



Evaluation report: Washington Campus Compact  
Learn and Serve America 2006-2009 Sub-Grant Program

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## **Context of the evaluation**

Washington Campus Compact (WACC) has administered a sub-grant program from the national Learn and Serve America (LSA) grant program. Three types of projects were funded: Promising Practices (PP) programs, Congressional District Action Teams (CDAT), and Capacity Building (CB) grants. A total of 22 colleges and universities in Washington and Idaho were funded with sub-grant awards between 2006 and 2009, with some schools receiving only PP (n=10), others receiving only CDAT (n=4) and others receiving both (n=6). Two schools received capacity building grants only. A variety of methods have been utilized to evaluate progress among the sub-grantees including progress reports and developmental self assessments from the sub-grantees, participation in the LASSIE survey, surveys of all program managers, and interviews with selected program managers. This report will consolidate and summarize the data from those sources to develop conclusions and recommendations regarding the LSA sub-grant program.

## **Existing Data Sources**

### **LSA 08-09 reports of volunteers and youth served**

Numbers served, activities completed, and successes are included in the 2008-2009 year end progress report summary. As a summary: Over 10,000 (n=10,244) college student volunteers participated in LSA sponsored opportunities – of which 86% were curricular. A total of 3,811 disadvantaged youth received services from LSA sponsored activities, and 191 new community partnerships were created. LSA funds supported continuing (n=399) and new (n=125) service-learning courses. A total of 127 policy makers or their staff members were educated about the impacts of service-learning.

### **LASSIE Survey**

In 2006-07, 7 respondents completed the nationally administered Learn and Serve System Information Exchange (LASSIE) survey which examined how service-learning (SL) programs were funded, how they were situated within the university, and the types of service projects. Almost every one of the WACC schools' respondents reported some funds from the general university budget each year (in only one year was there less than 100% additional funding from general budgets) and most also utilized the federal work-study program to hire staff. One-third to half of respondents reported other grants and funding sources (beyond general budgets) in each of the 3 years. Responses from each of the 3 years are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Characteristics of Service-learning Programs and Institutions in Numbers (top) and Percents (bottom).

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Total # respondents	7	12	18
2 yr public	3	6	7
4 yr public	2	4	6
4 yr private	2	2	5
Religious	2	2	4
Program 1 sem or less	4	11	11
Program school year	2	8	12
Courses funded by LSA	14	62	95
Total SL courses	415	684	961
Characteristics of programs (in percents)	%	%	%
First LSA grant	43	42	22
Hispanic	8	14	7
Female	60	44	53
Health / nutrition	57	58	67
Education	86	92	94
Environmental	43	58	39
Homeland security	14	17	28
Public safety	27	42	33
Housing	29	0	
Human needs	57	67	61
Comm./ Economic dev	43	83	78
Partners involved in planning/managing SL	36	11	20
SL Program > 6 yrs	57	50	50
SL part of official core	43	25	22
Technical assist for SL	71	58	44
Top 2 Technical Assistance strengths	Developing comm. Partnerships Building support	Developing comm. Partnerships Program design	Developing comm. partnerships Program design

*Note.* All numbers taken from LASSIE reports.

### Aggregate change on developmental level self assessment

2008-2009 LSA sub-grantees completed a self assessment rubric (described elsewhere in program materials) at 2 time points, 9 months apart. Schools assessed themselves on 5 dimensions with several

sub-themes for each dimension, for a total of 22 assessment points for each of the participating schools (n= 21). The stages for each sub-theme were assessed as critical mass building (stage 1), quality building (stage 2) and sustained institutionalization (stage 3). Of the total opportunities for change, 48 total incidences of decrease were reported, and 61 incidences of increase were reported. The declines were not distributed evenly across schools, 12 schools reported declines in at least 1 of the indicators, with 6 of those reporting declines in 4 or more total indicators. Likewise the increases were not distributed evenly. Seven schools increased in 4 or more domains, while 16 schools reported increase in at least 1 domain. Very few schools reported 2 level shifts. One school dropped 2 levels on 2 indicators, and 1 school raised 2 on 2 indicators. The most common placement for each indicator was to stay the same, and most often in the middle stage (quality building). There were 6 schools that reported no movement on any indicator.

