

## TRAINING SESSION PLAN

# PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

High quality afterschool experiences challenge and engage kids over time. Projects offer the opportunity for participants to get more deeply into topics, interests, talents, and skill-building.

**MEETING GOAL:** Staff understand the purpose and goals of project-based learning, and learn to plan a project that encourages youth involvement and targets learning objectives.

**PREP:** Put assorted random items such as toys, tools, pencils, pens, paper clips, machine parts, or kitchen ware in a paper bag. Include enough to give one to each person.

### MATERIALS:

- ☐ Little prizes (candy bar, pen, toy, etc.)
- ☐ Assorted random items (one per person attending) in a paper bag
- ☐ Flip chart paper, or whiteboard
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Handout: Group Roles, page 4, one per participant
- ☐ Handout: Project Planning Guide, pages 5 – 6, one per group
- ☐ Handout: Project Planning Review, page 7

## STEP-BY-STEP

### OPENER

5 MINUTES

**Explain:** Thinking about projects means thinking creatively about programming and possibilities. Here's a creativity warm-up.

#### Activity

- Pass the bag of items around the room and ask each person to take the first item they touch.
- When everyone has something, tell participants to list at least ten different uses for the item—including crazy and imaginative ones! For example, if someone took a hat, they could turn it upside down and use it for a cereal bowl.
- Have fun, and give prizes to anyone who comes up with more than ten!

### INTRODUCTION

**Explain:** Good projects offer rich learning opportunities. They let kids get involved and go deeper with things that interest them. They're intrinsically motivating and exciting. They can sustain and increase challenge over time, providing real skill-building. Project-based learning culminates with an event, a "demonstration by doing" that calls on kids to show what they've learned through a product, presentation, or performance.



## GOOD PROJECTS

10 MINUTES

It takes planning to lay the groundwork for good projects. But the planning pays off because many project plans can be used over and over with different kids, at different times. Some projects are completely open-ended, so the same child can continue with the project over an extended period of time, building skills or exploring different aspects along the way. Good projects tap into kids' interests, and are—absolutely must be—real and meaningful, not make-work. Group projects also build cooperative and teamwork skills, along with leadership, and self-directed learning.

### List and Discuss

Ask the group to name great projects they've done. For each, ask for two or three features that made them memorable. List answers.

## PLANNING FOR PROJECTS: WEBBING

10 MINUTES

**Ask:** What is the difference between a project and an activity? (Possible answers: projects are longer-term, have several parts or activities within them, involve different kinds of skills, result in something concrete.)

**Explain:** Projects allow children to participate in different roles, matching their interests, learning styles, and skills.

### Review and Discuss

Hand out Group Roles.

Ask if anyone has ideas to add.

**Explain:** The best projects grow from kids' interests and curiosity. Projects can be generated by almost anything. Webbing is a helpful technique.

### Activity

- Form pairs or small groups.
- Give each a large sheet of paper and some markers.
- Explain that you're going to create an idea web as a technique that can help in project planning.
- Start with a small circle in the middle of the page.
- Write the word "animals" in the circle.
- Create additional bubbles connected to the circle of ideas connected to animals. For example, two branches might be "wild" and "tame." Tame might lead to pets, and pets to veterinarians. Wild might lead to zoos and zoo designers.
- Allow about 5 minutes for the webbing.
- Ask a few participants to share. Did everyone have the same paths?
- Make the point that different projects can be generated from similar starting points.



## INSPIRATION

15 MINUTES

**Explain:** Where can ideas come from? Tell participants that you're going to use the same webbing technique using possibilities in the building.

### Activity

- Form pairs or small groups.
- Invite participants to get into the mindset of children they work with.
- Tell them to go around the building or into the hallway and find something that can be the start of a project. For example, they may pass a water fountain. What could they do? Something about plumbing and trades? Water quality? The environment? Environmental justice?
- After a few minutes, come back and web ideas.

**Explain:** Good projects are driven by youth interests. But they should also have learning objectives, which often can be linked to school content.

### Activity

- Distribute the Project Planning Guide and the Project Planning Review.
- Tell participants to look at the web they created, and flesh out a project idea using the project planner. Specifically identify school content or skills that can be brought out by the project.
- Remind participants to be clear about youth interests, choices, leadership, and skill-building. If they find their group saying things like "We could have them do" or "We could get them to," they have probably slipped back into a teacher-directed activity.
- Note opportunities for different roles.
- Ask groups to present projects. Suggest that listeners ask questions and fill in the Review as they listen.

