

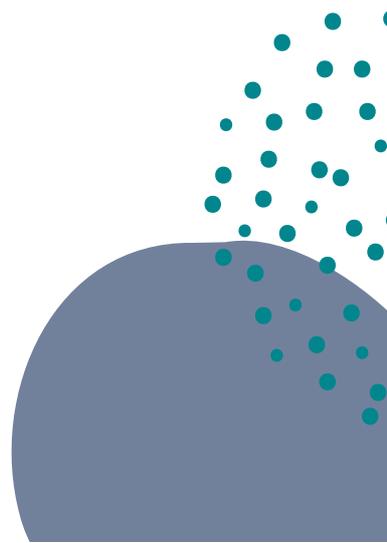


The Service-Learning & Digital Empowerment Manifesto



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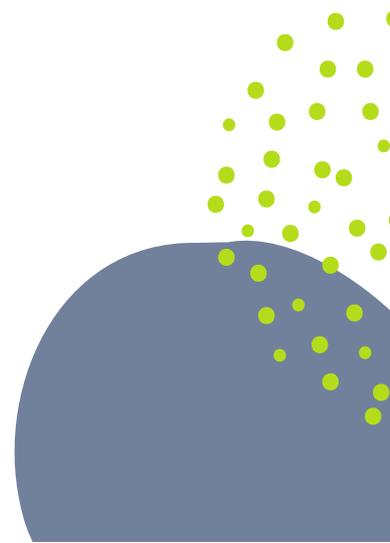
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Introducing SLIDE and the SL&DE Manifesto

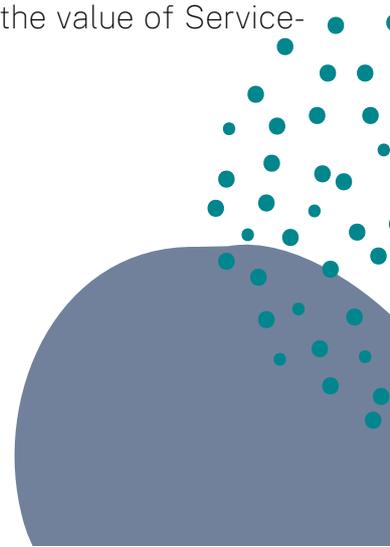


The Erasmus+ project “Service-Learning as a pedagogy to promote Inclusion, Diversity and Digital Empowerment” (2022-2024) or SLIDE is a multinational European project between Belgian, Dutch, German, Austrian, Italian, Croatian, Slovak, Romanian, and Spanish Service-Learning (SL) experts (higher education institutions and Service-Learning networks). SLIDE is a response to the acute education needs brought into focus by the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the need to digitally empower universities to rapidly transform from teaching professionals into designers of learning experiences and experts in emerging technologies. Secondly, the need to close the gap between self-perceived and actual digital competences of university students by equipping them with digital fluency/intelligence/engagement skills. Thirdly, the need to develop pedagogical skills to sensitize them towards digital inclusion of underprivileged and underrepresented groups and to empower them to address sensitive contemporary societal issues while developing their digital competences. And fourthly, the need to combine the digital empowerment of teachers & trainers and students with the pedagogical approach of Service-Learning understanding that this promotes diversity and inclusion, while establishing connections between higher education institutions and communities at risk, either in close proximity or in rural/remote areas.

This manifesto is intended as a basis for debate, as a resource and inspiration for people who benefit from Service-Learning. The manifesto groups different statements on digital empowerment and Service-Learning, which could be useful starting points for scholarly dialogue on resilience, access, teaching quality, and inclusion.

The SLIDE Manifesto was created through a process of consulting members of the various stakeholder groups mentioned in this manifesto from across Europe. Each of the 10 partners held two group discussions with teachers & trainers, professional staff of higher education institutions, Service-Learning experts, community organizations, and students, including those with fewer opportunities. The results of these discussions were used in 2 European group discussions among the SLIDE partners. We explored the need for digital empowerment and Service-Learning, its innovative properties, the impact we expect it to have and what the best practices are for digitally enhanced Service-Learning.

