

# Environment and Economic Empowerment

## Service Learning—Grades 9–12

Department of  
NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE



## Teacher Instructions

**Goals:** Students will become environmental advocates and learn why caring for the environment can benefit a community.

**Time Required:** Approximately two class periods, not including the service project.

**Materials:** Student Worksheets “Act!” and “Plan!”

### Get Started:

1. Tell students that in the following lesson, they are going to help the environment and make and/or save money for their communities. Write the word *money* on the board. Ask students to suggest some ways that teens can make and save money. Write their responses on the board. Now write the word *environment* on the board. Ask students to suggest ways that they can help and protect their local environment. Now ask: *What are some ways people can make or save money by protecting the environment?* Jot down students’ responses.
2. Share with students that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. not only championed civil rights, but he also inspired the environmental justice movement through his concern for the urban environment. Ask students what they think the term *environmental justice* means. Share this definition: *Environmental justice is the principle that all people have the right to clean air, water, and soil, as well as a right to live in safe and healthy communities.* King believed that mistreating the environment is no different from mistreating a human being. He said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Source: [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html). Discuss these ideas as a class.
3. Now write the word *sustainability* on the board. Ask students what they think sustainability means, then share a definition: *the effective use of resources to meet today’s community needs while ensuring that these resources are available to meet future needs.* A sustainable community is one that seeks to improve public health and quality of life for residents by limiting waste, preventing pollution, maximizing conservation, promoting efficiency, and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy. Ask: *How might caring*

*about the local environment improve a community’s chance of economic success? How might protecting the environment be like making an investment?* Lead a class discussion.

4. Provide students with the following example: Students at Green Thumb High plant a large vegetable and herb garden in an abandoned lot behind their school. The cafeteria uses the produce in school lunches. Ask: *What are some ways the garden might help the environment and the local community?* Have students brainstorm as many ideas as possible. Suggestions include: providing fresh, low-cost food cuts down on the use of fuel and transportation costs; the school doesn’t have to purchase certain ingredients; plants produce oxygen; students working on the garden foster a sense of teamwork; beautification of an abandoned lot attracts visitors—and possibly businesses—to the area, etc.
5. As a class, make a list of environmental issues students care about. Possible topics include: air pollution, e-waste disposal or recycling, litter, endangered species, invasive species, etc. Ask: *What are some ways our community contributes to these problems? What kind of service project could we create to address these problems on a local level?* Share some possible environmental service projects with students: a bike-sharing service; a sneaker swap; a cell-phone recycling program; a “shop local” campaign; branding and selling reusable water bottles or shopping bags, etc. Brainstorm ideas. Perhaps there is a cause unique to your community: for example, a beach-cleanup event. Take a vote to determine your class’s project.

### Investigate:

6. How might your class’s service project contribute to the community’s welfare and economic well-being? Have students work in teams to fill out the graphic organizer “Act!” Remind students of the school vegetable garden example. As they fill out the worksheet, have them consider the following questions, as appropriate to your project: *What resources will our service project protect? How might our project help create local jobs? How might it promote health and well-being? How might people save money as a result of our project? How might the greater community save money?* Generate questions

specific to your project as necessary to prompt students’ ideas about the multiple ways their project might benefit the environment and others. Review students’ responses as a class, creating a master graphic organizer on the board.

7. Discuss with students the five components of a successful service project: identify local partners, build a team, set a goal, serve your community, and report and celebrate successes. You can view sample Toolkits at <http://www.nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/days-service/martin-luther-king-jr-day-service/toolkits>. Fill out the worksheet “Plan!” as a class.

### Take Action:

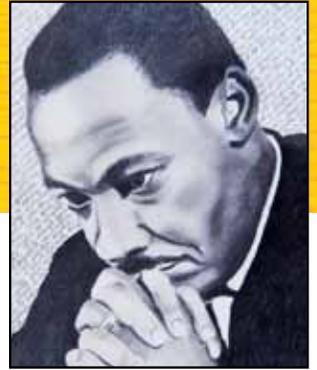
8. As a class, create a checklist of everything that needs to be done to get ready for the project. Divide students into two-person teams to tackle the tasks. Regularly review and revise your checklist as your project approaches.
9. Your students are ready; now they need to get others involved. Brainstorm ways to get the word out. Examples include: posters, flyers, social media campaigns, school announcements, crowdfunding, letters to parents, etc. Have students work in small groups for each campaign.
10. It’s time for your project. Deputize two or three students to report on the project and take pictures. Tag social media posts with #MLKDay. Some questions they should consider: *How many people attended? How did they learn about the project? How did organizers and participants feel about the project?*

### Wrap Up/Measure Your Success:

11. After the service project, have student reporters share what they observed with the class. Answer the following questions as a class: *Did the service project have the desired outcome? How did the community respond? What are some ways the project could have been more successful? How did we work as a team? How might we encourage teens in other communities to take similar action?*
12. If students’ service project directly made money (through the sale of water bottles or tote bags, for example), decide as a class how to invest those funds back into their cause.

