

SERVICE



Connecting underrepresented young adults to service

Vibrant social connections and robust community involvement are part of what makes a strong America. Yet, among our nation's young people, there are relatively low levels of community engagement. While acts of service that elementary schoolers take part in will look different than service among young adults, there is a way for all individuals, regardless of age, to engage in service, and individuals, regardless of age, can benefit from acts of service. For children and youth, service learning is an established method to bring youth closer to their communities while also promoting positive youth development outcomes. Among young adults, service, such as national service, enables them to make similar personal and professional gains when given the opportunity to participate. The afterschool field is a critical partner to expand access and availability of service in a multitude of forms for youth and young adults alike. Together with education and community leaders, afterschool and summer learning programs are working toward the healthy development of both the next generation and our democracy.

Overview

Breakthrough Cincinnati is an affiliate of Breakthrough Collaborative, a national organization dedicated to addressing inequities in education through academic enrichment. Breakthrough Cincinnati prepares rising 6th-9th graders from underserved communities for college through a consecutive four-year summer learning program. Driven by a student-teaching-student model, Breakthrough Cincinnati invites talented college undergraduates—intentionally recruiting students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds—to participate in an eight week service-learning experience as teaching fellows leading classroom instruction.

A typical day for teaching fellows

Teaching fellows arrive at school bright and early every morning during the summer to go through the final preparations necessary to lead a full day of student learning and engagement. To set a positive mood, teaching fellows gather at the walkway to greet students in cheer. After a nutritious breakfast, teaching fellows challenge their students through a series of fun and interactive small group academic and enrichment sessions. Fellows continue to bond with their students during “brain breaks,” recess, and lunchtime, as well as on weekly special events that include talent shows, college visits, and service-learning days. Every afternoon, teaching fellows conclude student programming in song before wrapping up their own day at a faculty meeting.

Breakthrough Cincinnati

Cincinnati, Ohio

240 Average number of students served during the summer:

78% Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Corporate/Private foundations
- ▶ Individuals
- ▶ Corporate sponsorships

64 Average number of teaching fellows during the summer

46% Young adults of color

Outcomes

Breakthrough Cincinnati helps mold the next generation of diverse teachers and educational leaders by engaging a significant number of underrepresented young adults in service. Teaching fellows are making a positive impact on the students they serve, with 88 percent of students graduating high school on time and enrolling in college. Teaching fellows also report that Breakthrough Cincinnati is a formative experience leading 76 percent of them to pursue careers in education.

Program characteristics

Breakthrough Cincinnati attracts a diverse cadre of college undergraduates to serve as teaching fellows in a summer learning program for high-need, but highly-motivated middle school students. Fellows receive a modest living stipend while engaging in a robust service experience that cultivates professional skills, fosters a sense of belonging to the school community, positively affects student achievement, as well as connects fellows to the field of education.

Before entering the classroom, teaching fellows participate in a two week pre-service training program. An essential component of this training is a community-mapping project, where fellows examine neighborhood demographics and resources to shape culturally relevant lessons for their students. Fellows also learn about instructional methods, classroom management, child development, and lesson planning based on curricula that align with Ohio's academic standards. With ongoing support from a professional teacher, fellows lead one academic course each day along with an elective course that taps into student creativities and talents.



Challenges

Despite the positive impacts of service, the desire to be a positive force in the community is not translating into action.

Service opportunities at school: for some, not all. While trends show an increasing number of community involvement opportunities offered by schools and universities—for instance, 68 percent of principals reported that their students participate in community activities that are recognized by the schools, and 69 percent of college seniors participated in a service-learning course in 2018—too many individuals are not accessing these opportunities.

The type of service matters. A growing body of research shows the positive benefits associated with service. However, the majority of youth service opportunities are rooted in volunteering, rather than service learning, with the percentage of schools offering service learning declining from 32 percent in 1999 to 24 percent in 2008.