Each SLIDE partner has contributed stories from students, teachers & trainers, and community organizations/members alike. Become inspired and gain new insights about the value of Service-Learning on our website.



Why Service-Learning & digital empowerment?



What is- and why digital empowerment?

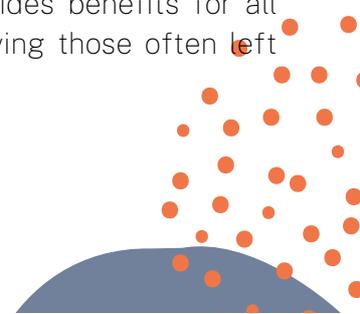
How to interpret digital empowerment depends largely on the intended target group. What a student experiences as digital empowerment, might not be so for a teacher and vice versa. An awareness of these differences and of the existing digital gaps in society is crucial when talking about digital empowerment. For stakeholders, digital empowerment means that someone has the knowledge, competences, and attitude to be able to experiment with the many things the digital world has to offer. Self-reliance is a key concept here, since empowerment means that target groups can take charge themselves. To be self-reliant in the digital world, stakeholders need basic digital knowledge and competences. This includes the ability to use digital devices such as a computer or a smartphone, knowledge of digital tools and knowledge of how and when to use them, knowing how to navigate among the massive possibilities of the online world, etc. Knowledge of online safety and privacy is particularly important. Besides basic knowledge and competences, being digitally self-reliant also requires certain attitudes. Knowing the privacy risks of a certain tool or website is one thing, acting accordingly, for example by changing certain cookie settings, is another. To be fully digitally self-reliant, knowledge and competences should be converted into specific actions and behaviour.

Stakeholders also believe that the development of digital competences should go hand in hand with 'digital discipline'. Even though digital tools can make our lives easier, the endless options often create distraction and a lack of efficiency. Stakeholders therefore emphasize that digital empowerment should also be the ability to make purposeful choices regarding digital tools. The needs of the involved target group should always come first when considering the use of digital tools. Digital empowerment requires stakeholders to make well-considered and substantiated choices, without assuming that this choice should always be a digital option.

What is- and why Service-Learning?

Service-Learning is a powerful pedagogical and educational method, aimed at collaboration between students of higher education institutions and teachers & trainers, and community organizations and members. As the term says, students learn by providing a service to the community. Among others, this can be done by doing research and providing advice, setting up new programming, or improving the organization's performance for example. Essential to a successful Service-Learning experience, is the reciprocal relationship between students and community organizations, where both invest their time, effort, and expertise to co-create value.

Across Europe, students are predominantly taught through theoretical exercises, in which hypothetical- or 'dead' cases are the norm. Recently, however, the call for more practically experienced, self-aware, and critical students becomes louder, and universities are being asked to strengthen their contribution to the community. Service-Learning has the potential to respond to these calls and provides benefits for all those involved and has the potential to encourage inclusion and diversity by involving those often left behind.



Why Service-Learning & digital empowerment?

