

Service-Learning Symposium

Uniting for Good: A Virtual Gathering

April 22, 2026 | 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. CDT | Online (Virtual)

Full Day Agenda

Time (CDT)	Session
8:30 – 9:30 a.m.	Pre-Conference Session: Docuthon
10:00 – 10:45 a.m.	Welcome & Opening Session
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Workshop Block 1
12:00 – 12:45 p.m.	Break & Energizer
12:45 – 1:45 p.m.	Workshop Block 2
2:00 – 3:00 p.m.	Workshop Block 3
3:15 – 4:00 p.m.	Closing Session
4:30 – 5:30 p.m.	Post-Conference Session: Hackathon

Docuthon: Stories for Change

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. CDT

*Pre-Registration Required

Pre-Conference Session

Join us for Docuthon: Stories of Change! This global storytelling movement empowers young people to create short films on issues they care about in their own communities. The morning session brings the world stage to your seat, featuring films submitted by youth filmmakers from across the globe. Hear directly from the young people behind the lens as they share the stories, challenges, and change they captured on screen. Docuthon gives students a powerful voice while building future-ready skills in creativity, critical thinking, communication, and empathy. Most participants are first-time filmmakers using nothing more than a mobile phone, proving that heart matters far more than gear. Come ready to be moved, inspired, and reminded of what becomes possible when young people are trusted to tell their own stories.

Uniting For Good Opening Session

10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. CDT

Transforming Students and Communities

Amy Meuers, *National Youth Leadership Council*

Yutian Li, *Harvard College*

The Service-Learning Symposium opens with *Uniting for Good*, a dynamic session that brings together educators, youth leaders, nonprofit partners, and community changemakers who share a common belief: when young people are given meaningful opportunities to lead and serve, communities grow stronger.

Participants will hear inspiring stories and insights from leaders in the field who are advancing service-learning in schools and communities across the country. Together, we will reflect on the growing need to create spaces where young people can share their voices, collaborate with others, and take action on issues that matter to them.

At a time when communities face complex challenges, and young people are searching for purpose and belonging, service-learning offers a powerful pathway forward. By connecting academic learning with real-world problem solving, service-learning helps young people develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to contribute to their communities and shape a better future.

Together, we will explore what becomes possible when communities unite around a shared commitment to youth leadership, civic engagement, and the power of learning through service.

Workshop Block 1

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. CDT

IGNITE: Launching the Service-Learning and Democracy Framework

Amy Meuers

National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC)

At a time when young people are navigating complex civic realities, IGNITE is the official launch of NYLC's Service-Learning in Democracy Framework – a bold, research-informed approach designed to equip educators and youth leaders with tools to cultivate civic identity, critical thinking, and collective action. This interactive workshop introduces the core components of the framework and explores how service-learning can serve as a powerful lever for strengthening democratic participation.

Co-presenter: Pam Siebert and Julie Rogers Bascom

Growing Leaders: Youth-Teacher Co-Leadership for Rural Service-Learning and Systems Change

Allyson Morgan

East Jackson High School

This youth-teacher co-led session explores how a rural school is working toward a youth-driven service-learning and STEM ecosystem, supported by a USDA service-learning grant and grounded in efforts to build authentic youth-adult partnerships. Students and teachers will share how their Youth Advisory Committee is beginning to shape project design and collaborate with community partners around issues such as food security, environmental stewardship, and STEM access. Presenters will discuss emerging practices, including reflective protocols and student-led action teams, that aim to create spaces where young people are increasingly seen, heard, and valued. Participants will engage in a brief, student-facilitated design sprint that illustrates how youth can identify problems, propose solutions, and mobilize peers. Attendees will leave with ideas for elevating youth voice and expanding service-learning and STEM pathways as part of ongoing efforts toward meaningful systems change in rural schools.

New Era of Youth Service in America

Mike Minks

Youth Service America (YSA)

This session will feature Youth Service America sharing the results of the 2026 Prevalence Survey of Youth Participation in America's K-12 Schools, a panel discussion featuring education leaders representing 2025 National Gold Ribbon School Districts in Service-Learning honorees, an announcement of the K-12 schools being honored as 2026 National Gold Ribbon Schools in Service-Learning, and an opportunity for participants to provide input into YSA's New Era of Youth Service in America national strategy to double youth participation over the next decade. Throughout, we'll highlight strategies and effective practices K-12 schools are using to address the most common barriers to increasing student participation in service and service-learning.

