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Service-Learning Summer Institutes

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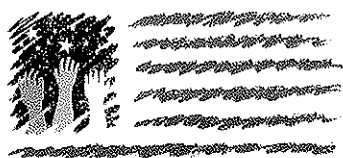
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SERVICE-LEARNING SUMMER INSTITUTES

By Jessica Donner, Director of District Initiatives

Summer institutes provide an important in-service education venue for educators to learn how to use service-learning as a teaching practice. To learn more about the number and nature of service-learning summer institutes, the National Service-Learning Partnership studied the institutes held during the summer 2004 in order to:

1. Generate new knowledge about these summer institutes, including information about institute models.
2. Stimulate dialogue about how best to strengthen the quality, expansion, and sustainability of such institutes.
3. Support a concerted effort to expand the access of potential institute participants to public funding streams that can support their participation.

The study findings provide a snapshot of information about the strengths and challenges of service-learning summer institutes, as follows.

Strengths

- Interest in summer institutes is strong among providers and participants.
- The content of summer institutes is varied.
- Summer institutes are conducive to offering participants an experiential education reflecting the pedagogy of service-learning.

Challenges

- The number of summer institutes and participants is small.
- Summer institutes are short, typically three days in duration.
- Summer institutes include teachers from many grade levels, yet best-practice professional education is rooted in the subject matter and standards of each teacher's grade-level and curriculum.¹

The remainder of this brief provides a summary of the study and its findings as well as a final analysis of the implications of this study.

STUDY METHODS AND SAMPLE

Partnership staff identified 16 providers that hosted 23 service-learning institutes across the country in summer 2004. Partnership staff designed a 33-question, web-based survey to collect information from these providers on the general characteristics of the institutes' structure, content, and best practices.

Survey respondents' summer institutes were located in 10 states: California (3), Colorado (2), Maine, Minnesota, New York, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia. Respondents represented nonprofit organizations (5), higher education institutions (2), school districts (5), and state education agencies (1). Thirteen of the sixteen providers completed surveys for 14 out of 23 summer institutes, yielding a 61 percent response rate.

¹ "Research shows that professional development leads to better instruction and improved student learning when it connects to the curriculum materials that teachers use, the district and state academic standards that guide their work, and the assessment and accountability measures that evaluate their success." (From "Teaching Teachers: Professional Development to Improve Student Achievement," *Research Points*, American Educational Research Association, Summer 2005, Volume 3, Issue 1.)

FINDINGS

This section offers the data the Partnership obtained as answers to survey questions about the institutes' general characteristics, participants, financial information, content, best practices, lessons learned, and next steps.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Overall, most institutes:

- Offer open-registration policy.
- Last for three days.
- Include 26-50 participants comprised of elementary, middle, and high school teachers.
- Charge no registration fee or minimal fees (\$20-35).
- Offer graduate or professional development credit options.
- Provide follow-up activities during the school year.
- Intend to host institutes again.

PARTICIPANTS

How many people participated in the summer institute?

The number of people attending each institute ranged from 20 to over 100. Half of the respondents (50%) indicated that the number of participants fell in the 26-50 grouping.

Table 1
Number of Participants

Number of Participants	Number of Institutes	Percentage
1-25	2	14%
26-50	7	50%
51-75	2	14%
76-100	1	7%
100-150	2	14%

Who participated in the summer institute?

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers were the predominant type of participant followed by community partners and higher education faculty. High school teachers participated in all of the institutes. The majority of the institutes (79%) were exclusively attended by elementary, middle, and high school teachers. The other institutes included at least five categories of participants. Youth participated in three institutes.

Table 2
Participants by Role

Role of Participant	Number of Institutes	Percentage
Elementary school teacher	11	79%
Middle school teacher	12	86%
High school teacher	14	100%
School district administrator head	5	36%
Curriculum staff/department	6	43%
Community partner	9	64%
Higher education faculty	7	50%
Youth	3	21%
Other	5	36%

Was the summer institute open to all?

Nine (64%) providers reported that they had an open registration policy. Five institutes restricted participation to representatives from Learn and Serve America subgrantee sites.

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CREDIT

Was graduate and professional development credit offered?

What were the amount of credit, cost to participant, education institution offering credit, and performance requirements?

Nine (64%) providers offered participants the option to receive graduate credit and/or professional development credit. Of these providers, 100% partnered with state universities to offer graduate credit. The cost and amount of credit varied by institute; however, participants were eligible to receive 1-3 graduate credits at an average cost of \$35 a credit. One respondent reported a graduate credit cost of \$446 for a 45 hour, five-day institute. Respondents indicated graduate credits were tied to a specific performance requirement, such as attendance or completion of a service-learning unit. Participants at five institutes were eligible to receive professional development credit at no cost, with a performance requirement based on attendance.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION: BUDGET AND COST

What was the budget for the summer institute? Please describe the major expenses.

The budget to convene a summer institute ranged widely from \$2,000 to \$40,000. Respondents indicated that major expenses for the institutes included lodging, space rental, food, and trainers. The duration of the institute and the number of participants did not have a direct impact on budget variation. The findings do show a correlation between high cost of the institute and lodging expenses for participants. While summer institutes have been held for as little as \$2,000 – for example, the San Joaquin (CA) County Office of Education held a two-day institute for 51-75 participants with a budget of \$2,000 – the cost of lodging is a barrier for organizations interested in convening summer institutes.

What was the registration fee?

Half the study participants (50%) reported that institutes were free of charge for participants or had a minimal registration fee of, at most, \$35. Five of the institutes did not have a registration fee because they were subsidized by Learn and Serve America grants or district operating funds. For those institutes with more substantial registration fees, the amount ranged from \$200-\$879.

What percentage of participants used personal, grant, or other funds to pay the registration fee?

The ability to use grant funds to cover registration fees was notable in the survey responses: 70-100% of the participants who paid registration fees used grant funds to cover the expense, and 30% used personal funds.

CONTENT

The survey solicited information about institutes goals, day-to-day activities, final projects, best practices, and lessons learned, as follows.

Please describe the purpose or goal of your summer institute.

All respondents reported that the purpose or goal of their summer institutes was to improve service-learning practice. Many survey respondents (64%) indicated that their summer institute had an additional focus, including: senior projects, youth development, environmental and civic edu-

cation, sustainability, ethics education, pre-service education, organizational change, and urban education.

What constituted the day-to-day summer institute activities?

Day-to-day summer institute activities predominantly consisted of workshops, breakout sessions, and guest speakers. Other kinds of activities included:

- Front Range Earth Force's institute featured experiential activities such as water-quality testing.
- Four institutes incorporated community site visits into the agenda.
- The KIDS Consortium "Living Democracy" institute featured civic forum discussions about primary historical documents.

Did participants complete a final project?

Participants completed final projects at six institutes. The most prevalent assignment was developing a service-learning unit, with a plan for use in the classroom. At the conclusion of the KIDS Consortium's "Living Democracy" summer institute, teams of participants presented their project ideas to their peers for discussion and feedback.

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Please describe aspects of your summer institute that you would characterize as a best practice.

The following best practices were identified by respondents:

- **Model service-learning practice.** Participants at the KIDS Consortium institute in Maine toured the Lewiston-Auburn community, met with local leaders, and developed action plans to use service-learning to address real needs in the community.
- **Use coaches to provide follow-up assistance during the school year.** At the CalServe institute, coaches were assigned to each participant to provide ongoing support in the development and implementation of a service-learning unit.
- **Vary workshop offerings to meet participants' different levels of experience with service-learning.** The Texas Center for Service-Learning offered breakout sessions providing beginner and advanced service-learning training.
- **Provide a team-oriented environment promoting interactive learning and networking opportunities.** The Evergreen School District institute included teams of teachers developing action plans for the school year.

Please describe aspects of your summer institute that you would do differently and why.

Survey respondents identified ways in which they would conduct their institutes differently in the future. In keeping with best practices identified by providers, lessons learned include:

- **Increased length.** Several providers of three-day institutes wanted to increase the length of the institute to five days.
- **Content targeted to different levels of experience with service-learning.** Front Range Earth Force planned to add more workshops the following year to provide different opportunities for teachers with varying levels of experience with service-learning.
- **An experiential component.** For future institutes, the International Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education will add an experiential component so that participants can apply what they are learning to creating a real service-learning experience.

FOLLOW-UP

Have any follow-up activities been planned to complement the summer institute?

Ten providers offered follow-up activities to their summer institutes. Providers complemented the summer institute with professional development events during the school year. One provider uses coaches for ongoing, in-person technical assistance throughout the school year.

Are you planning to offer a summer institute in 2005?

All providers indicated that they intended to host an institute the following summer. Although the institutes are time-intensive and costly, this 100% positive response rate indicates that providers view summer institutes as an effective way to offer service-learning training.

IMPLICATIONS

This study offers the service-learning community an overview of a critical part of a service-learning professional education infrastructure—summer institutes. While the study provides a better understanding of current service-learning summer institutes, key questions remain. Why are there so few summer institutes? Why do they reach so few practitioners? What is the impact of summer institutes on participants' practice? What should we do next to strengthen, expand, and sustain summer institutes? Learning more about the answers to these questions and then using our knowledge to improve service-learning summer institutes is essential to making service-learning a core part of every young person's education.

The study points to two major areas for action:

- **For enrollment in summer institutes to increase,** potential participants need more venues to choose from and better access to the public funding streams that support summer professional development.
- **To strengthen the quality of summer institutes,** participants need content-focused and grade-level-specific training opportunities.

The National Service-Learning Partnership will facilitate the formation of a network through which providers can deliberate about issues relevant to improving service-learning practice. Providers can focus on the issues raised in this brief to discuss service-learning in-service education and develop an action agenda.

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