## PLANNING FOR ACTION

5 MINUTES

Which project ideas seem do-able? What supports are needed? Did this trigger any other ideas?

Plan the next steps, drawing on kids' interests to create and conduct projects.  
Name at least three steps, the time frame, and help or supports you need.

**Note to Facilitator:** The next meeting, "Inquiry-Based Learning," provides more practice in building program experiences directly out of students' curiosity.



# GROUP ROLES

Before starting an activity or project, assign roles, or have kids pick what they want to do.

- **Manager:** Keeps the group “on track” and insures that members are fulfilling their roles.
- **Timekeeper:** Watches the time and moves group along so that they complete the task on time.
- **Recorder:** Keeps a record of the group’s actions, takes notes on discussions, and prepares a written report, if needed.
- **Observer:** Uses a guide, such as a checklist, to watch the group’s activities and may offer feedback.
- **Data Collector:** Uses resources to get needed information for the group.
- **Checker:** Makes sure that everyone understands the concepts and that all group members have reached their goals.
- **Spokesperson:** Communicates with the teacher and other groups when help or information is needed. Represents the group in presentations.
- **Materials Manager:** Makes sure that everyone has the materials they need.
- **Designer:** Leads the artistic representation of the group’s work.
- **Stand-In:** Assumes role of any missing group member.



# PROJECT PLANNING GUIDE

## PROJECT CONCEPT

Project description (project will lead to): \_\_\_\_\_

or

Topic to investigate: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions to investigate: \_\_\_\_\_

## OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Subject-matter, academic content objective  
(what specific academic learning will occur?)

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Other objectives:

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Supporting project component

(what part of the project fosters the learning?)

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## ASSESSMENT

How will outcomes be assessed? \_\_\_\_\_

Observation of working processes: \_\_\_\_\_

Observation of final product or performance: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation of final product against criteria: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation by outsiders: \_\_\_\_\_

Written evaluation by teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Self-evaluation by participants: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## INTERIM PRODUCTS OR PROGRESS DEMONSTRATIONS

- |   |                                       |                                |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schedules        | <input type="checkbox"/> Deadlines    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> Performances |                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reports          | <input type="checkbox"/> Drafts       |                                |

## IMPLEMENTATION MATTERS

Number of participants: \_\_\_\_\_ Materials, supplies: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of time needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Start date: \_\_\_\_\_

End date: \_\_\_\_\_

Storage space needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment dates: \_\_\_\_\_ Interims: \_\_\_\_\_ Final: \_\_\_\_\_

## PLANNING CHECK

### Does the topic...

- ☐ Build on what children already know?
- ☐ Offer real-world learning opportunities?
- ☐ Encourage easy hands-on learning experiences?
- ☐ Reach a range of ages, learning styles, and levels?
- ☐ Seem interesting?
- ☐ Involve many content areas?
- ☐ Have enough to keep it going for the length of project?
- ☐ Foster independent learning?

### Does the culminating project...

- ☐ Demonstrate learning?
- ☐ Demonstrate achievement?
- ☐ Permit meaningful contributions from all levels?
- ☐ Offer opportunities for interim products and markers of progress?
- ☐ Offer opportunity for pride in the work done?

### Is it...

- ☐ Do-able given time, space, and materials requirement?
- ☐ Within the scope of resources available?
- ☐ Within the scope of participants' abilities?
- ☐ Within the scope of teachers' knowledge and skills?



# PROJECT PLANNING REVIEW

Use this checklist to help think through project ideas with kids or with other staff.

- ☐ **What is at the heart of the project? What question or interest area?**  
(For example, learning about kids' legal rights, or what it means to be a lawyer.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **What does it take to do the project? Is it do-able?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **Who needs to be involved? What are the roles or responsibilities for staff?  
For participants? For community members or others?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **Is it driven by kids' interests? How are kids involved in setting up,  
managing, or evaluating?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **What are the hoped-for outcomes? How will they be demonstrated?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **How can learning be demonstrated or shared with others?**  
(For example, performances, newsletters, videos, PowerPoints®, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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