

# **Programming with a Purpose**

The General Federation of Women's Clubs, one of the world's oldest and largest women's volunteer community service organizations is dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through its volunteer service. For more than 120 years, GFWC members have had a proud history of working to make life better for their neighbors. Because of GFWC, communities all across America are better places to live.

Whether your club is planning a one hour visit to read at the elementary school or a major renovation to the library there are three basic considerations for every project:

1. Member interest
2. Community need, and
3. Resources

In preparing to select a project it is important for your club to think about and discuss what the club would like to do to strengthen, improve, or change in your local community. Once an issue has been identified, you must ask yourselves, is this something that your members are interested in undertaking; is there a need for this within the community; and does your club have the resources: members, time, and dollars, to do what would need to be accomplished as this need is to be addressed.

If there is little interest from the majority of club members, it may be wise to move on to another project. Without club support and commitment, little can be accomplished. Even if there is a handful of members who are very interested, unless this is a

smaller project, please move on to another the entire club can get behind and support.

As you look about your community and see a need that your club could, should, and/or would like to undertake, examine all you and your fellow members know about this. Take time to discuss the facts, and identify what is known and what needs to be learned.

Topics of discussion should include:

- Is anyone else currently addressing this issue?
- Has this issue been addressed before by another group that had little or no success?
- What would it take to fix this in terms of time, dollars, members, and community support?
- What resources are currently available, both within and outside the club?
- What can be accomplished in the short term, versus what will be required for long term commitments or changes?

Learning more about the issue, as well as the community needs and concerns is crucial in order to provide services appropriate to meeting these needs. As this issue is being studied, remember the value of the community input. If you will need the community's support, other perspectives are vital to bring about change and solve the problem at hand.

This information is gathered by conducting a community assessment, which is basically a description of your community, and its people, and learning how others feel about the issue. Data collection does not need to be extensive but should be adequate to identify needs and priorities in support of planning decisions. Furthermore, it should take into account some of the cultural, economic and physical conditions that make up the community.

Once the club has collected information that will help it better understand the issue, members should analyze and synthesize the results into key findings. The analysis should lead to a few conclusions, and provide the answers to key questions.

Now that your club knows what it wants to undertake as a project and has reviewed what it knows about its own interests and the community's needs, it is time to determine what the club would like to do order to bring about change.

Ask the club to imagine what the community would look like, or how the issue would be altered if there were changes or improvements made. Think creatively. Don't discount ideas that may seem expensive or unworkable.

The club should also discuss what observable changes it hopes to see as a result of its project. It may include things like certain laws or statutes are changed or amended. It may also include less tangible outcomes such as "community leaders are aware of the impact of domestic violence on the community".

Once the club has a vision in mind, it will need to set goals and identify what will bring this vision to reality. Consider what the group will need to do in order to accomplish its goals and be successful.

Any goals should address the change or outcome that the club would like to see in its community. Make sure the goals are owned by the club and obtainable within the available time frame. If they are not, go back and refine the project. Consider who needs to be involved and when they should be included in the discussion and/or planning process.

Consider what activities the club will need to do in order to accomplish its goals and be successful. Think about the resources that the group will need to make the activities happen. Is this a project that the club is capable of undertaking on its own, or will it need assistance? What is a reasonable timeframe, one day, or two years? What realistic cost are we looking at? Is fund raising going to be a major component of this project?

If this project is going to need allies from the community or other supporting organizations to come to fruition, let's look at ways to align them to your cause. Begin by making a list of potential individual, organizations, and/or corporations. Once you have other groups in mind, consider the following when reaching out to your potential collaborators:

- When you begin to make contact, be prepared with specifics regarding the overall mission and the tasks needed to see it through to completion.
- Be prepared to discuss funding, time frame etc.
- Remember – collaborators and others will work with your club, not for your club. There should be open discussion regarding who will take the lead in which area.

Ideas for reaching out to volunteers outside your clubs include:

- Arrange a club display with sign-up information at schools, banks, local businesses, the airport and/or City Hall.
- Place ads in local and neighborhood newspapers and newsletters.
- Contact local radio and TV stations for spots in volunteer sections or community listings.
- Place announcements in the bulletins of worship places.
- Send a press release to local community colleges, universities and public radio stations.

- Ask public officials to pass along information at meetings and through mailings to constituents.
- Arrange to speak at local community group meetings (be sure to bring sign-up sheets.)
- Ask businesses to put fliers in their monthly mailings of bills to customers.

Not enough can be said about the planning process. A thorough process will lead to success. A not so thorough process will lead to frustration, discord, and lack of success. Put the time and energy into the planning that your project deserves. As you go through this planning, envision each step, and what is needed to bring that portion to a successful conclusion. Put the entire process on a worksheet and let others see it. Two heads are better than one, and three are better than two. Be open to input and suggestions from others as you work through the plan.