Youth as Solutions: Youth Voice in City Decision-Making

Syed Murtaza-Rose

National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC)

Move beyond traditional youth engagement and discover what happens when cities truly partner with youth. Hear from three cities across the country that have integrated youth-led teams using the service-learning framework — empowering young people to move from identifying challenges to implementing high-impact community solutions.

Co-presenter: Members of the Youth as Solutions Teams

Engaged, Educated, and Empowered Youth — Human Trafficking and Social Media Safety

Sheila Larang Whittle

Project Protect Our Children

This session equips young people with clear, practical knowledge about human trafficking, warning signs, healthy relationships, online safety, and trusted resources. Attendees also learn about the Youth Action Board — a student-led movement to raise awareness and lead real change in middle and high schools.

International Perspectives on Service-Learning

Luz Avruj

CLAYSS (Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario)

An international perspective on service-learning practices, sharing insights and models from Latin America that connect youth civic action with academic learning and community development across borders.

Workshop Block 2

12:45 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. CDT

Youth-Led Social Action: From Foundations to Systems Change

Amanda LeGrande

Gateway High School

A team of teens from an alternative high school built a student-driven plan to reduce absenteeism. They demonstrate how they defined the problem with student voice, analyzed data, interviewed stakeholders, and co-designed solutions. Participants receive a handbook with ready-to-use templates and leave with the four-step cycle: Define, Delve, Design, and Deliver.

Co-presenter: Kay Augustine

STEM and Service-Learning: Near-Peer Mentorship in Action

Deborah Ivie

Utah State University / Utah 4-H

Follow Utah 4-H STEM and Ag Project Ambassadors through a year-long service-learning process — creating curriculum, training county-based youth leaders in grades 7–12, and leading STEM camps in their own communities. Includes hands-on, youth-created activities for participants.

Mentors: Successes, Failures, and Tools

Emiliana Korin

NYLC Youth Advisory Council

Centering youth voice, this session offers practical and experience-based tools for adults working alongside young people in service-learning spaces. NYLC YAC member Emiliana shares insights from launching a podcast, completing a two-year capstone, and navigating spaces where youth voice is present in theory – but not always in practice.

NeuroPack: Brain-Based Strategies for Youth-Powered Collective Action

Shei Ascencio

NeuroPack

This workshop introduces core principles of Mind, Brain, and Education (MBE) Science – focusing on how dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin shape motivation, belonging, and community behavior. Participants explore a brain-informed action planning model that guides them from insight to implementation, designing student-led initiatives that cultivate kindness, resilience, and systems-level impact.

Co-presenter: Dom Verwey

Workshop Block 3

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. CDT

Empowering Youth: Achieving the State Seal of Civic Engagement Through Service-Learning

Ryan Pinkham

Stockton Unified School District

Discover how Stockton USD leveraged service-learning to help students earn the California State Seal of Civic Engagement. This interactive session equips educators with knowledge and tools to use service-learning as a pathway to the State Seal, with lessons from successfully embedding it district-wide.

Co-presenter: Julie Rogers Bascom

Designing Ethically Responsible Community Research to Support Service Opportunities

Ross Velure Roholt

University of Minnesota

How do we know what a community genuinely needs? This session explores research methods for conducting needs assessments that ensure all stakeholders' voices are heard and ethical standards are followed. Methods range from simple to complex and can work whether you have two hours, two weeks, or more.

Co-presenter: Pam Siebert

Building Leadership in Youth Through Program Jobs

Shira Woolf-Cohen

Innovageous

This interactive workshop explores how classrooms and programs can intentionally design youth roles that mirror real-world responsibilities — giving young people opportunities to practice leadership, receive feedback, and co-own programs alongside adults. Participants leave with strategies to build student agency, ownership, and readiness for life beyond school.

