

# Service That Matters



## A Guide for Local Jewish Service-Learning

Jewish service-learning (JSL) is the integration of hands on service and Judaism, learning and reflection. This packet is designed to help you enhance your tikkun olam activities by exploring several factors that contribute to high-quality JSL – JSL that contributes to real impact on the issue/community you’re volunteering with, and that is meaningful to the people doing the volunteering.

As you develop a JSL program, here are some factors to consider:

- Building a project, including:
  - **Getting Started** by identifying the issue you will address, and thinking about your purpose
  - Building a **Community Partnership**
  - Creating a **Program Structure**
  - **Mobilizing a group** of participants
  - Carrying out **Service and/or Awareness-Building & Advocacy**
- Building understanding, including:
  - **Educating participants** about the context that surrounds the issue, and
  - Weaving **Jewish Values and Reflection** into the program

High-quality JSL programs integrate these factors *with* one another with a view towards intentionality and alignment. In this way, each factor informs and enhances the others. For example, developing a Community Partnership can help you set up opportunities for Service that is really needed by those affected by a given issue. Likewise, a program that involves Service *and* Jewish/Educational experiences or Reflection offers participants the opportunity to form – or strengthen – social, personal and/or Jewish contexts for their volunteer efforts (likewise, the service itself illuminates the learning and discussions). It’s helpful to think about each of these elements as complementary spokes in the wheel of a service program.

At the same time, it is not necessary to force different factors together, if they don’t naturally connect within the context and circumstances of your program. Some programs, for example, will be successful even without Awareness-Building & Advocacy activity. Furthermore, while the factors above are listed in a generally sequential fashion, *you* can decide how best to take them into account as you go through the process of creating your program.

**A Final Word:** While most volunteers are truly interested in working toward the benefit of the communities and causes they are involved with, service programs can be undermined or even harmful, if there isn’t proper communication, collaboration and learning focused on the community’s needs. Service That Matters contains prompt questions and concrete action steps that can propel meaningful service that engages both participant-volunteers and the communities they spend time in...service that matters!

# Building a Project →

## Getting Started

As you plan to design a JSL program, take time to reflect on an issue – such as hunger, homelessness, education or the environment – that you, your peers and community members care about – and can have an impact on. Consider why it is important to you and what you will do to address it.

### Planning and Acting:

- Who else do you need ‘at the table’ to help organize a program?
- How much time do you have to commit?
- What community issue(s) does your community want to address? Can these issues be addressed through service within your time frame? Have these issues been articulated by the community that is affected by them?
- Why do you and your planning team care about this issue? How does it affect all of you?
- Are there community members or organizations already involved in addressing the issue you identified?
- What can you learn from these contacts? Are there previous or ongoing efforts to address the issue? What has worked? What hasn’t worked and why?
  - Research background information about your issue and efforts that have been made to address it. How can you share this information with your community?
  - Based on what you’ve learned, what goals do you have for the JSL program you will develop?
  - Write out your goals for the JSL program, including impacts on both the issue/community, as well as your volunteers.

### *Have you thought about...?*

- Why does this problem/need exist in the first place?
- What political, economic and social dynamics surround the issue you are looking to address?

## Community Partnership

A partnership is only a partnership to the extent it benefits everybody involved. The people affected by the issue are the experts, so it’s critical to form real partnerships in respectful, supportive ways, learning from those who have first-hand experience with the issue. When relevant and possible, develop a partnership with an organization that is already successfully engaged in work related to the issue you have identified. In doing so, you can help ensure that your service addresses real need(s) articulated by the community itself, in turn preventing the duplication of efforts and maximizing the impact of your service on the community and its beneficiaries. To the extent possible, service should be planned with people affected by an issue – not for them!

### Planning and Acting:

- Which of your community contacts best meets this criteria?: a) Meaningfully addresses the issue you have selected; b) Is open to collaboration; c) Works well with volunteers
- Do you share common objectives for the service? If not, how can you align both of your visions to best serve the community?
- What sort of service work would both your partner and potential volunteers value?
  - Together, brainstorm service work that would be relevant to your partner and match the skill sets and interests of your potential volunteers. Then, develop a basic outline for your program:
    - What needs will your program address? How?
    - What is your targeted demographic for volunteers?
    - How will your program benefit volunteers and the community alike?
    - Who will be your primary contact moving forward?