Now that your club has created a plan of action for its project and drawn on the community and other resources, you are ready to implement the project. As you implement the project, keep in mind these points.

Well in advance of the day of the project (or beginning of a longer project), have the club members who will be working on the project review the plan of work or a similar visual organizer to make sure everyone's tasks are clear, that they will know how to do them, and that they will have whatever materials they need.

This should be printed for all concerned and include:

- Each person involved and their responsibilities during the implementation of the service project
- Any instruction or training each needs to do the tasks
- Times and places for instruction or informational meetings
- Any materials, tools, funds each needs

To help ensure your project's success, think about what might go wrong, such as changes in weather, not enough or too many volunteers showing up, a lack of resources (tools, food, tables)—anticipate as much as you can. Have your club members brainstorm a list of “what ifs ... ” Then go through the list and come up with a plan of how to handle each of them. For example:

Review your project schedule and make sure you have built in time for all the people involved to learn about and reflect on the project and to assess what they have accomplished and think about the future. One way to do this is to ask your club to think about how they will find out how the participants feel about the issue you are addressing. Do they remember past history about it? What were the successes of prior attempts to address this? Decide how the group will share its vision with the participants.

Feeling appreciated is one reason people are willing to help. Just as your club hopes to be recognized, your members should find ways to express their appreciation for those who helped the project in any way — from the initial information gathering to the implementation and with any follow-up that will occur. Ask yourself, is there some sort of recognition for the work that participants did? When and how will the recognition take place?

After you have implemented your project you want to assess and evaluate how your club performed and document your accomplishments. Your club should also take some time to reflect on how the project has impacted the members and their community. If you and your club follow the suggested steps, you should be able to review your previous discussions and documents to discuss the progress made.

During a meeting, have the club recount the project and share their perspectives. Some questions for the discussion include:

- How did our project go?
- Did the group's planning help you address any challenges that arose?
- Were there any unexpected surprises, either positive or negative, during the activity? If so, how well did we handle them?

Ask your club members to consider the goals they chose and how planned to determine their success. Did you meet your expectations? Where there unintended outcomes that made a difference?

In thinking about the intended benefits to the community:

- If the project was an educational undertaking or had an awareness raising component, did the intended audience benefit from your efforts?
- Did community members develop new skills?
- Was there new awareness of a particular topic or issue? For example, is there increased awareness among community members about the value of protecting the environment?
- Did anything physically change in the community? For example, is the river cleaner? Does the orphanage have a new garden? Is the school library organized?

What did club members learn from the service activity? Ask what new skills have club members developed? Have they met any of their personal goals? What areas do they want to pursue further?

Consider developing a self-assessment or reflection tool for the service participants. This may occur through:

- Service journals the group members keep throughout the project
- Portfolios or art projects
- An evaluation tool or rubric that participants complete

Examine their thoughts and feelings about the service, as well as place the experience into a larger context. Reflection is an important component of community service, as well as an important part of any learning process. It is important that the service project participants reflect on their project experience in a way that will help them achieve a new level of awareness about themselves, their community, or their country.

Apply multiple methods to engage in reflection throughout the project. It should be a fun and interesting part of service. Reflection can be creative and take various forms.

- Service journals and project diaries
- Discussion groups
- Photo or video documentaries

Your project was a success, so take the time to celebrate and highlight your club's accomplishments. Don't limit your celebration and sharing your achievements to only your club.

Make sure to plan a public demonstration to highlight what was accomplished or improved

Find ways to acknowledge and thank the people and organizations that participated. This may include letters of appreciation, drawings, or public acknowledgement through radio, newspapers, or other public forms of communication.



Plan a social activity for those who participated. Ask a respected individual to present words of support and certificates of participation or have a concert or party to celebrate.

Complete an evaluation of the service project:

- Gather some sort of input from the organization, community, or people who have benefited from your project to determine the actual outcomes that were achieved.
- Evaluate success and failure. Hold a meeting and discuss, honestly, what could have been done differently and how challenges could have been met more successfully. Will the club have a continuing role? What types of activities, projects or initiatives would the club like to tackle next?

And finally...before you can consider your project finished,  
**Document it and REPORT!**

- Report (use GFWC report form in the club manual.)
- Compile the results of your project in a report or article so the lessons can inform subsequent projects.
- Record, with text and photos, the entire project for the club's history.
- Send photos to GFWC *Clubwoman* Magazine at GFWC Headquarters.
- Enter any of the GFWC contests that would be appropriate for your project