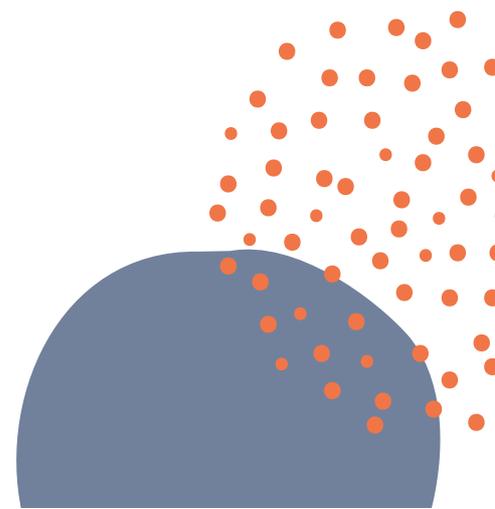
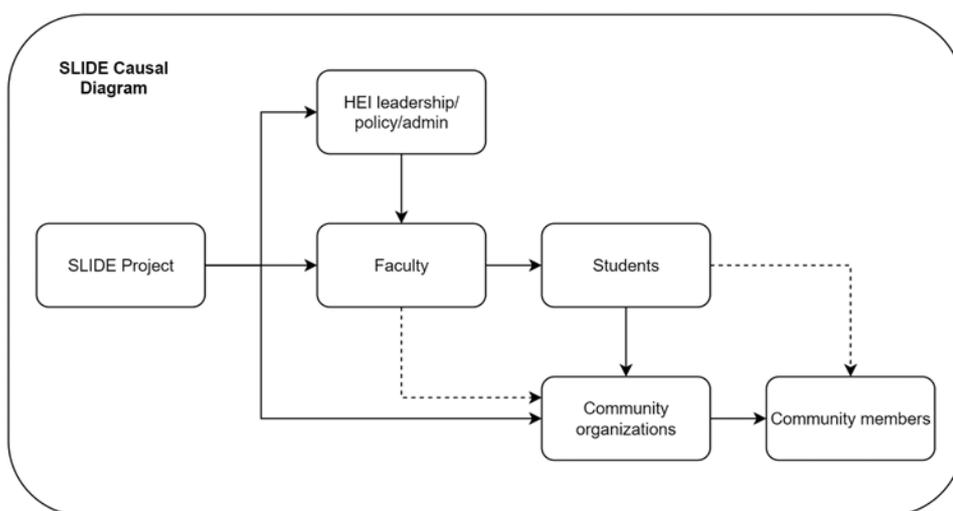
How do these two concepts come together?

Embedding digital means does not only enrich Service-Learning by breaking down barriers (such as geographical barriers), but it also provides the opportunity for stakeholders to work on socially relevant issues while developing their own digital competences. Merging the two themes leads to more possibilities for inclusion of those with fewer opportunities, by for example, properly using tools that are adapted to local contexts, or being able to do Service-Learning with rural participants far away from the university, or even for working with students that face anxiety when doing Service-Learning face-to-face.

How do we expect to create impact?

The SLIDE project aims first and foremost to empower students, teachers and trainers. The manifesto is the starting point of different actions that try to achieve this aim, two massive open online courses (or MOOCs) will be created focusing on digital competence, digital learning culture and higher education student engagement, on equipping teachers, trainers, and educational leaders with skills necessary for the use of (emerging) technology in creative, critical, competent and inclusive ways. Next to that, an Online World Café for teachers and a Social Hackathon for students will be organized. Findings and recommendations resulting from these outputs will be brought together in a policy brief.

The project's content will be created and accounted for with the help of a diverse set of stakeholders including higher education teachers, students, and community organizations from all over Europe, who will be asked to provide feedback and input on these project outputs.



Stakeholder group stories

Community



Community: Needs

Rural and less privileged people need their voices to be heard and have the ability to exercise their rights. Their plight is one of social justice. Too often, communities are treated as simple receivers of information, while they should be treated as partners. Each group in society has a different need for digital empowerment, and finding out what that need is, is crucial for creating value. To participate in civic life and to exercise their rights, all people should develop certain (transversal) skills, digital competences. Often, community organizations are overburdened with their tasks and require help to fulfil their mission through manpower and new insights.

With the COVID-19 crisis, the digital gaps in our society became more visible than ever. Even now, as the crisis slowly passes, the digital transition continues. Banks and train ticket booths are closing, social services are working more and more from an online basis, communication is via mail, (fake) news goes via the internet, etc. Community members who previously never felt the need to use digital tools, now realize that they are excluded from certain services. The new needs of community members also required adjustments in the services of community organizations. The digital transition presents communities with new and difficult challenges. Service-Learning trajectories can offer opportunities to tackle these challenges with the help of students.