### **Sub grantee end of year reports**

Year end reports for the sub-grantees provide a number of examples of both successes and challenges in Promising Practices, Capacity Building, and Congressional District Action Teams' sub-grants. Specifically, some of the success included enhancing educational practices to support students' understanding of service and the contexts in which they serve, faculty development opportunities, and development of institutional structures to improve either administration or evaluation of service-learning. For the CDAT, successes focused on creating consortiums or improving communications among stakeholders within Congressional districts; additionally contact with and education to policymakers was a recurring theme of successes. The purpose of these action teams was to facilitate involvement of community agencies, educational institutions and other local community leaders in political advocacy that supports service-learning and improved social conditions. Fourteen schools were able to develop public forums or events. Most of the schools (n=16) reported new collaborative partnerships as a result of the LSA sub-grant. These schools were able to partner with new community agencies, or to create collectives or consortiums to address local concerns and promote service-learning.

All but 2 participating schools sent at least 1 participant to the Continuums of Service (COS) conference which provides opportunities to share resources and network. Seven schools sent 8 or more people to COS. Most of the schools were able to use LSA funds to provide technical assistance to faculty within their institutions, including workshops, consultants, retreats and faculty stipends for course development. Most institutions were able to develop some infrastructure to sustain efforts initiated by the LSA sub-grant, and most also reported some evaluation activities, ranging from events evaluations, to participant tracking, to university wide service evaluations.

Challenges reported in the year end reports ranged from communication and lack of infrastructure at the institution, to negative perceptions about service-learning and developing trust with participants and local organizations.

### **Follow up survey data**

One year after program completion, follow up surveys were sent to 21 sub-grantee institutions; completed surveys were returned from 13 institutions. The returned surveys represented a mix of institutions with Capacity Building grants (n=2), Promising Practices only (n=6), CDAT only (n=2) and both Promising Practices and CDAT (n=3).

Participants were asked to reflect on changes based on sub-grant funds, and how well those changes have been sustained in the year since funding ended. They were also asked to provide feedback on the sub-grant program and give ideas to improve WACC sponsored opportunities. In addition to open-ended responses, participants rated their satisfaction with 5 aspects of the LSA sub-grant program.

Respondents were from institutions with a range of time funded by the LSA sub-grant including 4 institutions with 1 year of funding, 3 institutions with 2 years of funding and 5 institutions with 2.5 years of funding (one did not answer this item).

### **What types of infrastructure developed?**

Three main types of infrastructure development were reported as a result of the grant activities: relationships, functions, and systems. Relationships were developed, enhanced, maintained and institutionalized via grant activities. For example, some campuses developed and enhanced relationships with faculty and students through trainings, volunteer fairs, sponsoring conference attendance and advisory boards. Relationships were institutionalized by creating formal partnerships across campuses, between campuses and community partners, and in one case by direct partnerships between faculty and community partners. A variety of functions were developed or maintained, and some were institutionalized via grant activities. Campuses attended the COS conference, and in some cases other conferences that are now part of the annual or biennial activities of the centers. One campus worked collaboratively to create a service-learning award that is no longer directly funded via the sub-grant, but continues through collaboration with private and community partner efforts. Campuses conducted needs assessments, evaluations and curricula that continue to be used, revised and disseminated. One campus began to incorporate research into its functions, and now has contributed to research findings about service-learning. Finally, most campuses reported changes in overall structures or systems in response to the grant activities. At some schools, positions were created and hired (at least in part) with sub-grant funds, and in some cases those positions were retained with other funds by the time the sub-grant ended. In several schools, an ongoing AmeriCorps position designated to facilitate service-learning has been approved by the administration. Finally, items such as systems for training, adoption of scheduling systems, and curriculum for volunteers to use in their work have been incorporated into the structure of the institutions.

### **How have the infrastructure and relationships been maintained or changed?**

The developments that were most sustainable or continued to grow were either institutionalized activities (like an annual award, or change in strategic plan) or relationships where all parties were committed to the relationship. For instance, community partnerships and partnerships with other

departments or faculty on campuses were sustained or enhanced when the community partners or faculty members were motivated to continue the relationship. In cases where the partners were less motivated, the partnerships were difficult to maintain in the absence of the incentive provided by the LSA funds (program dollars, workshops, etc.). Several schools indicated that the projects of the LSA sub-grant had blossomed into dissemination efforts where faculty or service-learning professionals had developed materials or reports that were presented at conferences or published in education resource materials. In some cases the LSA sub-grant activities could be transformed such that other entities could continue the activities without funding. In one case, the community partners had developed their own commitments to the social issue at hand and were developing their own programming to enhance the prior efforts of the school. In another case, a funded position was well enough established that it could be transformed into a recurring student volunteer position, thus ensuring the continued success of the program activities. Other schools restructured service learning coordinator roles into other departments on campus (e.g. student employment).

