Project-Based Learning FAQ

How long should a project last?

Projects vary in length. A well-designed project allows enough time for youth to experience all phases of project-based learning - starting with project kickoff, continuing with active learning, and culminating in a public demonstration and/or celebration of learning. At a minimum, a project will likely involve 10 to 20 hours of afterschool time. More complex projects last much longer.

Do you have any advice for project-based learning newcomers?

Project-based learning challenges both youth and adults to get comfortable with new ways of working together. It's wise to start with manageable-sized projects and doable goals. During the first project you do with a class, devote some time to helping students develop the skills and abilities before starting the actual project. Teach youth how to manage their time and keep track of tasks they need to accomplish. Help them break big challenges into smaller, more manageable tasks. Before their first public event, make sure they practice presenting. Give them specific, helpful feedback and encourage them to think about what they are learning. All of these activities will expand their project-based learning toolkit - and yours. Once you've experience one successful project, both you and your students will be more comfortable with the project-based learning process.

My program serves younger kids. Does project-based learning work at the elementary grades?

Project-based learning works across grade levels and with children of all learning styles and abilities. Successful project-based learning depends on knowing your students and understanding what's appropriate for their developmental levels. Younger students, and youth who are struggling academically, may need more support. As they gain new experiences and confidence through project-based learning, students will become ready for more self-directed projects.

Which 21st century skills should I focus on in an extended learning project?

Several skills have been identified as critical for future success in schooling and careers. If project-based learning is new to you, focus on two skills that should be a part of every project: collaboration and communication. Project-based learning gives students authentic opportunities to practice and hone these important skills. Once you become more comfortable with project-based learning, think about how projects can also encourage skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.

Where can I find project ideas?

Potential projects are all around you. One good strategy is to focus close to home. Look for interesting neighborhood issues. For example, youth might tell an important story about their community, celebrate local heritage or history, or offer ideas to solve a current problem. Brainstorming project ideas with students will invite them to consider the issue of "What matters to us?". That helps build student buy-in from day one.

What is the difference between project-based learning and problem-based learning?

Project-based learning and problem-based learning are similar, and you may see the terms used interchangeably. The primary similarities are that they are both student-driven and oriented toward inquiry-based exploration of a problem or question. Problem-based learning is used more often in colleges and universities than in K-12 education, and it tends to incorporate simulations of real-world situations. Project-based learning, on the other hand, incorporates authentic real-world situations to capture student interest. In addition, project based learning tends to have longer project lengths.

What is the relationship between service learning and project-based learning?

According to the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, "Service Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that itnegrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." Although not all service-learning programs use project-based learning, and vice versa, service-learning and project-based learning can work well together because they both rely on a meaningful relationship between the community and students.