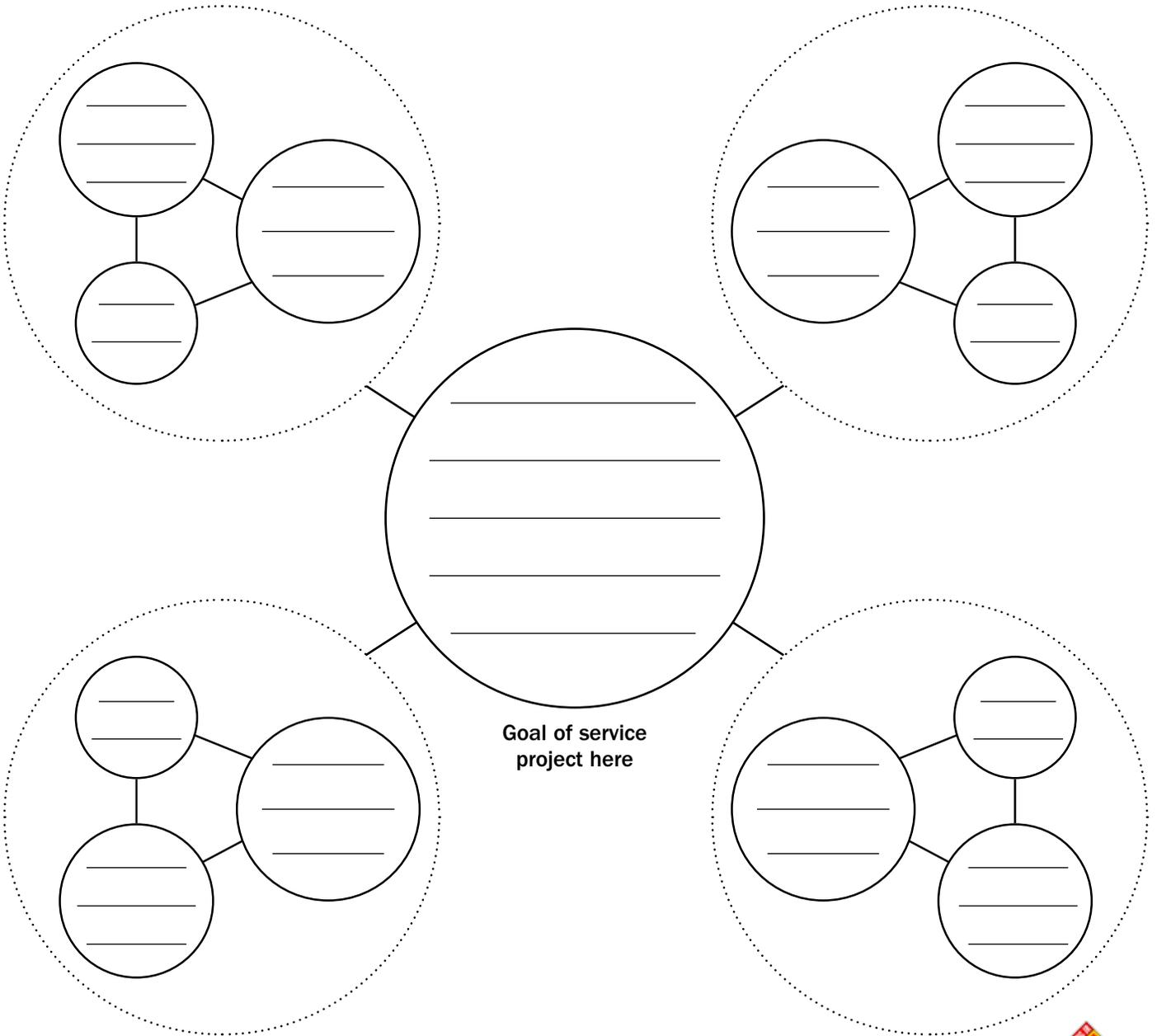
# Act!

*Understanding the reach of your actions.  
A chain-reaction worksheet.*



Artwork by Olivia, winner of the 2014 MLK Day of Service Poster Contest

**Directions:** Fill in possible effects on, and benefits of your service project to, the environment and your community in the circles below.



# Plan!



Artwork by Sarah, winner of the 2014 MLK Day of Service Poster Contest

Your team name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your service project: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Identify local partners: Are there any organizations already working on your cause? Which ones? What advice and support can they suggest? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Build your team: Many hands make light work. How can friends, family, and community members help you prepare and carry out your project? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Set a goal: Having clear, measurable goals will help keep you and your team focused. Here's an example: "Our team will hold two after-school tutoring sessions per week." List one to three achievable goals for your team.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Serve your community: Are you ready? What materials do you need? Have you confirmed all the details with your team and community? Make a list of what needs to be done and divide up the tasks.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Report and celebrate your successes: You'll want to share your experience with your community. Which individuals and groups can you reach out to, to spread the word? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