Youth Redefining Civic Engagement Through Technology and Service

Leah Mordehai

VR'ing Democracy

Youth leaders Emily Gorodetskiy and Leah Mordehai explore how technology and service intersect to foster empathy, amplify youth voices, and build more inclusive systems of governance. Topics include VR-based voter education, youth policy engagement, and their co-created AI platform PlainPolicy, which simplifies legislation for everyday citizens.

Co-presenter: Emily Gorodetskiy

Elevating Youth Voice Through Service-Learning: A Pathway to SEL and Civic Engagement

Susan Ward-Roncolli

LAUSD (Retired)

Unleash the power of youth voice and leadership through service-learning! This session explores how engaging young people in solving community problems fosters social-emotional learning, civic engagement, and real-world skills. Discover research-backed strategies to co-create meaningful opportunities that drive lasting impact.

Co-presenter: Feven Tesfaye

Uniting For Good Closing Session

3:15 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. CDT

Youth Voices Leading the Way

What does it look like when young people don't just participate in change but lead it?

To close out Uniting for Good, we pass the mic to the young people at the heart of this work. In this reflective and energizing session, youth from across the country share what they've learned, what they're still working toward, and what they need from the adults and organizations who stand alongside them.

Through storytelling, dialogue, and a collective call to action, this closing session reminds us why we're all here – and challenges us to go back to our communities ready to listen first, and follow their lead.

Facilitator: Isabella Sullivan, NYLC

Panelists: Renad Boamar, student; Mariah Eskel, student; Emiliana Korin, student

Hackathon: Trailers for the Planet

4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. CDT

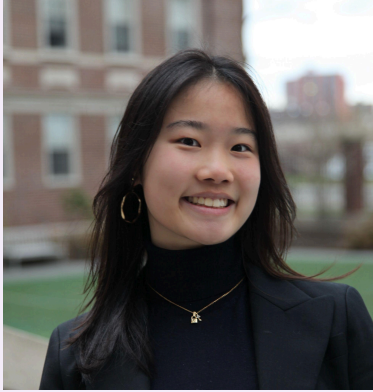
Post-Conference Session

What if young people could pitch solutions to the world's biggest challenges in under two minutes? Join us for a hands-on Hackathon led by Docathon, where student teams will compete to create short film trailers that imagine a better future for our planet. Working together in real time, participants will brainstorm, script, and produce original trailers that combine creativity, storytelling, and a call to action. This is not a passive session. It is a live, high-energy challenge that puts young people in the director's chair and invites everyone in the room to cheer them on. Come ready to collaborate, create, and see what this generation can do when given the tools, the time, and the stage.

Pre-registration required.

You do not have to attend the morning session to participate in the afternoon Hackathon.

Meet the Speakers



Keynote Speaker: Yutian Li, *Harvard College*

Yutian Li is an award-winning and internationally-recognized human right activist and public speaker. From immigrating to the US at 11 without speaking English, to speaking at MA State House, MIT, Boston Children's Hospital, etc eight years later, she is passionate about using her story to advocate for and empower LGBTQ+ youths, immigrants, BIPOC youths, and/or FGLI students. She is currently an undergraduate student at Harvard College, studying Neuroscience and Government. She is also a psychology researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital who specializes how racial discrimination impacts immigrants and Asian American youths' racial socialization and mental health. She has presented her research at international conferences, like the American Public Health Association's Annual Conferences.



Shei Ascencio, *NeuroPack*

A mama, partner, friend, sister and daughter – Shei is an international educator with extensive experience in inquiry and conceptual-based learning, skilled in teaching students across grades 1 to 12. Shei's deep commitment lies in leading service, solutionary approach, global citizenship, and community engagement initiatives, enhancing collaborations with youth, educators, and organizations globally.



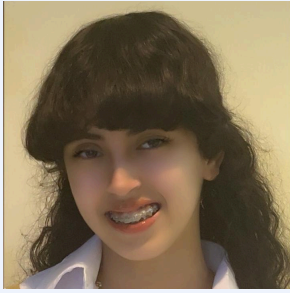
Kay Augustine, *Iowa Department of Education*

Kay is a Program Consultant for the Iowa Department of Education. Her role includes Bullying/Harassment, Therapeutic Classroom Grants, and youth voice/service. Throughout her teaching and training career she has consistently demonstrated her commitment to working alongside youth to advance student voice and service initiatives.