## Program Structure

Turning ideas into action. Work with your community partner to design your program (unless they suggest you do it on your own). When developing, remember that meaningful service is not only about the volunteers' experience, it is most importantly measured by the impact it has on the community. Create service opportunities that are realistic and that address your issue in authentic, and sustainable ways. See the associated **Planning Worksheet**.

### Planning and Acting:

- What service work are you committing to (see SERVICE)?
- In addition to the service you've committed to, what additional components of this framework will strengthen your JSL program?
- How long will the overall JSL program run (including all of the "factors" you'll be working on? How much time are you able or willing to commit to leading it?
- What costs might be involved?
- What logistical considerations do you need to prepare for?
- How will this program be successful?
  - Define success for your program and determine a way to evaluate whether you've been successful (e.g. With a tutoring program: measuring the number of students who were tutored, the number of students who improved their reading level and to what extent, the number of volunteer hours given, etc.).

### *Have you thought about...?*

- What does success look like after 1 month? After 1 year?
- How will this program be sustainable over time?

## Mobilizing a Group

Rallying the troops. Form a group of participants who are interested in your JSL program. This can be done after you've developed your Program Structure, or beforehand. In mobilizing volunteers, remember that service can and should be social and fun – the sustainability of your program hinges on your volunteers feeling engaged!

### Planning and Acting:

- Who do you need as volunteers to make your program (the service) happen successfully?
- How will you develop interest in your program among your targeted audiences? AKA, how will you mobilize volunteers?
  - Use in-person meetings, phone calls, word-of-mouth, e-mails, flyers, Facebook, Twitter, etc. to get the word out about how your program will benefit participants and the partner community alike.
  - Change methods if your original approaches don't work. Build relationships with potential participants, learn about their interests and values, and connect them with your program in creative ways.
- How will you solidify a group of committed individuals?
  - Clearly communicate logistics and requests to potential participants, making sure they understand where they need to be, and when with as much advance notice as possible. After they commit, you may need to continue to remind them of upcoming activities, even after they sign on, so that your group "shows up" when they say they will.
- What orientation/training do your participants need before they begin their service?
  - Talk with your community partner about what they require in regards to training volunteers.

## Service

Meeting the needs of participants and community partners alike. With respect and humility, support your community partner through frequent and/or ongoing service. Showing up repeatedly enables greater integration with the community, allowing you to be fully involved in addressing the issue you've committed to.

### Planning and Acting:

- A couple of days before your service kicks off, confirm with your community partner that the specific volunteer activities you agreed upon will take place as you had planned.
- How will you make sure that the people who have committed show up?
- What needs to be done for set-up and cleanup once the service is complete? Who will be responsible?
- Should you conduct an orientation or training for participants before the program begins? If so, what needs to be considered?
  - If relevant, host an orientation so that your participants are prepared to serve.
- How can you best facilitate the service during and after the volunteering?
  - Check-in with participants throughout, to make sure they are engaged in their work
  - Thank your community partner and offer to spearhead any cleanup
  - Debrief with the community partner and your volunteers (together or separately, depending on what is appropriate). Did each party feel that time was well spent? What improvements could be made for next time? Was it successful according to your goals?

### *Have you thought about...?*

- How will you ensure that all participants have something to do and that they are capable of doing it?
- How will you and your participants engage with the community in a respectful manner?

## Awareness-Building & Advocacy

Treat the disease, not just the symptoms. Empower participants/volunteers to raise awareness about the issue. Through education or lobbying, advocate for specific change that you would like people to contribute to.

### Planning and Acting:

- What do you and your participants need to know about this issue?
  - With your participants, zero in on resources you can use to educate yourselves about the dynamics and narratives at play.
- To whom will you direct your awareness-building efforts?
- What methods will you use to effectively spread awareness about the issue and its root causes?
- Beyond raising awareness, how can you work to enact systemic change?
  - Determine whether there are policies that could impact your issue.
  - Identify people and institutions that hold influence in making change.
  - Talk to the influential players. Specify what particular actions you would like them to make.
- What action steps would you like them to take, based on what you have shared with them?
  - Know your audience; what is compelling to one may differ for another. Speak to their interests, connecting the issue/need to things they care about.
- How will you convey your passion compellingly to your different audiences?

### *Have you thought about...?*

- What contributes to people being unaware or apathetic toward this issue?
- Are there people or groups who don't want to see the change you're advocating for? If so, why?

# Building Understanding →

## Education

Teach your participants about the underlying issues to deepen their understanding of the social, economic, political and historical contexts that surround the need you're working to address.