The things that were the least sustainable were those activities or materials that required direct funding to maintain. For instance, once money was no longer available for outreach, curricula materials, or other supplies, some programs had to end activities that depended on those supplies. In cases where partnerships were not well established and involvement was still motivated by the perks of the sub-grant (fellowship funding, staff activities to promote partnership, program costs, trainings), a decrease in investment was noted after the funding subsided. In particular, if strong buy-in from faculty did not occur during the grant, continued involvement or establishment of new service-learning faculty proved difficult once the funding ended.

Most schools reported no changes in policy as a result of the LSA sub-grant. However, the few changes that were reported are worth noting and are described here:

*The LSA grant coordination was one of many examples where we realized we needed to coordinate the efforts of individual units on campus better to maximize our outreach and engagement efforts, especially when resources are scarce. One significant outcome of this is the formation of the Outreach and Engagement Council.*

*The regional service-learning Dialogue roundtable drafted a statement about higher education's mandate to serve community that was included in [the] CCBLA Annual report.*

*Our college placed Service-Learning in the College's strategic plan. This recognition of the need to institutionalize service-learning is an important step in creating a sustainable Service-Learning program*

## **Overall growth of Service-learning on campuses**

Respondents were asked to reflect on changes in the overall service-learning climate on their campuses both because of the LSA grant and concurrent to the grant but not directly stemming from the grant. Two major themes emerged from these responses: growth and institutionalization. Every program indicated growth in service-learning whether it was increase in the number of students and faculty participating, an expanding scope of opportunities, or improvements in the quality of services and opportunities provided. Some growth was a direct response to the LSA grant funded activities, but most campuses reported concurrent growth not directly tied to the LSA funds. The second major theme was increase in institutionalization both because of and concurrent to the LSA sub-grant. Respondents reported more buy-in in and support from administration for service-learning, the establishment of longer term and deeper relationships with both faculty and community partners, the establishment of a service-learning program or center on campus, and an expanding paradigm for viewing service-learning in the context of broader engagement and civic responsibility efforts. The most commonly reported institutional shift was the development of a long-term AmeriCorps or VISTA volunteer position. A number of campuses experienced this change during the grant period, some as a direct result of grant activities and others as separate endeavors. However, all the campuses that reported this new position explained that the position would serve to enhance institutionalization of service-learning on campus by providing a designated person for that specific purpose.

## **Experiences with the sub-grant program**

The WACC sub-grant program clearly utilized a number of factors that respondents deemed essential to the success of service-learning on their campuses. For instance, at several campuses, service-learning, student engagement and/or social responsibility were explicitly named in the colleges' missions. WACC was able to tailor the programming so that service-learning professionals could draw clear links between the colleges' missions and the proposed projects. This synchronicity helped campuses to promote service-learning opportunities within the campus and to administrators. Another factor identified as essential was the significant technical assistance, administrative support and collaboration provided from WACC. Site visits were described as vital by a number of participants both for supporting programming and for promoting service-learning within the specific campuses. The flexibility of the funding options was raised by a number of participants as integral to growth within their own campuses. Campuses new to service-learning could use the funds to initiate community relationships and start service projects. Campuses with stronger service-learning backgrounds used the funds for activities such as integrating diverse types of projects, or developing evaluation and research components of their programming, or taking a risk by branching into a new area that would otherwise be unfunded. Finally, several campuses volunteered that it would be difficult to attend the COS conference (or send faculty or students) without the support of WACC.

When asked which factors impeded success or growth, most respondents did not name any factors or said “none.” Several respondents noted issues related to the “fit” between the sub-grant structure and the institutions’ structures and needs. For instance the timing of proposals, spending dates, and reports due did not always flow with the academic calendar, and created some additional administrative burden. The size of the grants did not allow for the hiring of an additional FTE person, and sometimes this meant shuffling personnel in ways that were less efficient to accommodate the competing funding needs within a unit. The grant size also seemed to have disproportionate reporting requirements for some of the institutions that also had larger grants from other sources. One participant noted that the small grant, while innovative, sometimes functioned to further “scatter” projects by creating new threads rather than serving to integrate existing threads. Respondents from Idaho campuses were more likely to note that visits and contact from WACC seemed to be less in Idaho; thus an effect could be that it was harder for Idaho schools to access the WACC resources. Finally, the survey of faculty was reported as helpful by some, but considered less helpful by others who felt the response rate by faculty was low and perceived as too biased by others on their campuses.

Most respondents said that they would not make any changes to the sub-grant strategy or program. The few recommended changes included improving direct contact with service-learning program coordinators (as opposed to upper administrative personnel), and reducing the reporting requirements of the sub-grant, or combining them with the WACC membership reporting requirements. One participant felt that expenditures on hotels and other venues were at times extravagant and not consistent with the missions of the programs.

