

Service-Learning **Elections** Projects in Response to Identified Problems and Needs

Potential Partners for Service-Learning Projects:

- ✓ Town/City Clerk's Office
- ✓ Town/City Mayor's Office
- ✓ Local League of Young Voters
- ✓ Local Chapter of the League of Women Voters
- ✓ Local/State Political Parties
- ✓ Local Housing Authority
- ✓ Town/City Refugee/Immigrant Services Office
- ✓ Local/State Political Parties
- ✓ Secretary of State's Office
- ✓ State Campus Compact (organization promoting civic engagement in higher education)
- ✓ Nearby post-secondary institution



Examples of Service-Learning Projects that address the following Problems/Needs:

Lack of understanding of voting process:

Elementary students studying local town government interviewed their selectman and discovered that few residents attended town meetings. Students learned about the history of town meetings, tracing its evolution from colonial times to the current structure. Working with the local League of Women Voters and the selectmen, students created plays that shared this history, the current process and some of the topics to be discussed at the upcoming town meeting. They presented these plays to parents of all 4th and 5th graders. They also made posters advertising the event and placed them around town and baked brownies for the actual town meeting.

Middle school students learned about various political, social and economic topics related to elections. Working with the town elections clerk, students identified issues preventing people from voting and worked in teams to design workshops to educate the public and overcome those obstacles. Parents and community members were invited to workshops where the students shared what they learned through oral presentations, exhibits and handouts. Topics included: the registration process, absentee ballots, polling locations, signing in, proving residency, and how to correctly use the voting machines.

Unable to access polling locations:

Middle school students studying elections and voting learned from the town clerk that voter turnout was low in their community because many people were unable to get to the polls. Students designed brochures with information about absentee voting and distributed them to area employers, churches, schools, and retirement homes.

High school students studied the electoral process and the history of voting in their social studies class. When they examined local issues concerning elections and voting in their community, they discovered that many people had a hard time getting to and from polling places. So the students worked with City Hall, their principal, and civic groups to organize transportation for their school's staff and voting age students to get to and from the polls. Groups of students also helped to register voters and distribute absentee ballots to "Meals on Wheels" clients.

Lack of knowledge regarding voting issues:

Middle school students thought it would be cool to invite local candidates to their school for a “Candidates Night” after learning about press conferences and debates in language arts class. In order to prepare for the event, in social studies students researched the platforms of the candidates and designed questions to ask them about their positions. The students created advertisements that were approved by all candidates and put them up around the school, town, and in the school newspaper to inform parents and community members about the event. Students emceed the event and ran the night as a formal press conference and debate.

In the course “Elections: Democracy in Action” high school students studied the election process and local candidates and referenda. The students spoke with candidates, government officials and lobbyists to identify issues important in this election. They decided to educate the community on a bear baiting referendum, so they partnered with groups on both sides of the issue. The students created a website listing the pros and cons of the bear baiting referendum, and presented on the topic at their school’s Voter Information Night.

Elections materials only available in English:

High school students studied election and voting issues in their social studies class. They learned that low voter turnout was a problem in their community so they partnered with their city registrar to sign up new voters. The students learned one of the reasons voter registration was so low was that their community had a large population of new U.S. citizens who couldn’t easily read the voting materials. So the students worked with the Secretary of State and their school’s language department to translate the city’s voting materials into various languages spoken in their community.

Apathy towards voting:

Elementary students were each asked to survey 10 adults to see if they voted in last year’s election. Students discovered that many adults hadn’t voted. Students then studied the origins of the voting process in America and picked some key points and events highlighting the importance of voting. Working with the guidance of a group of local college drama majors and their town’s elections clerk, students then wrote and designed skits that emphasized these points and events. Students also created a playbill with a synopsis of the history of voting and the importance of each individual’s vote (as well as a cast list!). The students performed the skits and shared their playbill with their parents, 2 college classes and members of the community. At the performances, voter registration cards were available for anyone not already registered to vote.

Low voter turnout among certain populations:

High school students studied voter trends and realized that certain populations were not well represented in the polls. To address this problem, students wanted to inform targeted groups about the statistics of who votes and who doesn’t – and why it is so important to vote. They interviewed a local PR firm to learn how to effectively design a Public Service Announcement. Students also worked with their town elections clerk and manager to share their Public Service Announcement and voter registration information with the community, targeting specifically areas and populations in the community where voter turnout has been low in the past.

Middle school students learned that voter turnout was traditionally low in their community, especially among young voters. To address this problem the students partnered with the League of Young Voters and various community organizations to design and host voter registration drives. Students wrote and produced Public Service Announcements for local radio stations that targeted young people, convincing them that voting was important. They also sent birthday cards with voter registration forms inside to local high school students turning eighteen.