### Planning and Acting:

- What is the educational goal for your program? What do you want participants to understand about the issue and surrounding context?
- Articulate your educational goals and gather resources that can help facilitate conversations with your participants that move toward this goal.
- How and when, specifically, will you engage your participants in this learning?
  - Select appropriate times and places in which to educate your participants about your issue. Also determine how frequently and for how long you will engage participants in these discussions.
- Who will be able to teach/lead conversations most effectively?
  - Choose a person (or people) to lead these education discussions. Consider bringing in outside educators or speakers if relevant. Ask your direct service provider to recommend a speaker and host an event.
  - Try to also engage your participants in dialogue with your community partner.
  - See what documentaries or movies are out that your group could go see and have a dinner discussion afterwards
  - Host a "salon"
- How do you want your volunteers to grow from these discussions?
  - Facilitate discussions with participants that relate personal, communal and societal actions to the circumstances that surround the issue. Encourage participants to share questions they may have.

### *Have you thought about...?*

- How does your community partner perceive the issue? Is this similar to or different from the regional, national and global narratives of the problem?
- In what ways do you, your participants or your larger community impact the issue? Directly and indirectly? Positively and negatively? Knowingly, unknowingly and unavoidably?

## Jewish Values

Service informed by Judaism, Judaism informed by service. Explore and reflect on Jewish ideas and values that relate to service. Through these activities, your participants can come to realize that they are living Jewishly by engaging in service.

### Planning and Acting:

- What Jewish values and ideas are relevant to the issue your program is working to address? You might explore some of the following:
  - Spiritual elements such as Jewish prayers, texts and holidays
  - Ritual practices such as Jewish traditions, religious practices and holidays
  - Cultural behaviors related to traditions and "Jewish" ways of life
  - Historical perspectives and Jewish communal experiences over time
  - Intellectual concepts found in Jewish resources or secular resources developed by Jews
  - Personal experiences and values, such as participants' personal Jewish practices, or the histories and practices of their families

- Develop a plan for infusing Jewish thought, language and values into each element of your program (Service, Advocacy, Education, Reflection, etc.), weaving in participants' personal experiences in service and social action.
  - Who can teach about these ideas in an engaging and meaningful manner?
  - Consider bringing in outside educators or facilitators (from a synagogue, school, Jewish service agency, etc.). Recognize that participants come from different cultural and religious backgrounds and might respond differently to a given speaker or topic.

## Reflection

Create opportunities for your participants to reflect upon their service, so that they can “think out loud” before, during and/or immediately after the volunteer activity. This allows participants to contemplate their service experience in the greater context of their values and life decisions, enabling them to think about their larger roles in the world.

### Planning and Acting:

- Where, when and how frequently will these discussions take place?
  - Recognizing that each person reflects differently, choose times and venues that are conducive to carrying out thoughtful reflection.
- What will your reflection look like? Will you lead individual or group reflection? Do you need any materials?
  - Consider how different media (art, music, poetry) and frameworks (thought-provoking questions, journaling, story-telling) can help people think about the larger questions that surround service.
- What questions will you pose to your participants in your discussion(s)?
  - Make a list of questions. See examples below in HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT? Then, facilitate thinking about oneself, one's values, one's Jewish identity and one's relationship and responsibilities to the community partner, the Jewish community and greater society. Explore how your participants will take what they have learned from this service opportunity into future service experiences.

### *Have you thought about...?*

- What kinds of questions will foster meaningful reflection? Consider:
  - What values did you and your participants' service work tap into? Where do these values come from?
  - Are the values you and your participants identified linked to your identities? Do you consider service as part of your identities? To your Jewish identities?
  - How have you and your participants grown and changed over the course of the program? What new ideas and feelings did you think about or experience?
  - How do you think the community that you served was affected? How did the community perceive the program/experience, and your group?
  - Has the program created meaningful, long-lasting change in the world? How? If not, why?
  - When and with whom will your participants share their experience?
- How can you foster a comfortable, safe atmosphere for your participants?

This document was developed with inspiration from multiple resources:

- “Making the Case”, a section of ‘Moving From Band-Aid Solutions to Systematic Change: A Service-Learning “How-To” Manual for Hillel Foundations’ which was developed for Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in 2001
- Repair the World's “Standards of Practice for Immersive Jewish Service-Learning Programs”
- Penn Hillel and The Jewish Renaissance Project's “Initiative Planning Document”
- “Beyond Volunteering: A Guide to Service-Learning.” Kristen Hecht. PCDN. 2012.