Luz Avruj, *CLAYSS*

Luz Avruj is Coordinator of Institutional Relations and Networks at CLAYSS, where she fosters global collaboration around service-learning (SL). With over 20 years of experience linking education and social development, she has worked as a teacher, trainer and facilitator. She previously coordinated training and led CLAYSS's SL Promotion Program in Central and Eastern Europe, and serves as Executive co-Secretary of the Ibero-American SL Network.



Renad Baomar, *Brave Voices*

Renad Salim Baomar is a 14-year-old student from Oman currently in Grade 9. She is a passionate global youth advocate and changemaker, dedicated to making sure young voices are heard. As the Founder and President of Brave Voices, she works to empower peers to lead with confidence. She is also involved with UNESCO-IOC Ocean Literacy, ICC Global, and SheLeadsToo. She believes that even at 14, young people have the power to shape a better future for everyone.



Julie Rogers Bascom, *National Youth Leadership Council*

Julie Rogers Bascom is a service-learning leader from Minneapolis, MN who has been supporting youth workers, teachers and young people to use service-learning as a strategy to solve problems in their communities for over 17 years. She also coaches and leads workshops on Respectful Conversations in Schools and has presented at local and national workshops on how to incorporate service into curriculum and community.



Mariah Eskel, *student*

Mariah Eskel is a high school junior from Massachusetts engaged in public policy and civic leadership. She has created multiple pieces of legislation, including two environmental bills in the MA State Legislature focused on renewable energy and grid modernization, as well as an economic bill addressing inflation. She also initiated a National Young Leaders in Politics Day, connecting with national leaders as well as passing a bill in her town. Her work focuses on practical policy solutions and expanding involvement in government.



Emily Gorodetskiy, *Plain Policy*

Emily Gorodetskiy is a youth civic innovator and nonprofit executive who is passionate about strengthening democracy and expanding opportunity for young people. She is the creator of VR'ing Democracy, an internationally recognized virtual reality civic education headset that visualizes the voting process and democratic systems for first-time voters



Emiliana Korin, *NYLC Youth Advisory Council*

Emiliana Korin is a senior at Athens Academy and incoming University of Georgia student studying Political Science. A Venezuelan immigrant and second-year NYLC Youth Advisory Council member, she brings lived experience to youth civic engagement. Emiliana completed a two-year capstone project on service and civic engagement, launched a podcast, and earned the Congressional Award Gold Medal.



Amanda LeGrande, *Gateway High School*

Amanda LeGrande is an English teacher at Gateway High School in Ottumwa, Iowa, and the 2025 Iowa Alternative Educator of the Year. She is passionate about student-led service-learning, community partnerships, and helping young people use their voices to create real change. Through projects focused on issues such as chronic absenteeism, mental health, and volunteerism, she works alongside students to design solutions that make a meaningful impact.



Amy Meuers, *National Youth Leadership Council*

Amy is CEO of the National Youth Leadership Council. She has spent over 20 years with NYLC leading both national and international service-learning initiatives that expand the capacity of educators to utilize service-learning as an instructional strategy with students of all age-levels. Under her leadership, NYLC launched Youth as Solutions, a national service-learning program that supports teams of youth across the country in addressing issues impacting their communities.



Michael Minks, *Youth Service America*

Mike has 20 years of experience in the education, youth development, national service, and public policy fields, including 18 years at YSA. At YSA, he manages strategic planning & evaluation, communications & technology, and finance & human resources for the organization. He is the Editor-in-Chief of YSA's weekly Youth Service Briefing. He has a M.A. in Public Policy from Georgetown and a B.A. in English & Education from St. John's University.



Leah Mordehai, *Plain Policy*

Leah Mordehai is a junior at San Francisco University High School with a strong interest in law, public policy, and civic engagement. She serves as a District 1 Youth Commissioner for the City and County of San Francisco and co-chairs the League of Women Voters Youth Council, where she leads initiatives to make government more accessible to young people. Leah founded Plain Policy, a civic technology initiative that translates complex legislation into readable text.



