staff member, agency supervisor, and the student. After the student spends three days at the site, the supervisor is called to check on progress, and a site visit is made by the school staff member. The student keep a written journal of the experience. Final evaluations are written by the student, the agency supervisor, and the school staff member.

Hospital Auxiliary Aids in a midwestern community conduct a review after the first two weeks of volunteer service and monthly thereafter to be certain that the volunteer is comfortable in that position and is meeting the hospital's service expectations. In some cases, volunteers who have been assigned to emergency room admissions find that they would be more comfortable working in the gift shop; after working with people in the out-patient admissions area for several months, a volunteer may discover a gift for consoling families and may be placed in the hospice program.

## **7. An effective program expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.**

In order for a program to be effective, it must have a strong, ongoing commitment from both the sponsoring and the receiving organizations. Ideally, the commitment will take many forms, including reference to both service and learning in the organization's mission statement. Effective programs must receive administrative support, become line items in the organization's budget, be allocated appropriate physical space, equipment, and transportation, and allow for scheduled release time for participants and program leaders. In schools, the most effective service and learning programs are linked to the curriculum and require that the faculty become committed to combining service and learning as a valid part of teaching.

### **Some Examples:**

Corporations across the country commit thousands of hours of employee release time each year in the United Way Loaned Executive Program. Employees are given time away from their regular jobs to serve on area campaigns, helping United Way raise needed funds to operate a wide range of community service agencies.

The "DUO" high school program in Vermont has received full funding from its school district for the past 17 years. An office, staff, funds for professional growth, and transportation funds for students are included in the school budget. Teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators encourage students to get involved.

Commitment to student service by the college or university president is critical to the success of service programs on campus. Campus Compact: The Project for Public and Community Service, is a consortium of more than 200 college and university presidents who provide leadership and visible institutional support for service as a part of the educational experience on their many campuses. Campus Compact, headquartered at Brown University, provides coordination and support for a wide range of service projects and opportunities for students, including literacy programs and mentoring. COOL (Campus Outreach Opportunity League) promotes the creation of a "Green Dean" administrative position on college campuses. Each college or university involved hires an energetic recent graduate to organize community/voluntary service programs for undergraduates. The positions may be funded for one to two years, or ideally, become permanent staff positions, as they have at Carleton College and Fordham University.

## **8. An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.**

The most effective service and learning programs are sensitive to the importance of training, supervision, and monitoring of progress throughout the program. This is a reciprocal responsibility and requires open communication between those offering and those receiving the service. In partnership, sponsoring and receiving organizations should recognize the value of service through appropriate

celebrations, awards, and public acknowledgment of individual and group service. Planned, formalized, and ongoing evaluation of service and learning projects should be part of every program and should involve all participants.

### **Some Examples:**

At Stanford University's Ravenswood tutoring project, tutors are required to take a one-day training session. Staff of the Tutoring Program provide students with support and resources to plan effective tutorials. Student Tutor Coordinators act as liaisons between teachers and tutors in each school. Stanford's Education Department offers a 2-4 unit course in tutor training; teachers from the Ravenswood schools lead math and reading workshops throughout the year; on campus there is a Tutor Resource Center and a monthly newsletter called Tutoring Times.

International service programs of the Partnership for Service-Learning include pre-program academic and cultural materials, a statement of expectations of behavior and responsibility, a two-week introductory orientation to the culture and what it means to serve, and ongoing monitoring by academic and agency personnel. Evaluation is comprehensive and includes academic grading for demonstrated learning. It also includes service agency reports on the behavior and value of the student to the community.

The United Way of Minneapolis helped to fund a longitudinal study of the impact of the "Big Buddy" program on elementary school children.

Volunteers from Walker Manufacturing Company, Racine, Wisconsin, "pitched in" to help clean up the Root River. In recognition, the company provided personalized tee shirts ("Jane Pitched In") which the employee could then wear to other corporate and voluntary functions. The event was prominently pictured on the back cover of the company magazine, and volunteers were recognized for their ongoing service at an annual banquet hosted by the company president.

Hudson High School in Ohio gives each student who contributes time to the service program a handsome certificate. Many schools recognize service through award ceremonies, banquets, presentations of award pins, or other celebrations.

"Prompters" volunteer organization at SUNY-Purchase in New York involves some 175 community members in the process of linking the campus and its arts programs with others in the community. After an extensive in-service training for volunteers, community members become "ambassadors" for the arts programs of the college, speaking in schools and helping expose some 8,000 elementary and secondary school students to the arts.