Community: Innovation & Impact

For the community, participating in Service-Learning offers extra manpower. Having students, supported by teachers, take on tasks and issues allows the often-overburdened community organizations to develop and breathe. Students also bring in new perspectives, insights, and lived experiences. Together with these students, communities can think about the needs for digital empowerment in their own community. This participation in identifying needs, ensures that communities have agency and are actively involved in service formation. Often, these issues fall outside the jurisdiction of either the government or businesses, making Service-Learning an excellent way to get attention and energy for otherwise supportless issues. In a more indirect way, Service-Learning participation leads to awareness of higher education students, teachers, and institutions, possibly increasing opportunities for research and policy awareness.

Learning within Service-Learning is not a one-way street, it happens to both students and community members. Engaged community members can see personal, professional, and social development through skills and knowledge, and build meaningful relationships and new networks. Successful Service-Learning programmes can set examples for the wider community, allowing best practices to take hold and positive effects to spill over into the community. Any individual involved in Service-Learning who experiences personal or social development can pass this on to family, friends, and others within their network. Meeting new types of people helps reduce cultural and ethnic imbalances, for example by closing the generation gap and learning about new cultures.

By enhancing Service-Learning through digital means, (rural) communities can be reached more easily and more frequently within the context of higher education courses without becoming overly time-consuming. Hybrid working with students helps build digital capacity and skills, helping community members become better problem-solvers, more self-sufficient and stronger participants of the digital society.



Stakeholder group stories

Community

Community: Conditions for successful SL&DE

- For SL experiences to be valuable and digitally empowering, the community partner's needs should be front and centre when setting up the programme.
- Community partners need to be involved as equal partners, as co-creators of new knowledge and insights.
- Create the right expectations on both the student and the community side.
 - a) Make explicit what the non-negotiables are for each party
 - b) Make explicit what all parties expect from the SL experience and what they can contribute.
 - c) Be realistic about students' skills and their contributions within the timeframe.
- Be open and transparent about receiving the service and the different lived experiences students bring.
- Part of Service-Learning is that students don't have the experience or skills. Every SL experience has risks, you interact with new people and have to invest time and effort, part of SL is that students don't have experience or the skills to perform the service.
- The community partners should take a pro-active role in co-creating value, by involving themselves in shaping and implementing the service, instead of waiting for students to deliver the service.
- Use tools that are familiar and / or accessible to community members, make sure community members are guided on how to use digital means properly.
- Community partners and teachers & trainers have joint responsibility to co-mentor the students to make sure their experience is valuable and learning goals are met.
- Community members are represented by community organizations. They have the responsibility to investigate how to (digitally) empower community members to create valuable services.

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Stakeholder group stories

Students



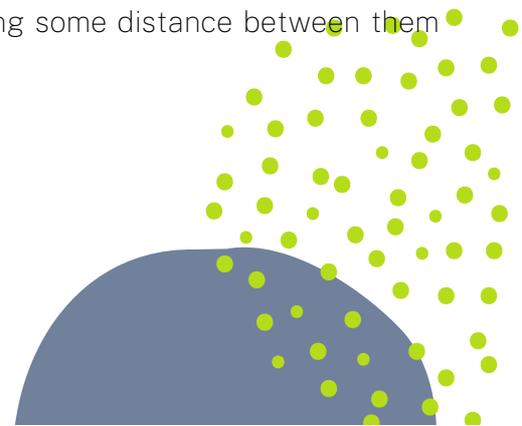
Students: Needs

Students are the main protagonists of Service-Learning. Their work makes or breaks the Service-Learning experience. Students require practical experience and opportunities to learn and grow, they require scenarios that stimulate their ability to think critically and reflect, to prepare them to take on challenges in society. The focus groups have shown that students have trouble using digital tools, and that they have a need for digital competences training. Students are still working on their fundamental self-development and along the way Service-Learning can make a difference. It is often assumed that students have a higher level of digital competence than teachers, however, the inverse should be true. Although students now are digital natives, they can still fall for the same perils as other groups, such as fake news and improper data handling, and need educators who are more skilled than them. They need experiences that allow them to become full-fledged resilient digital citizens who can use digital means effectively to take on opportunities and exercise their rights.

