

Developing Civically Rich Culminating Projects: Tips for Community Agencies

by Kate McPherson

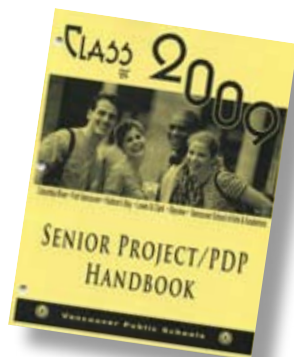
What is a Culminating Project?

All students in the state of Washington are required to complete a Culminating Project to graduate. (Some schools use the term "Senior Project", "Community Service" or "Service Learning"). These projects provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their academic skills by planning and implementing a real project. Every district determines the elements of The Culminating Project but most include four components – a paper, a project, a public presentation and a post-high school plan. These projects are to be both an authentic demonstration of learning and an opportunity for students to clarify what they plan to do after high school. Most districts either require or encourage students to plan and implement a project that contributes to the community.

These tips sheets are for community members who will be helping students plan and implement projects that add value to the community and preferably make a lasting impact. Every year more than 5,000 Clark County high school seniors are completing these projects. Imagine the possibilities.....

How do I know what students are required to do?

Schools usually provide students with a packet of information for the community members or organizations assisting students with these projects. These packets explain the purpose and the elements of the Culminating Project. This packet may also include a calendar with deadlines for the year, project verification forms and a process for getting a background check. The project requirements and the role of the community member vary greatly



from school to school so it is important to review the packet, **paying special attention to the criteria used to evaluate and document the project.** The key is that you and the student have a clear understanding of the process so you can work together to ensure the project's success. A Culminating Project handbook may be found at most school or district web sites or ask a student if you can photo copy their handbook to keep on file for future reference at your agency.

Thank you for supporting students with the Culminating Project. There are several ways you can assist students with this project and your role will vary depending on the skills of the students and your time and interest.

How you can assist students

✓ Welcome students

Many students are uncomfortable making contact with the community and feel awkward on the phone or in an interview. One of the purposes of



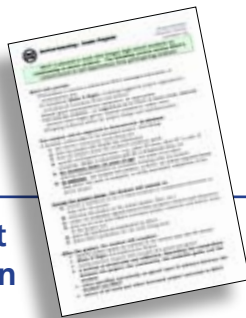
this project is to give students the opportunity to develop these important skills which they need as they assume a more active role in the community as a citizen and worker. If you have time, thank the

student for their interest in your organization, ask them what interests them in their project and then define the best way you can support their work. A welcoming voice mail with clear instructions is helpful too (i.e. "Thanks for your interest in our agency. Please leave your name and phone number after the tone. We respond to calls during weekdays only. We do receive a large volume of calls so we appreciate your patience in the process." This way the student knows more what to expect and doesn't feel ignored when they call on week-ends.)

Also know that many parents call for their students because students are not available during your office hours.

✓ **Be clear about what you and your organization can and can not do.**

Develop a flyer that defines what your organization does, how students can support your work, what you need from students and what preexisting opportunities exist. You can find example flyers in a Community Resource Guide for Civically Rich Culminating Projects. Some agencies that receive frequent requests establish weekly or monthly service opportunities at a time when students can participate. It's helpful to students to have general statistical information plus list ways that their weekly/monthly participation helps your organization (the community) on the flyer. Students need concrete info they can include on a report (i.e. Our agency serves XXXX amount of people per year. Our agency has XX amount of programs that are only possible with your community support).



Check out the sample handout developed by SOLV, an Oregon nonprofit. (click here)

✓ **If possible, work with students to formulate a project that provides valuable service to your organization and which uses their skills.**

If you are willing and have the time to help a student personalize their project, meet with



the student to see if there are unique ways the student can contribute to your organization. This is a rare opportunity for students to personalize a learning project and it can be an opportunity for your organization to meet a specific need. However, if you are busy, define your limits so the project does not become something you resent. It should benefit both the student and the agency so everyone feels positive about the experience.

If you can work personally with the student the following steps may be helpful:

✓ **Develop Clear and Compelling Goals.**

Have students formulate a concise statement of the project's purpose, their hopes, what skills they have or want to develop, the project timeline and required paperwork. Writing this helps them clarify their thinking and enables you to work together better.

