



# A Guide to Engaging Students in Service-Learning Projects Addressing Hometown Safety

*Lessons from Florida SPaRC*



*The Florida Service, Preparedness, and Response Coalition (SPaRC), a partner in the Florida Alliance for Student Service, is a statewide service-learning grant program administered through a collaboration between the Florida Department of Education and Florida State University's Center for Civic Education and Service. This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service under the Learn and Serve America grant #04KSHFL001. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Corporation or the Learn and Serve America Program.*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## Introduction

Letter from SPaRC director.....	iv
Overview of Florida SPaRC.....	vi

## I. Understanding Hometown Safety

What is Hometown Safety?.....	3
The Four Phases of Emergency Management.....	4
Partners in Hometown Safety.....	8

## II. Overview of Service Learning

What is Service Learning? .....	11
Quadrant Exercise .....	16
How Can These Become Service Learning? .....	18
Tying Service Learning to the Curriculum.....	19
More on Preparation and Action .....	21
More on Demonstration and Reflection .....	23

## III. Creating a Service-Learning Project

Introduction to Creating a Service-Learning Project .....	27
Basic Components of a Service-Learning Project.....	28
Action Planning.....	29
Completed Project Example: Operation Blown Away .....	30

## IV. Florida SPaRC Project Descriptions

Introduction to Florida SPaRC Projects .....	39
Florida SPaRC Project Map .....	40
Miami-Dade County.....	41
Sarasota County.....	44
Manatee County .....	46
Lake County .....	49
Alachua County.....	52
North East Florida Education Consortium.....	55
Santa Rosa County .....	58

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## V. Partnerships

Building Partnerships .....	63
Partnership Spectrum .....	65
Considerations for Collaboration .....	65
Questions Regarding Roles and Responsibilities in Partnerships .....	67
Assessment of Partnership Collaboration .....	68
Models of Partnerships .....	70
Principles of Good Partnerships .....	72

## VI. Florida SPaRC Impacts and Results

Florida SPaRC Partners' Response to Hurricanes .....	75
Florida SPaRC Project Successes .....	78

## Appendices

Appendix A: Additional Resources .....	83
Appendix B: Action Planning Worksheet .....	84
Appendix C: Timeline .....	87
Appendix D: Budget Justification Form .....	88
Appendix E: Delegated Duties Grading Sheet .....	89
Appendix F: Video/Photograph/Audio Release of Records Form .....	90
Appendix G: Curricular Connection Tables .....	91
Appendix H: Sample Project Chart—Emergency Kits .....	94



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Greetings,

The staff at the Florida Service, Preparedness, and Response Coalition (SPaRC) developed this manual to assist students, teachers, faculty, administrators, and community partners in engaging youth in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery, and school and community safety. Specifically, this manual provides:

- an introduction to the phases of emergency management;
- an overview of service learning, particularly as it relates to hometown safety, and a step-by-step process for project design;
- a glance at the SPaRC program's seven unique models of service learning that address hometown safety through project overviews and a brief accompanying video;
- examples of ways youth can play leadership roles in school and community safety and emergency management, from being part of search and rescue teams to teaching peer mediation;
- a review of the importance of partnerships and how to move toward collaboration;
- an outline of program impacts over the past two years; and
- additional resources.

Disaster preparedness and school and community safety are issues that affect all of us. Even so, Florida finds itself at the forefront of these issues. With a current population of 17.4 million, Florida is projected to swell to 20 million by 2010 and pass New York as the third-largest state. Such rapid growth has placed enormous strains on communities, including a dearth of open space, the decline of natural ecosystems, and a lack of well-planned infrastructure. High levels of density and diversity and high rates of mobility sometimes conspire, leading to conflict and violence, particularly among youth who find themselves in overcrowded schools. Additionally, three million of Florida's residents are over age 65, and millions of other seniors winter in the state. Few of these seniors are Florida natives, and, along with the 86 million tourists drawn to Florida each year, their knowledge about how to prepare for and respond to local disasters is often incomplete. Disasters can strike often and hard. During the 14-month period from August 2004 to October 2005, Florida was struck by seven hurricanes and four tropical storms, with cumulative damage exceeding \$30 billion and over 37% of the housing units in the state damaged.

While these conditions may be amplified in Florida, they are not unique to the state. We hope that others can learn and benefit from our experience in developing service-learning partnerships and projects that address these issues. These projects engage students in leadership roles that promote mutual respect and help make our communities safer and better prepared. The service-learning models address an array of needs through a diversity of strategies and may be applicable to your community. Furthermore, the manual provides the tools to design new service-learning projects, beginning with assessing community needs and designing strategies to address them.