Students: Innovation & Impact

Students learn from each other by sharing an experience working together to address real issues, while they are supported to reflect on the process. Service-Learning provides them a unique opportunity to put theory into practice, to see the impact of the effort they put in, and experience the value of their education. Some students even become role models for the young people they work with during SL experiences. They encounter other realities that shift their views and make them aware of their biases, helping them better understand themselves and the world around them. Service-Learning enriches the educational experience so profoundly that it allows students to develop more skills than with traditional education. It develops their critical and innovative thinking, their interpersonal skills, their civic development. It comes as no surprise that successful SL programmes increase student motivation and effort and generally create a more enjoyable educational experience for students. Enhancing the experience with digital means opens up the possibility for students to take the value of their higher education anywhere, by having access to tools, knowledge, etc. anywhere. It also means physical presence is not always necessary, making it easier for students to participate from wherever they want, to wherever they want and to make an impact anywhere they want.

Digitally enhanced Service-Learning puts students in touch with the digital world in a more profound and responsible way. They gain experience in addressing problems while using digital means, and face challenges such as data handling, information assessment, satisfying the needs of digital communities and effective professional communication in a real way they would not experience with traditional education. This empowers students (digitally) and develops key transversal skills such as critical thinking. It also lowers the barriers to entry for those with fewer opportunities and physical or mental disabilities. For example, students with anxiety can perform much better when having some distance between them and other students/community members.



Stakeholder group stories

Students

Students: Conditions for successful SL&DE

- Students should receive guidance and space to reflect on their experience.
- Teach students how to work with community groups, to hear and respect community needs, and how to transfer knowledge and skills.
- Embed SL into the curriculum to unlock its potential. Students should be given the opportunity to break out of their bubble more regularly. That way, paradigm shifts can occur, and habits can be formed.
- Projects should be aligned and planned with students' interests and needs, as they are the ones carrying them out, and with learning objectives of the course/study, since this is the key thing that allows teachers to give ECTS credits for learning from SL experiences.
- Creating the right expectations on both the student and the community side. Community organizations should understand what SL can offer and plan accordingly. Effective use of the time and manpower that SL offers is key to gaining value for communities.
- Be experimental and open-minded and do not be afraid to take risks and fail. These are all essential elements of SL.
- Reduce complexity. It would also be important for a common form of language related to youth culture. E.g. rap.
- Involving students in the promotion of their work and learning experiences through social media (e.g. Instagram and YouTube), increases the impact of their work and promotes further SL adoption.
- Guide students in (digital) security issues when conducting SL (insurance, privacy, data protection and rights).
- Include a social justice perspective (right and dignity of people).

