



## AACPS Service Learning Portal Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) provide service-learning opportunities through course content during the school day. They also encourage students to participate in additional volunteer service-learning experiences to improve their academic skills by applying what they learn in school to the real world and to provide meaningful service to the community.

75 service-learning hours are a high school graduation requirement for every student and are earned directly through classes and grade level and content curriculum.

### ***What counts as an official service-learning project?***

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), quality service-learning projects:

1. Address a particular need in the community
2. Connect to curricular objectives
3. Include Reflection throughout the service-learning experience
4. Develop student responsibility
5. Establish community partnerships
6. Plan ahead for service-learning
7. Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for civic engagement

### ***When should the portal be used for Service-learning action or efforts?***

Service-learning experience hours, above and beyond the 75 required hours, may be accessed and recorded through the Service-learning Portal.

In addition to aligning with the seven best practices above, the portal will allow AACPS to recognize student-driven service projects offered by community partners through the portal, service-projects completed through school clubs and organizations, as well as additional service-learning projects completed through classes.



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For a student to receive AACPS credit for service-learning hours, each project recorded in the portal must document the following three components: Preparation, Action, and Reflection.

### **Preparation:**

- An activity that prepares the student for the project by helping him or her to understand the community issue to be addressed, the community to be served, and any needed information before actual work on the service project begins.

***Examples of Preparation activities include:*** A classroom intro lesson led by a teacher, a training session led by a community partner or teacher, or an independent research activity.

### **Action:**

- The actions that are taken (whether direct, indirect, or through advocacy) to complete the service project.

### **Reflection**

- An activity that prompts the student to think about (and then document in some way) the impact of the service experience, along with the future implications of the service experience on the community and on the student as a person.

***Examples of reflection activities include:*** journal reflections, twitter blogs, reflection videos (vlogs), presentations, class assignments, poems, etc.

### ***Who can users contact if there is a glitch in the portal for any reason?***

Any technical glitches with the portal can be reported using the “contact us” feature on the homepage. The Office of Service-learning is available to assist with portal concerns.

**Service Project Difficulties:** Any specific difficulties with a particular project should be reported to the community partner or teacher point of contact associated with the project. The Office can be reached at 410.222.5391.



## AACPS Service Learning Portal Frequently Asked Questions and Answers **STUDENT AND FAMILY QUESTIONS**

### ***Is the portal required for all students to use to earn AACPS service-learning hours as a part of the graduation requirement?***

As AACPS currently integrates all required service-learning hours into course curriculum, use of the portal is not a requirement to earn AACPS Service-Learning hours nor should they be entered in the portal as the portal at this time is for Distinguished Service.

### ***Can students use the portal to track service-learning hours?***

The portal is a platform to track all service projects acquired through a club activity or with the supervision of the school based facilitator, who will support/validate these hours.

If pursuing a distinguished service recognition, a student can track his/her service hours easily on the portal which can later assist in resume writing, National Honor's Society applications, college applications, internship and job applications, etc.

### ***Will students be able to self-report service-learning hours and projects?***

Students will self-report all information. The preparation and reflection will be validated by the school based service-learning facilitator and the action will be validated by the approved community partner. If students wish to work with a community partner who is not registered to the site, there is a feature on the portal that allows students to request that they be contacted and invited to register for the portal.

### ***What incentives are available for students who log their independent projects within the portal?***

Students who use the portal to track service-learning hours will benefit from:

- A platform to track all service projects completed through independent and club activities
- A one-stop-shop to determine how many service hours have been completed outside of classes
- Eligibility for AACPS incentives for students who engage in service projects beyond the minimum, in-class requirements.

### ***Once a student begins a project, how long does a student have to complete a particular project within the portal to be eligible to earn hours?***

A student must complete all required steps and earn all required approval within one academic year of beginning the project.



## AACPS Service Learning Portal Frequently Asked Questions and Answers **COMMUNITY PARTNER QUESTIONS**

### ***What kinds of community partners are eligible to register for the portal?***

Community partners who can facilitate meaningful opportunities for students to aid in a community issue or support a community cause are encouraged to register for the portal.

- **Note:** It is important that community partners remember that AACPS values student participation in meaningful acts of service. Student participation should not be viewed as additional staffing or labor for a particular event or project.
  
- **Common community projects include (but are not limited to):**
  - Community clean-ups,
  - Support for environmental awareness events,
  - Peer-to-peer mentoring/tutoring,
  - Support for health/disease awareness events, or
  - Advocating for a non-partisan cause (i.e. anti-bullying, drug awareness, equal opportunity education, etc).

### ***Will training be provided for community partners who wish to register for the portal?***

An individual meeting and/or an invitation to a community session as a part of the community partner vetting process will be provided.

- Community partners interested in registering for an opportunity and/or scheduling a training can contact the Office of Service-learning and Mentorships at 410.222.5391.
  
- Community Partner Training sessions will consist of the following components:
  - A hands-on introduction to the Service-learning Portal,
  - An opportunity to address questions, and
  - The signing of the AACPS partner agreement.

### ***What is the Community Partner Vetting Process and why is vetting necessary?***

- The vetting process includes a diligent and thorough review for the protection and safety of all student volunteers.
- The vetting process is limited to initial training opportunity. However, vetting for community partner and/or service sites can be updated at any time.



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### ***How are community partners vetted and who is responsible for vetting community partners?***

The vetting process must be conducted for each new community partner by an Office of Service-learning and Mentorships (SLM) representative, an authorized district representative, or an authorized school-based administrator or teacher.

The process consists of the following steps:

1. A review of company history, mission, and current goals
2. A review of company and company employee status on the Anne Arundel County and Maryland sex offender registries, to determine whether or not potential community partners have registered sex-offenders on site as employees.
3. A site visit to the community partner's organization and/or the site where the service will occur to ensure that the site meets AACPS student safety guidelines.
4. An individualized meeting and/or small group community partner training that will conclude with the signing of the Service-learning Partner agreement form.

### **EDUCATOR QUESTIONS**

#### ***Which teachers have access to using the SL Portal with their classes?***

Currently, no teachers are required to use the portal in their classrooms, but all teachers will have access.

Teachers, coaches, and club advisors will be invited and trained to use the portal to take advantage of an electronic platform that:

- Aids in volunteer management,
- Tracks student participation,
- Compiles a student record of service-learning, and
- Makes students eligible for county recognition and incentives.

#### ***Who will provide training to schools?***

Training for schools will be offered by the Office of Service-learning, which may enlist the support of school-based representatives, such as administrative liaisons, classroom teachers, club advisors, coaches, school counselors, or signature program facilitators.

#### ***Who is responsible for approving the hours that students complete within the portal?***

Community partners approve student participation in the action stage of the project.

Educators who are registered as administrators on the portal (this could be an AACPS district-level service-learning facilitator, a school-based service-learning facilitator of a project, a club advisor, a Signature Program Facilitator, a School Counselor, etc.) approve overall student projects on the portal.