Community Service Projects vs Take Action (Narrative)

In Girl Scouts we do a lot of projects that help our local communities, our cities, our counties, our state, even our nation, and our world. Some of these projects are considered community service while others are considered [Take Action projects](http://ve.girlscoutsnorcal.org/ve/mod/book/view.php?id=2&chapterid=27#TAP), and yet even more seem to fall into both categories at the same time. As a leader, a volunteer, or even a girl—how do you tell the two apart? How do you know if you are doing a project that would work for your Community Service Bar, or if you are doing a project that would qualify for a higher award, like the Silver Award?

To some, this may seem like a very confusing topic, but never fear, help is here! In this information sheet, I’ll break down both community service projects and Take Action projects, so you and your girls can better understand the difference between the two. First, let’s define two words that tend to be used interchangeably, “**need**” and “**issue**“. A “need” is something that is a condition requiring supply or relief. An “issue” is an important topic or problem that must be addressed on a bigger scale. Differences in these words elicit a different response from organizations. If you ask a homeless shelter what they “need”, you will normally get a response of physical items like blankets, towels, money, or pillows. If you ask a homeless shelter what “issues” they or the people they serve are facing, you will get a response that goes beyond donations, such as we can't wash items the homeless people have and need. So what do these words have to do with community service and Take Action projects?

**Community Service Projects**

Community service projects are projects that help to solve an immediate **need**, but they don’t impact the root cause of an issue. Continuing to work with the homeless shelter example above, community service would be donating pillows—it’s an immediate need and a great thing to do, but it does not identify the root cause nor is the root cause affected. Once the shelter runs out of pillows they will be right back where they started.

**Take Action Projects**

Take Action projects are projects that help solve an **issue** by discovering the cause and developing a project to affect or eliminate the cause of the problem. Continuing with the homeless shelter example, a Take Action project would start by asking “*but why can’t the shelter wash linens?*” After a little research, you might learn that the shelter can’t wash linens because they don’t have a functioning washer or dryer to use. Speaking with the shelter you find out that they have an area where they could install a washer and dryer, but to meet their needs they would really need multiple industrial washers and dryers. They have not had these donated and cannot afford the cost of purchasing and hooking up.  A Take Action project that would eliminate the root cause of the shelter’s linen washing problem may include working with local appliance companies to get a donated industrial washer and dryer installed, negotiating an ongoing donation of soap and dryer sheets from a local church, and creating a laundry storage area at the shelter. Do you see how that differs from community service project?

Another good example to help you recognize the difference between a community service project and a Take Action project is one focused on youth reading. A community service project would be to go to an organization like a library, school, or youth club and volunteer as a tutor. Once you stop tutoring, the organization will be in need of tutors again. A Take Action project would look more like noticing a youth club does not currently have a tutoring system in place; therefore the children are not getting help with their homework at this organization. Then you could work with the organization to create a tutoring system from the ground up—custom designed for this organization, so it works for them. You might pull in a student club from a nearby school to create an ongoing supply of volunteer tutors for this organization. Then when you step away, this organization still has a tutoring system in place as well as volunteers that come to tutor.

Unlike community service projects, Take Action projects go a step further than collecting, making, or donating needed items. Community service projects stop when you stop, but Take Action projects do not; Take Action projects are continual, sustainable.

**Here’s a handy chart to break it down:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Community Service Project** | **Take Action Project** |
| Addresses an IMMEDIATE NEED in the community | Addresses the ROOT CAUSE of an issue in the community |
| A project done FOR the community | A project done WITH the community |
| A one-time project that HELPS something or someone now | A long-term project that is SUSTAINABLE AND HAS A LASTING IMPACT |

There’s no doubt that both community service and Take Action projects make the world a better place. They just do so in different ways and at different levels. From Daisies to troop leaders and everyone in between, we all choose what we want to do to make our world a better place. And now that you know the difference between community service and Take Action, you can make informed decisions on what you want to accomplish.

As our founder Juliette Gordon Low always said: “The work of today is the history of tomorrow and we are its makers.”

Let’s try to play a little game to see if everyone can identify the differences.

 There are two game cards and one answer sheet (has the answer cards for both game cards on it.

 Print out and give a game card and corresponding four cards to participants.

 Have participants match up with the activity was a Take Action, Service Project, or no impact..

 Discuss answers