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Stakeholder group stories

Teachers and trainers

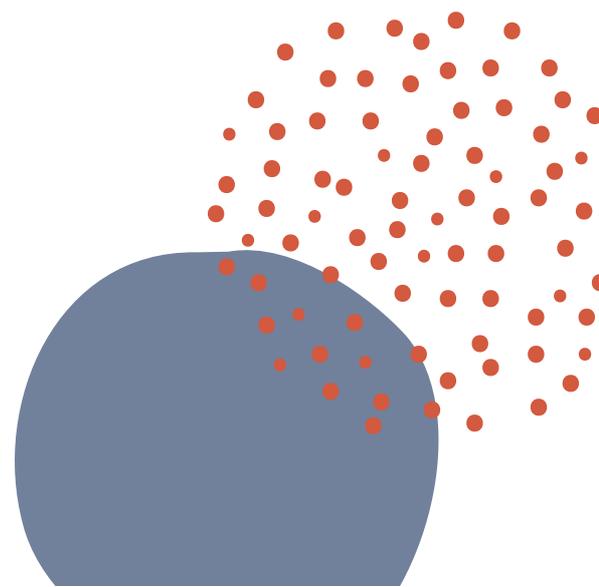


Teachers and trainers: Needs

The teachers' and trainers' role within Service-Learning is to organize courses and take responsibility for the quality of the SL experience. Teachers and trainers primarily want what is best for students, ensuring that students have a valuable experience, but also carry responsibility for ensuring community organizations feel valued. Teacher & trainer needs align with these responsibilities and focus on the space and support they receive from their institutions, and their own capacity to create and manage experiences. In many institutions, Service-Learning has not been embedded in the curriculum. The institutional infrastructure to support, recognize and develop Service-Learning is lacking.

In the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, an acute need arose to digitize faster than most thought possible, which in many cases succeeded. However, both students and teachers & trainers became aware that 'digital only' has some fundamental downsides that are difficult to overcome. In a Europe where COVID-19 is slowly fading to the background, the need to become experts in merging the best elements of online and offline education is shifting. This recognizes how combining these worlds leads to richer education, but also that the world has changed and offline only is no longer sufficient or desired. Knowing how to properly design learning experiences with digital elements embedded and becoming experts in the pedagogical challenges inherent in digital or rather hybrid education has become a priority.

It is often assumed that students have a higher level of digital competence, however, the inverse should be true. To fulfil their responsibilities, teachers and trainers should be competent enough to guide and support digitally native students. They should be able to distinguish if a digital component is an added value or not and to choose digital tools or environments that are relevant and efficient for their intentions. Digital empowerment should focus on the ability to use IT, be digitally literate, the ability to access information and digital knowledge, the ability to learn and cooperate with others, and most importantly, be part of the networked society. Knowing how and when to integrate digital tools and methods into educational practices to enrich the experience for all participants and to engage in the digital transformation process should be the primary aim of the transition to post-pandemic university teaching.



Stakeholder group stories

Teachers and trainers

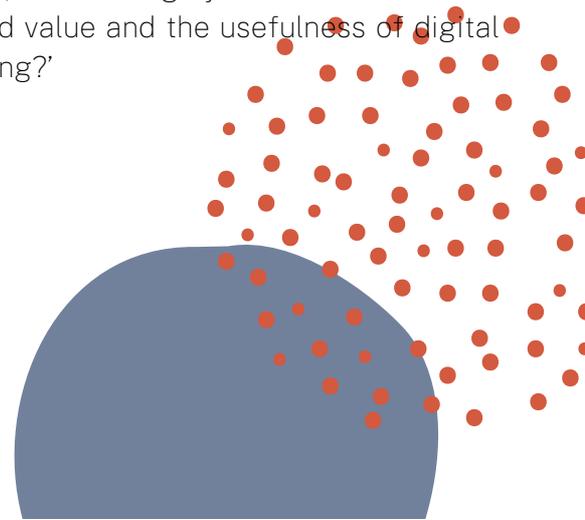


Teachers and trainers: Innovation & Impact

Service-Learning is quite revolutionary for teachers and trainers. It grants the opportunity to directly see the practical value of the materials taught in their programmes and allows for courses to have a societal impact. Service-Learning sheds light on issues that otherwise get little attention, as they are beyond the jurisdiction of public and private sectors. It also allows teachers and trainers to empower other stakeholders, such as those with fewer opportunities who would otherwise not be involved. When Service-Learning becomes embedded in the regular curriculum, staff can expect to build a strong community network connected to current societal issues, providing meaningful connections, inspiration, and a source of new SL experiences.