Overall sub-grantees described themselves as very satisfied or extremely satisfied with the experience. They reported feeling well supported and having deep appreciation for the WACC staff. More experienced programs described the value of initial grants for getting service-learning started and institutionalized on their campuses. The WACC sub-grants over the years were described as “valuable to our development and to our initial viability,” and “playing an important role in leveraging opportunities on campus.” Those who had ceased being funded were disappointed with the loss of funds and support.

### **Satisfaction with program**

Overall, respondents reported very high levels of satisfaction with the LSA sub-grant program. In response to four of the five satisfaction items, almost all 12 respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed (4 or 5 out of 5) that they were satisfied with the experience. The item with the lowest overall satisfaction rating (and the most variability) was the item asking about satisfaction with the administrative aspects of the LSA sub-grant program. The most common explanation for the lower ratings was that the overall reporting requirements were too high, and for the more funded programs, respondents indicated that the reporting requirements were inconsistent with the level of funding. Several respondents indicated how supportive and timely the WACC staff were in responding to their needs. The table below summarizes the number of responses in each category as well as the average score for each item.



Table 2. Sub-grantee Satisfaction Ratings from Evaluation Survey

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Mean
I am satisfied with the LSA sub-grant program design.	n/a (1)	1	2	3	4 (6)	5 (5)	4.45
I am satisfied with the outcomes of the LSA sub-grant at my institution.		1	2	3	4 (4)	5 (8)	4.67
I am satisfied with the administrative aspects of the LSA sub-grant program.		1	2 (1)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (4)	3.92
I would recommend other schools to apply for a similar sub-grant opportunity.		1	2	3	4 (4)	5 (8)	4.67
I would apply for this opportunity again if available.		1	2	3 (1)	4 (3)	5 (8)	4.58

### Interviews with Selected Campuses

Seven schools were interviewed to examine with more depth the types of institutions, how LSA sub-grants fit into the overall picture of service-learning, and what the administrative responses to LSA grants and service-learning had been at the institutions. Participants in the interviews also were given the opportunity to provide specific feedback regarding the WACC programs, and to describe successful collaborations that had resulted from this particular sub-grant cycle. The schools were chosen to incorporate campuses with each of the 3 types of sub-grants, a mix of 4 year and 2 year schools, and campuses both in Washington and Idaho.

*What is overall service-learning at your institution and how does LSA fit into that?*

Institutions ranged in service-learning experience and commitment from emerging programs (just starting to offer service-learning opportunities to students) to established programs that had some dedicated staff (sometimes volunteer or AmeriCorps) and centers established within campus structures and retaining more than a few staff persons annually. For two of the institutions the LSA grant represented almost all of the money for service-learning that the institution had during the grant period. The larger, more established programs used LSA money to expand existing services or to branch into new realms. The money of the LSA grant allowed the service coordinators some leverage to establish and develop relationships on campus that would have been more difficult without the financial backing to make programs happen.

The Learn and Serve grants played different roles at different campuses, based on the existing size and scope of service-learning at each campus. Overall the grants seemed to serve one of two complementary functions at each campus: first to push forward new initiatives, and second to balance and stabilize existing programs. The emerging campuses describe the sub-grants as lifelines that helped them to initiate their programs and gain some support from administration. The more experienced programs used the grants in ways to extend current services, create balance and synthesis among

programs, or to expand other elements of the service-learning field like curriculum development or research on service-learning.

### **Regional influence**

Regionally, WACC provides opportunities for networking and shared resources across campuses. When asked to reflect upon how the LSA grants influenced the region, participants were able to identify specific ways that the sub-grants had improved networking and shared resources. For instance, several campuses had experiences mentoring or being mentored by other campus service-learning professionals. The networks developed across campuses in response to the CDAT were also mentioned as a pathway to developing relationships among the schools. Two schools described experiences of seeing how they fit into the region by attending COS and learning what other campuses were doing and how they were structured. Finally, the efforts of WACC overall were described as elevating the region by revealing new possibilities, maintaining a focus on best practices, and promoting awareness of resources.

### **Institutional responses**

Every campus indicated that their institutions had responded positively to the LSA grant and activities. Some campuses and administrators were more enthusiastic than others, and on campuses with more overall resources already devoted to service-learning, the response to the sub-grant was not particularly distinct from the response to the service-learning agenda overall. In several cases (especially on campuses with emerging programs) administrators committed additional funds for service-learning efforts once the LSA grants had been received. The most common outcome of these efforts was approval for continuing AmeriCorps volunteers in the coordination of service-learning.