High-quality service learning grows from the richness of collaborative partnerships. The Florida SPaRC program and this manual reflect such collaboration. I would like to extend a special thanks to the entire Florida SPaRC staff, particularly Holly Gudaitis, AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, who led the development of the manual; all of our partners at the Florida Alliance for Student Service (FASS), particularly Joe Follman, who conceived of the Florida SPaRC program; our colleagues at Volunteer Florida, who have provided invaluable training and technical assistance and produced the accompanying SPaRC video; the staff at the Florida Department of Education; Learn and Serve America for its invaluable support; and, of course, the students, teachers, and partners around the state who have made such a difference in our communities. On behalf of all of us, we wish you the best as you strive to make our communities and our world safer, more just, and more peaceful.

Sincerely,



Bruce J. Manciangli  
Director, Florida SPaRC



# OVERVIEW OF FLORIDA SPARC

The Florida SPaRC program is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service through the Learn and Serve America Homeland Security Initiative. SPaRC represents a statewide coalition of school and community partnerships that are working to expand service learning that addresses hometown safety and homeland security in Florida. By meeting these needs, students contribute to stronger schools and communities, building a foundation for a more secure local, national, and international community and a generation of positively engaged citizens.

Florida SPaRC supports seven unique and exemplary models of service learning. Each project represents a partnership between at least one school and one community-based organization (and, in some cases, includes one or more higher education partners) and focuses on one or more of the following areas:

- 1. Disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery**  
Service-learning projects engage students in activities to prepare for and respond to potential disasters and to assist first responders, residents, and visitors.
- 2. Senior safety**  
Students serve—and serve with—seniors through intergenerational service-learning projects.
- 3. School and community safety**  
Students learn and teach others about violence prevention, conflict resolution, and tolerance.

These partnerships, in turn, help others throughout the state replicate successful projects and strategies. The statewide SPaRC office, in partnership with the Florida Alliance for Student Service, the Florida Department of Education, and Volunteer Florida, facilitates this network of service-learning projects and capacity-building efforts, providing vision and leadership as well as program administration, training, and technical assistance.

Florida SPaRC aims to achieve the following goals:

- Florida’s communities have reduced risk of (and improved preparedness and response for) disaster and violence. This takes place through training and replication of the service-learning models that address homeland security.



- Youth are recognized by local, state, and federal emergency management stakeholders as having a key role to play in the four phases of emergency management.
- Partnerships and service-learning models are institutionalized and sustained.

The following partners provide resources and infrastructure at the statewide level:

## Florida Alliance for Student Service

The SPaRC program is a part of the Florida Alliance for Student Service (FASS), a coalition of six statewide programs based at Florida State University’s Center for Civic Education and Service that promote student service learning and civil engagement:

- Florida Service, Preparedness, and Response Coalition (SPaRC)
- Florida Learn & Serve
- Florida Campus Compact
- FASS VISTA Initiative
- Florida Community/Higher Education/School Partnership (CHESP)
- Florida State Farm Service-Learning and Home Safety Initiative

Formed in 1998, FASS promotes the sharing of ideas, expertise, and resources to initiate, improve, expand, and institutionalize student service learning and volunteerism in Florida. Working together, FASS programs increase collaboration, leverage scarce resources, consolidate space and staffing, as well as expand programs, networks, and in-house expertise.

## Florida Department of Education

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) has supported school-based service learning since 1990. Florida's efforts, with support from the Corporation for National and Community Service, have blossomed since then and supported over 2,500 projects involving nearly 400,000 students. Florida has 13 National Service-Learning Leader Schools. Grants Management at the FDOE is responsible for sub-grant award processing, and the FDOE Comptroller's Office provides fiscal management.

## Volunteer Florida

As the state lead agency for volunteers and donations, Volunteer Florida responds to disasters and galvanizes volunteer response. Volunteer Florida also works with other state and foreign governments, federal and state emergency management agencies, voluntary organizations, the Points of Light Foundation, the Corporation for National and Community Service, CityCares and others to present disaster training and disaster volunteer management to government, community, and faith-based organizations nationwide.

Operation Step Up, a Volunteer Florida program funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, unites efforts of volunteer centers and local disaster response agencies to engage senior citizens in all-hazard preparedness and homeland security. Through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, Volunteer Florida staff have served nationwide in disaster relief operations, including Hurricanes Katrina and Floyd, the 9/11 attacks in New York, and the 2003 nightclub fire in Rhode Island. They have also provided assistance in Central and South America.

As a partner in Florida SPaRC, Volunteer Florida provides regular sub-grantee assistance through resource dissemination, identifying local partners, marketing,

and assisting in developing strategies for successful dissemination and replication. The efforts of Volunteer Florida enable model partners to understand the federal, state, and local emergency management structure to facilitate a project with attainable goals that meet homeland security needs and remain consistent with needs of the local community.

*“If service learning has people practice what they need to learn through service, then this brand of service learning has young people practice being productive citizens. Knowing they can and have made a difference in their communities—making them safer, solving problems, preparing for emergencies, working with people of all stripes—they are much more likely to continue making a positive difference for the rest of their lives.”*

— Joe Follman, Co-Director, FASS

Notes: