



Expanding Your Impact

Leading a Service Project

The idea: There's a big jump from helping with a project to being the one who makes it happen. Leading a service project means taking an idea and turning it into a real day of work that helps real people. It sounds intimidating, but it's just a handful of doable steps, and you don't do them alone.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." — Arthur Ashe

"Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." — Warren Bennis

"A boss says 'Go!' A leader says 'Let's go!'" — E. M. Kelly

FACILITATOR NOTES

Time. about 60–90 minutes total. Works in a classroom, youth group, or club. No materials or cost required.

Service today. Pick one option in Serve below and set it up before you begin.

Warm-up (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

Keep this quick, short answers are great. Read the questions together.

- What's a need you've noticed that no one seems to be doing anything about?
- What's the difference between helping with a project and leading one?
- When you've been part of a group effort, what made it run smoothly, or fall apart?
- What scares people about being "the leader," and is the fear bigger than the job?

Learn (10–20 minutes)

At some point, helping with other people's projects leads to a bigger question: what if you ran one? Leading a service project means taking responsibility for the whole thing, spotting a need, deciding to act on it, and organizing people and supplies to get it done. That's a real step up, and it's normal for it to feel like a lot. But here's the secret: leading isn't a mysterious talent some people are born with. It's a process. You pick something real, break it into pieces, line up the people and the supplies, run the day, and thank everyone after. Each piece is doable on its own. And you're never doing it alone; a good leader works with a mentor and shares the load. The first time you turn your own idea into a finished project that actually helped someone, something clicks: you realize you can make things happen, not just wait for them to.

Leading a project mostly comes down to:

- Deciding to be the one who makes it happen, instead of waiting for someone else.
- Breaking a big goal into small, doable pieces.
- Getting the right people and supplies, and keeping everyone moving together.

A closer look. A sixteen-year-old notices the same elderly neighbors struggling to keep up their yards every fall. Instead of just raking one yard, she decides to organize a whole afternoon. She picks a date, texts a dozen friends, and asks her mentor to help round up rakes and bags. Then she maps out four houses and splits everyone into small teams. The day comes, and it's a little chaotic, one team finishes early, the bags run low, but by dark, four yards are cleared and four neighbors are stunned. She didn't have any special training. She just decided to be the one who made it happen, broke it into steps, and didn't do it alone. That's all leading a project really is.

Why leading matters. Every service project you've ever joined existed because someone decided to lead it. Without organizers, good intentions stay stuck as ideas: the need gets noticed, everyone agrees it's a shame, and nothing happens. Leaders are the people who turn "someone should do something" into "we did." Learning to lead multiplies your impact like nothing else: one person serving helps; one person who can organize twenty servers helps twenty times as much. And leading changes you, too. It builds the confidence that comes from discovering you can take an idea in your head and make it real in the world. That's a skill that reaches far beyond service, into every part of a life.

How to lead a project, step by step. Leading is just a sequence you can follow. To run a service project, you:

- Pick a real need: choose something specific, doable, and genuinely helpful, smaller is fine.
- Make a plan: decide what, when, where, and what you'll need, then break it into tasks.
- Line up people and supplies: recruit help, assign clear jobs, and gather what the work requires.
- Run the day and follow through: lead by working alongside everyone, then thank people and see it finished.

Keep these in mind.

- **Start small.** A tiny project you actually finish beats a huge one that never happens. Scale up later.
- **Plan, then delegate.** You don't do everything yourself; you make sure everything gets done. Give people clear jobs.
- **Lead by doing.** Work alongside your team, not above it. People follow someone in the trenches with them.
- **Finish and thank.** Follow through to the end, and thank everyone. It's how people leave wanting to do it again.

Serve (30–60 minutes)

Today you'll put this into practice in a real service activity. Here are ways to do it:

Option A — Lead one small thing *(no cost, works in any setting)*

Pick one small, free service task and be the one who makes it happen, start to finish. Maybe it's organizing a few friends to rake a neighbor's yard, clean up a lot, or write cards for a care home. Choose the need, set the time, get two or three people, and run it. Keep it tiny on purpose. Leading one small project all the way through, even an hour long, teaches you more than helping with ten.

Option B — Plan and run a group project *(low cost, a bit more effort)*

Take on a real project with your group, using the full sequence: pick a genuine need, make a plan (what, when, where, supplies), recruit and assign people, run the day, and wrap up with thanks. Work with your mentor and, if it fits, a host organization. Aim for something meaningful but doable in a single day, a drive, a cleanup, a build, a packing event, that you organized from start to finish.

Option C — Lead bigger, and grow other leaders *(more effort; ongoing leadership)*

Step up to a larger or repeating project, and don't just lead, build other leaders. Delegate real responsibility (let someone run supplies, someone else run recruiting), teach them how, and take on something with enough moving parts that it needs a team of leaders, not just you. A project that runs well because you developed other leaders is leadership at its best, and it's how good projects outlast the person who started them.

Before you go (all options): Lead any project with your mentor's guidance and sign-off, and keep your group in public, supervised settings doing age-appropriate work, leaving anything heavy, hazardous, or risky to adults. Plan for safety as part of the project, rides, supervision, the right gear, and check with any organization or family you're helping before you begin.

Reflect (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

After serving, talk through a few of these together, then give everyone quiet time to write.

What was harder than you expected about leading? What was easier?

What did you have to hand off to others, and how did that go?

How did it feel to see something you organized actually happen?

What would you do differently, and what would you take on next?

Then finish one or both sentences:

A real need I could organize a project around is...

The first small step I'll take to lead it is...
