



Introduction to the Generator School Network Online Community

The GSN online community has been built to accommodate the needs of service-learning teachers everywhere. It is meant to serve as a single online space for service-learning practitioners to share their experiences and learn from others. The goal is to improve the quality of service-learning practice for all GSN members through the use of resources guided by NYLC's *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice* and the Service-Learning Cycle.

By providing members many different ways to find useful resources, each member will be able to use the online community in the manner that best fits his/her personal goals. Think of the GSN as a Facebook for service-learning. Instead of finding out what your friends are doing for the weekend, members find resources related to quality service-learning practice.

K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

The *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice* are a guide for service-learning practitioners to improve the quality of service-learning within the classroom. This set of standards is one of the core concepts for the GSN, so you will find that it is referenced often. Be sure to watch within the GSN's professional development plan for resources related to each of the service-learning standards from NYLC, GSN Advisors, and other service-learning experts.

The Service-Learning Cycle

The Service-Learning Cycle is the second core concept to the GSN. By following the service-learning cycle, teachers will be able to create and implement a service-learning curriculum customized to their own learning environment and share it with other GSN members. The uniform set of steps enables teachers to compare their projects with the projects created by other members, and receive support and guidance throughout the entire service-learning cycle.

A Sharing Community

The GSN is not meant only to provide resources to teachers. It is also meant to be an active support community of peer service-learning practitioners from near and far. GSN members share their service-learning activities with the community, thus enriching the wide base of content and enabling service-learning experts and GSN members to work together to improve the quality of service-learning practice in individual schools and across districts.

Resources in the GSN

GSN members can contribute an array of resources across a range of mediums. We have included "text posts" to be used for announcements or a blog, "discussions" to allow members to receive input from other members pertaining to a specific topic, and "documents" to allow members to share materials. Ultimately, members will also be able to post photo galleries and videos that show service-learning in action.



1667 Snelling Ave. N., Suite D300 • St. Paul, MN 55108
651.999.7367 • gsn@nylc.org

gsn.nylc.org



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To create a resource, a member clicks on the corresponding icon within the resource view. The user is then prompted for the required information and optional descriptive information. For example, if Joe wanted to post a document about how he approaches the Youth Voice standard in his classroom, he would click the “New Document” button. He would provide a title and some descriptive text for the document. He could also select the grade level it is appropriate for and the standard that it emphasizes, such as youth voice. This would enable other users to easily find his document when looking for assistance with the youth voice standard.

Projects

Projects are simply collections of the elements listed above, built over time through members’ contributions of details for their projects. For example, a project might consist of planning documents, lesson plans, and status updates as the project progresses. By updating the project in small steps, members paint the larger picture of their projects with little effort.

When creating a project, a user is able to specify a range of information that helps describe the project. How many students are participating? What academic subjects does the project focus on? What issues does the project address? This information helps other users find the project based on relevance.

Projects also provide access to the two core concepts of the GSN. This is where members are able to assess the project’s quality based on the *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice*, as well as progress through the Service-Learning Cycle.

The project-based self-assessment helps members, with the support of a GSN Advisor, identify areas of improvement and areas of expertise. This information can be leveraged by the software to help the members of a project find resources that apply to these areas of improvement.

The Service-Learning Cycle helps members along the path to creating a project by providing a guided way to contribute to the online community. NYLC has created tools that correspond to each step of the Service-Learning Cycle. Members are able to access these tools, complete them, and upload the results to progress along the cycle. These results are then accessible to other members as an integral part of the project.

Finding Resources

A primary concept within the online community is “activity.” When a member uploads a document, creates a project, updates a profile, or performs any other action within the GSN, it is known as “activity.” When a user first signs into the GSN website, they are presented with the “Dashboard” — a list of activities that have recently occurred within the online community.

For example, if Jane adds a document titled “Lesson Plan” to her service-learning project entitled “Erosion in Our Community,” other users will see on their Dashboard that a new document was added to the project. This single announcement will allow users to view the document, the project, and the user who posted it. This enables members to discover new resources from peers without actively searching; it also sheds new light on particularly active members. Clicking on the user’s name will provide access to the other resources (projects, documents, discussions) that the user has contributed to the GSN.

There are two activity lists on the Dashboard: the “Recommended” list, and the “My Favorites” list. The “Recommended” list consists of activity selected automatically by the GSN software. As a member participates in the online community, the software will begin to gain an accurate picture of which resources are relevant to that



member. Information contained in the user's profile and posted projects helps determine which resources are relevant, so it is important to remain active within the online community.

The "My Favorites" list allows each member to have a level of control over which updates they receive. When a member finds a project of interest, that member can mark the project as a "Favorite." This allows the member to save that project for later viewing. It also notifies the member any time that project is updated, through the "My Favorites" activity list.

For example, if John adds Jane's "Erosion in Our Community" project to his favorites, he would be notified every time Jane adds a new document to it. If Jane updates the "Lesson Plan" document with a new version, John would know.

Lastly, GSN members can search the entire network for other users, schools, or resources by keyword, resource type, date, resource name, and more. This enables users to browse through all the resources posted by GSN members.

NYLC's Professional Development

NYLC will also deliver professional development through the online community. For each topic, NYLC will create an area where all the materials will be posted. These areas are known as "Topics." A "Topic" is similar to a Project within the online community in that it is a collection of resources. Each topic will contain documents prepared by GSN Advisors, discussions with service-learning experts, and other resources designed to help members along the path to quality service-learning practice. Each Topic will show up on the top of members' "Recommended" activity list on the Dashboard as a "Featured Resource." If the topic sounds interesting or helpful, we encourage members to add it to their favorites to be sure to see all the updates within that topic.