✓ **Be Inventive.**

Encourage youth to use their unique gifts and talents to develop a project that they might not have considered. The very process of inventing together helps all participants to feel more vested in the project.



A student shares his love of music with a Hough student and encourages him to join a free elementary orchestra.

Concern/ Hope	Talents/ Gifts	Project Possibilities	Civic Action (sustainable; impacts policy)
More beautiful community	Visual Artist	Design and paint a mural for the community	Establish a youth advisory board for the local mural society.
Too many unwanted animals in shelters	Web Design Marketing skills Video skills	Develop a youth-friendly web site about adoptions Organize a Battle of the Bones fundraiser to support the shelter. Develop a You Tube video about the Humane Society.	Establish an on-going youth web presence on the Humane Society's web site. Establish links between this site and key community web sites.
Loneliness / depression for youth with long term illness	Video games	Host a video game events at hospital care center	Work with hospital to establish an ongoing program.
Positive after school options for youth	Can relate to kids who do not feel they have a place to go.	Work with Parks Department to establish an after school program that is built around the interests of students in neighborhood elementary school.	Work with the city to develop a local levy to fund after school youth programs.
Help low-income students have access to music instruction	Marketing skills Musician	Develop a musical petting zoo event for a local elementary school that promotes the free orchestra program.	Develop a program that promotes free or affordable music opportunities at elementary schools.



This senior created a short video which is used by the Humane Society to educate the community about its needs. To view the video, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57DJtYPpk&feature=related>



The 2008 Mr. Hudson's Bay student team raised more than \$85,000 for Doernbecher Hospital.

What started out as a young woman's senior project at Hudson's Bay High School has blossomed into a formidable fundraising machine for Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland, collecting more than .5 million dollars over the years.

Authentic project SERVICE adds value:

- Service enables students to experience that they are genuinely valued.
- Civic projects develop important citizenship skills and foster a sense of caring and empathy.
- Just as students benefit, likewise agencies do. Students often become lifelong supporters or ongoing volunteers because they become educated in knowing what your agency is about.

Support but do not do the projects

Clarify with your students how you can help them meet **their goals** and deadlines. As you define the specifics of the project you will discover where students need technical assistance in order to be successful. Many schools have forms that guide and document student planning. Work with students using those forms or using one of your own. If no forms are available, talk with similar agencies as to what they use if you need to develop one.

Once they have a plan, help them take responsibility for the project. Projects are to be done by students and on their own time. Remember many students are juggling a lot for their age with school, work, sports, etc... some tend to procrastinate. Remember, through this process, schools, parents, and agencies are all helping students learn organizational skills. Your patience is appreciated through the youth learning process. Help students find a system that reminds both of you of deadlines and set up a regular time and place to meet to check progress and to problem solve.

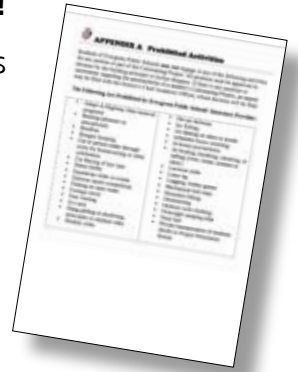
For many students, this may be their first independent project so encouragement and taking time to define each person's role and specific activities will help students develop project planning skills.

Students can make displays that educate the community and recruit volunteers.



Safety First and Foremost!!

Be careful not to put students in harm's way. Check out the **Culminating Project Safety Tip Sheet** for specific guidelines to help you plan a safe project. Even though students are to plan and implement the project they need adults to help them think through the project to prevent problems they may not foresee. Many districts have certain prohibited activities so be sure you comply with these guidelines.



Most districts require community members who work with students to have background checks. Be sure you meet all these expectations. Meet only in public and supervised locations for you and your student's protection.

Thank you for providing the personal and technical support students needed to make the potential possible!! Remember those that supported you in youthful learning, it was time well invested. These students will quickly become the next generation to serve our community. A brighter future impacts all generations. Your time, support and guidance benefits everyone!

Good luck!

Please contact me if I can help:
mcphers@pacifier.com

Learn more about Service-learning and Culminating projects at <http://www.projects-service-leadership.org>

For more details about developing effective service-learning partnerships check out <http://psl.oditech.com/community>



Project Service Leadership

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