The challenges at institutions had to do with finding faculty willing to commit to the time and process of service-learning, receiving adequate recognition for accomplishments (several coordinators indicated that they aggressively promoted their programs on campuses to enhance visibility), and administrator willingness to commit stable resources to service-learning. Each program was able to speak to its own uniqueness in how the campus responded to service-learning. Some were unique in the longstanding presence of a center and staff dedicated to service-learning; others were unique in the extent to which service-learning fit with the mission of the campus. Still others saw themselves as unique in how new their programs were, or in the demographics of the students (older, religiously affiliated, etc).

Almost every campus indicated that service or engagement was an element of the schools' missions, which allowed them to refer to that mission as a basis for promoting the sub-grant activities. For the newer programs, presence of the grant allowed service-learning coordinators the opportunity to interact with senior administration to move forward other service-learning goals. The more established programs did not see a direct influence of this sub-grant cycle on administrators' attitude towards service, in part because the sub-grant was a small component of what was already a much larger, funded operation. The exception to this finding was in the cases where the sub-grant funded something

really new and interesting that captured the attention of administration, such as research and evaluation projects.

### **Recommendations for changes from interview respondents**

The primary recommendations for change had to do with enhancing support from and communication among college administrators across campuses. People indicated that WACC communications had helped in making administrators more receptive to service-learning, and suggested more direct communication from WACC as well as support for getting administrators to communicate with administrators from other campuses about the value of service-learning. Other recommendations included focusing in ways that were a strong fit across types of campuses.

Every campus indicated a willingness to apply for LSA funds again, however with variable levels of commitment, and some indicated a need to reduce paperwork. Most indicated a desire to hear feedback from WACC about their own performance as a sub-grantee.

### **Successful collaborations**

Participants were able to describe successful relationships or collaborations that developed as a result of the grant funds. Here are some examples of those.

*We formalized a relationship with three schools, and we have managed to keep the partnerships thriving. Last year we developed a program without LSA funding for a book drive. The bookstore hosted a competition, with three schools to be the recipients of a brand new book for each kindergartener. There was an application process with questions. It was a fun competition between schools – they connected with one another. As a fun addition we matched up with Read Across America. It would be nice to have LSA as back up funding if needed to purchase books.*

*We enhanced our relationship to the School of Education. During the first years, a researcher led the research from education as we identified training of mentors as important. We brought in a trainer from the faculty in other fields. As we align more with education it will make programs much better because mentors are trained to work with high risk youth – they know what we are there for.*

*We keep the cultivation of faculty and community supporters even though the funds are gone. We just got a \$100,000 award from a local donor to expand service work and activities. This person was on the Congressional District Action Team for three years, and was a consultant. It takes time to cultivate these relationships and the three year timeframe of the sub-grant is helpful for that.*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Across the many sources of data, several major themes emerged in different ways. In this section, I review those themes and provide recommendations based on the information provided.

The cluster of primary themes included: 1) the flexibility of the funding opportunity in light of campus program maturity, with match of funds to growth needs, 2) reporting and administrative management time, 3) relationships among service-learning professionals and administration, and 4) regional networking. Each of these themes seemed to represent strengths and challenges for campuses.

- 1) Flexibility of the sub-grant opportunity allowed programs to propose the type of initiative or action that best fit with their own developing needs. Consequently the types of programs were very diverse and ranged from providing specific service-learning opportunities to enhancing collaborations and evaluating programs. In a very few cases the flexibility was seen as a detriment to enhancing focus for programs. Future initiatives may want to work closely with campuses to assess the type of proposal that will most enhance their growth. The more established programs may need additional support to examine ways to “push the envelope” with the available funding. In contrast, the newer programs may be heading down well established pathways to develop service-learning structures on campuses, and could benefit from the relationships with more experienced campuses.
- 2) Most of the campuses mentioned both pros and cons of the reporting requirements for WACC. Campuses appreciated the data and information that WACC provided to them, but also struggled with the amount of administrative time required to complete this aspect of the projects. Several campuses indicated that this sort of administrative time was not funded by their grants and was thus pulling from other resources within the service-learning programs. Consolidating reporting requirements to the greatest extent possible, while still collecting useful information, was definitely a theme of recommendations from campuses.
- 3) Relationships with campus administration varied considerably, with some administrators being overwhelmingly supportive, and others displaying more superficial support. A focus directly on the role of administration and ways to improve the commitment of administration to service-learning could help to improve the contexts of service-learning on some campuses.
- 4) Finally, the regional networking was a considerable strength of the WACC presence. Campuses benefitted from their relationships being facilitated through WACC, and also had the opportunity to see their own accomplishments within the context of the regional efforts. Continued support of regional networking will definitely be useful to the participating campuses.