The equity divide. Participation in opportunities for service varies across different socio-economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, based on the availability and access to surrounding institutions that facilitate and encourage service. For example, schools in low-income areas, often serving a larger percentage of minority students, are less likely to offer service learning when compared with other schools. For low-income young adults, in school and in the workforce, monetary and non-monetary costs of service act as a barrier to participation.

Read [Afterschool Supports Service Opportunities from Youth to Young Adulthood](#) to learn more.



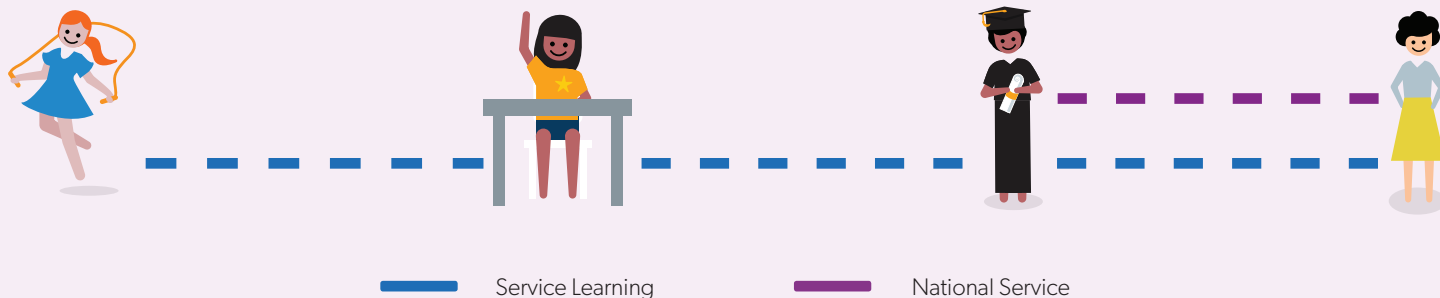
Service Opportunities at Every Age

Everyone, regardless of age, can take part in service. The service opportunity may look different depending on one's age, but the positive benefits are a constant. In addition to meeting the needs of a community, acts of service can foster greater community engagement, trust, a better understanding of the community, and compassion for others.

Service Learning

Through service learning, youth are active participants in thoughtfully organized community projects that advance a set of learning goals while meeting the needs of the community. For example, students in an afterschool program study their city's waste collection and recycling services. Students then plan and implement a series of local cleanup projects to apply their lessons on accessibility and use of these services. In addition to students helping with litter abatement and beautification efforts, the community is presented with students' sustainable waste management recommendations.

Example adapted from [Loyola University](#).



National Service

For young adults, service can also be a deeper form of experiential education through longer-term service projects that provide formative hands-on opportunities to assess and address community needs. For example, AmeriCorps State and National members placed at an afterschool program make a yearlong commitment to directly serve youth and their families. Members grow professionally, learn about the community they are serving, and support students' development. Students in programs benefit from AmeriCorps members' tutoring and mentorship. Afterschool programs benefit by receiving help with child enrichment activities and overall program implementation.

Breakthrough Cincinnati is intentional about diversity and inclusion in their recruitment process, understanding that teaching fellows who share similar backgrounds with the students they serve makes a valuable contribution to student success. In fact, Breakthrough's teaching fellows are more demographically diverse and better reflective of students' backgrounds than the national average teacher population.

Program history

In 1992, Breakthrough Cincinnati was founded as Summerbridge in response to challenges facing Cincinnati Public Schools, adopting the model of a summer enrichment program to begin tackling problems with graduation rates, student enrollment, and academic performance. Over the years, the demand for Breakthrough Cincinnati has grown exponentially. They currently run two sites serving students from 57 schools; however, they aspire to grow program capacity by almost twofold to meet the ongoing demand.

Recommendations

for connecting underrepresented young adults to service:

- ▶ Conduct a community needs assessment. It is an important place to start when designing and implementing a service program to generate community-centric solutions.
- ▶ Create an environment where it's "cool to be smart" to motivate participants to be informed and engaged community members.
- ▶ Construct a modern experience relevant to today's young people as a helpful method of engagement. This includes using technology enhancements, linking activities to program purpose, and offering leadership opportunities.