The role of teachers and trainers shifts in Service-Learning as opposed to regular methods. Due to the peer-to-peer and formative nature of Service-Learning as an experience-based learning method, teaching staff are called upon to guide students, instead of simply teach them, for example by creating space for students to reflect on their work. They become mediators between students and community partners and are responsible for creating assignments with the highest odds of a win-win for all. Managing expectations of all parties becomes a skill that Service-Learning adds to the teachers' and trainers' repertoire. When students are involved in SL projects on digital empowerment of the community, this requires that the teacher also has sufficient knowledge of this digital environment in which his students are navigating.

Becoming digitally empowered entails teachers and trainers to understand how to organize Service-Learning to maximize the value for students and community organizations, while managing their own workload. Connecting with often large groups of community organizations can take a toll on resources of higher education institutions, but by using digital means, teachers and trainers can spend their time more efficiently, i.e., by having progress meetings digitally. Understanding Service-Learning organization based on elements such as geographical distance, varying agendas, available tools and methods and their effective use will allow them to create long-lasting positive impact experiences for students and communities alike and to increase the inclusion of marginalized communities and students with fewer opportunities. However, digital empowerment should not mean 'everything digital, at the expense of everything else'. When developing educational programmes, teachers and trainers need to make well-considered and substantiated choices, without assuming that this choice should always be a digital option. Especially in SL projects, where social interaction plays a key role, some things just work better in a physical environment. The key question should be: 'what is the added value and the usefulness of digital environments in the specific context in which your students are working?'



Stakeholder group stories

Teachers and trainers

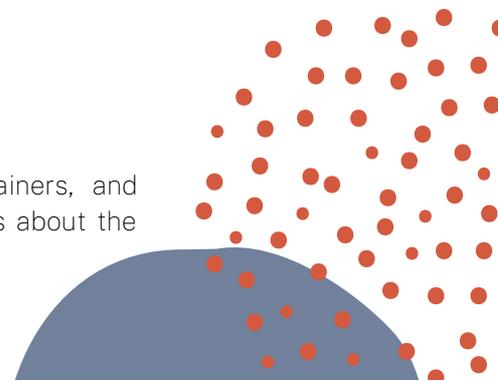


Teachers and trainers: Conditions for successful SL&DE

- Facilitate students participating in SL. Support and motivate students in a ‘doing it together’ style, to foster a shared learning process.
- Work on developing a ‘common digital language’ at the community level, by using tools that are known to community members for example.
- Provide students with sufficient time and space to experiment with digital tools and environments so they can play an active role.
- Offer students time to explore, research and understand the communities to provide suitable services.
- Use open communication and transparency. Approachability is key, teachers & trainers should foster understanding, respect, and diversity.
- Provide students and community participants with clear instructions and manage expectations.
- Co-create clear learning and project objectives.
- Offer community immersive resources for a better interaction between students and communities.
- During semester courses, there is often little time to become immersed in the community. Offer students immersive resources to get them engaged and motivated.
- Guide students along the experience and provide them ample room to reflect. Stimulate their reflection through means such as blogs, vlogs, or e-portfolios.
- Grade students based on their learning, not on the results of the service.

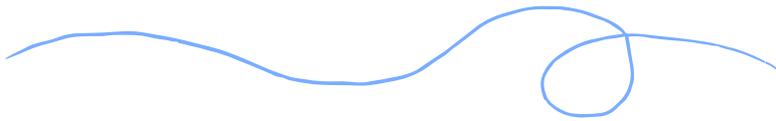


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Stakeholder group stories

Higher Education Institutions



Higher Education Institutions: Needs

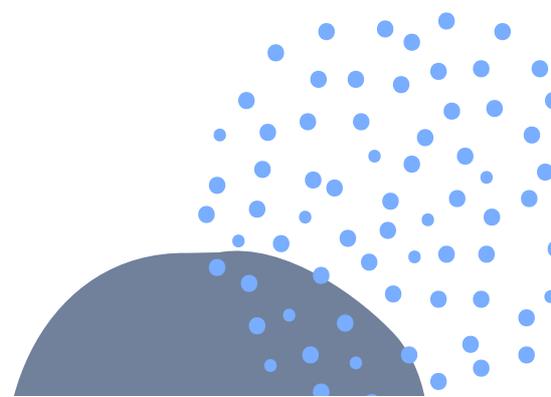
The role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Service-Learning is one of support and logistics. Their main role is to support the faculties in their implementation and development of SL experiences, but it also comprises establishing strategies to improve and expand Service-Learning and to use it to its full potential for societal gains.