**9. An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.**

In order to be useful to all parties involved, some service activities require longer participation and/or a greater time commitment than others. The length of the experience and the amount of time required are determined by the service tasks involved and should be negotiated by all the parties. Sometimes a program can do more harm than good if a project is abandoned after too short a time or given too little attention. Where appropriate, a carefully planned succession or combination of participants can provide the continuity of service needed.

**Some Examples:**

Many successful programs arrange projects to accommodate the busy schedules of student and professional participants. A Stanford student, for example, whose heavy schedule made her unable to volunteer during daytime hours, answered calls for a crisis hotline in her dorm room from midnight to 8:00 a.m.

Members of "New York Cares", a group of 600 professionals, can only volunteer on weekends and in the evenings. The coordinator of the group works closely with service agencies to arrange service activities that fall within these time constraints. For example, teams of volunteers plan, fund, and host parties on weekends for children living in homeless hotels.

Many academic programs that link service to the curriculum design the time commitment based on two factors: what is needed for legitimate recognition of academic credit, and the length of service that agencies and their clients define as necessary. In some cases, this may require the commitment of a semester or even an entire academic year, while others may be as short as a summer or even a couple of weeks.

Many successful programs in high schools and colleges organize activities to keep volunteers involved for the entire school year. They conduct retreats, have weekly or bi-weekly meetings, and use extensive communications to keep track of volunteers. Others recruit student volunteers on a rotating basis. These operate on the philosophy that students should be afforded opportunities to volunteer whenever they are ready. This gives more flexibility for program entry and exit.

The Mellon Volunteer Professionals (MVP) Retiree Group generally places people in short-term projects without long-term, on-going commitments to a specific task in order to accommodate participants' travel and lifestyle schedules. Volunteers work on events such as intergenerational fairs, special fundraising events, and development campaigns for local non-profit organizations.

**10. An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.**

A good service and learning program promotes access and removes disincentives and barriers to participation. Those responsible for participation in a program should make every effort to include and make welcome persons from differing ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, as well as those of varied ages, genders, economic levels, and those with disabilities. Less obvious, but very important, is the need for sensitivity to other barriers, such as lack of transportation, family work and school responsibilities, concern for personal safety, or uncertainty about one's ability to make a contribution.

**Some Examples:**

The best school programs are designed specifically to be open to all students. They meet students at an appropriate place where they can learn, give, and feel of value to the community. Release time is provided (often as much as one day a week), and transportation is available for students who do not have access to an automobile. Students may also do projects after school, on week-ends, or during the summer.

"City Year", a service corps program in Boston, in its original charter, proposed to include a diverse group of participants and to have specific recruitment efforts to create a balance of participants that reflects the diverse population of Boston.

A group of largely Asian and Latino students in the "Learning Through Service" program in seven San Francisco area high schools perform after-school community service in their own ethnic communities. These students, many of whom were initially reluctant to volunteer, noted at a recent recognition luncheon that they had come to discover, in their own words, "the great rewards of serving."

In many programs in which activities are culturally integrated, students report that stereotypes break down and that they learn to appreciate cultural differences, and find out that they share similar goals and values.

The "Magic Me" program in Baltimore links children with nursing home residents, specifically enlisting students who are not doing well in school. This allows both the youngsters and the elderly to "serve" one another. It also makes it possible for a group of persons confined to a nursing home, who traditionally could not engage in service, to make a difference to society.

Senior citizens are often among those most willing to volunteer, yet least able because of logistical barriers. One successful literacy program provides transportation for senior citizens to the community centers where they help others learn to read and write.

A high school in Steel Valley, Pennsylvania, has adopted the elderly community. Youngsters visit with residents one-on-one at a personal care facility, helping with

arts and crafts and performing concerts. One important aspect of the program is that it involves a wide range of students - not only those with high academic achievement.

*A caveat is called for in the presentation of examples: Clearly, not all examples of successful programs can be presented in this limited space. Most of the examples included are drawn from material submitted by organizations that participated in the creation of a set of principles developed by the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE). The early principles developed by NSIEE served as an essential starting point for this final document. Many of the contributing organizations are oriented toward school or educational settings, hence so are the examples. In an effort, however, to acknowledge the broader possibilities for combining service and learning, others have been included. Examples are meant merely to suggest possible ways in which to implement the spirit of the Principles.*

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