Allyson Morgan, *University of Georgia*

Allyson Morgan is a doctoral candidate in Educational Theory and Practice at the University of Georgia. A former middle school teacher, district instructional coach, and Georgia Department of Education STEM/STEAM specialist, her work focuses on teacher education and learning in middle grades classrooms. She also collaborates on research related to experiential learning and how lived space shapes learning.



Syed Murtaza-Rose, *National Youth Leadership Council*

Syed is passionate about learning, youth development and community. Previously, he has worked for an education nonprofit leading professional development, service-learning, and DEI initiatives. Within his own community, he is involved with his local boards and commissions, participates in community gardening, and started a mutual aid group.



Ryan Pinkham, *Stockton Unified School District*

Ryan Pinkham is a Curriculum Specialist for Stockton Unified School District with 26 years in education, including 23 years as a social studies teacher. He focuses on strengthening instructional practices and expanding civic learning opportunities. Ryan leads professional development in service-learning and supports schools in helping students earn the California State Seal of Civic Engagement through community-connected learning.



Ross Velure Roholt, *University of Minnesota*

Ross VeLure Roholt is Associate Professor, School of Social Work (Youth Studies), University of Minnesota, where he teaches courses on youth development, youth work, and civic youth work. He is an active community-based participatory researcher and evaluator. His research and evaluation work focuses on youth engagement, youth work, civic youth work, and youth involvement in democratic and social development, especially with young people from historically marginalized and contested communities.



Pam Siebert, *National Youth Leadership Council*

Pam is a skilled strategist and implementer, with over 20 years of experience in nonprofits and cross-sector initiatives— taking plans from ideas to action on topic areas including human services, substance abuse prevention, homelessness, education, and community service. In her current role as Vice President of Community Impact & Evaluation with NYLC, Pam supports youth taking action in their communities by conducting evaluation and managing special initiatives.



Isabella Sullivan, *National Youth Leadership Council*

Bella has always been passionate about youth leadership, service-learning, and community empowerment. Her journey with the National Youth Leadership Council began in high school. Over the years, Bella deepened her involvement by joining the Youth Advisory Council (YAC), mentoring future leaders, and interning during multiple summers. As NYLC's Marketing and Events Coordinator, Bella hopes to leverage her service-learning experiences to inspire and elevate young leaders around the country.



Feven Tesfaye, *NYLC Youth Advisory Council*

Feven is a Senior at Burnsville High School in Minnesota. She is interested in forms of advocacy amongst youth and the intersection of service learning and environmental equality. She has served as a Congressional District representative for the Minnesota Youth Council, focusing on environmental sustainability with the hopes of increasing interaction with young people. She is also keen on equity for all minorities to have a right to speak out, and continues to help this mission as a Youth Fellow for her county's League of Women Voters.



Dom Verwey, *NeuroPack*

Driven by family, authentic action, nature, and reflection – Dom is an international school service learning educator with a passion for supporting those around him to develop their service leadership endeavours, especially young solutionary changemakers. He is inspired by the ways in which we can collaboratively draw on a constellation of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to regeneratively solve some of the world's deepest systemic challenges.



Susan Ward-Roncolli, *National Youth Service Council*

Susan Ward Roncalli is a veteran teacher with over 30 years of classroom experience. She has presented at conferences on service learning and social emotional learning nationally and internationally. Susan serves on the Board of the National Youth Service Council and has worked in the SEL field for 10 years.



Sheila Whittle, *Project Protect Our Children*

Sheila Whittle has devoted her career to empowering underserved populations through education, advocacy, and trauma-informed care. A former Teacher of the Year, she moved from Title I classrooms into nonprofit leadership, supporting child sex trafficking survivors in Houston and working with survivors globally through outreach, training, and employment initiatives. She holds an M.Ed. in Neuroscience and Trauma and serves as Managing Director.



Shira Woolf-Cohen, *Innovageous*

Shira Woolf Cohen, MEd is an educator, community organizer, and founder of Innovageous. She leads career development and service-learning initiatives that connect students to real-world opportunities through partnerships with schools and community organizations. A former K-8 principal and university instructor, she is also the author of *Leading Future-Focused Schools: Engaging and Preparing Students for Career Success*.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!

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