Increasingly, HEIs are pressed to, and want to, become more involved in contributing to society. Part of this contribution is to actively make an impact within the communities HEIs reside in, and part of it is to be aware of the issues at play in society so that its research can contribute to understanding and resolving said issues. HEIs need proven ways to fulfil this mission that provide tangible results and are sustainable. On the other hand, HEIs need to offer socially relevant programmes and have a future-proof curriculum. Especially in more technology-focused university programmes, students note that programmes do not change at the same pace as their sectors, but also generally, as COVID-19 showed, the pace of change is very high and HEIs need to keep up.

This is not only a conversation about the content of programmes, but about the methods of teaching. Formative versus summative, flexible versus rigid, hybrid versus offline, synchronous versus asynchronous. To have this conversation, HEIs need to be equipped with the skills, resources, and knowledge on how to organize and institutionalize inclusive education that uses new technologies and educational methods such as Service-Learning. Only then can HEIs develop a clear vision for future education.

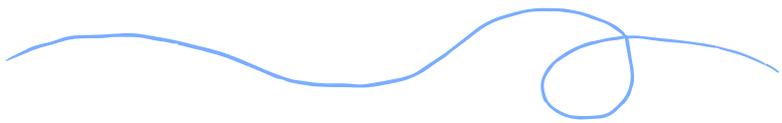
Higher Education Institutions: Innovation & Impact

HEIs have three main missions: teaching, research and contributing to society (Third Mission). Each mission is touched by the inclusion of digitally enriched Service-Learning. First, Service-Learning enriches the curriculum, keeping it relevant and making it future-proof, providing relevant 21st century skill development, practical insights, and valuable experiences to students, in turn making them more engaged, satisfied and better employable. The most fundamental change for HEIs is that Service-Learning allows HEIs to have a direct societal impact while educating their students, where normally the societal impact of education comes after students have left the institution. HEIs interact more with communities and society at large, allowing them to make valuable connections. SL experiences are opportunities to see what is going on in society and can inspire new and relevant research, with high societal relevance.



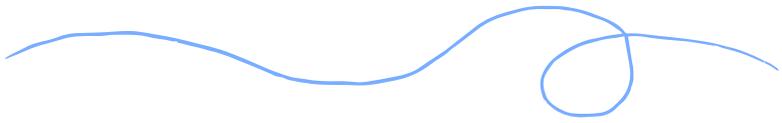
Stakeholder group stories

Higher Education Institutions



Higher Education Institutions: Conditions for successful SL&DE

- Create infrastructure and an independent entity to support SL integration, for a continuous development of SL at the level of the organization. Develop appropriate training on digital (teaching) tools and online platforms.
- Encourage teachers to allow students' creativity and deviation from learned patterns of teaching and thinking, and to accept that they (as well as students) can learn a lot from community partners and users.
- SL can be a more resource-intensive teaching method. HEIs should expect to need more staff support or more staff in general.
- Recognize SL achievements by rewarding teachers' & trainers' SL work either financially or by amending the rules on promotions.
- Create an independent entity to support SL integration, for a continuous development of SL at the level of the organization.
- Investing in technology would allow universities to be more 'open' and transfer their knowledge and research results to citizens and communities.
- Empowering innovative teaching is of paramount importance for achieving student engagement and deepening innovation and entrepreneurial skills.
- Create pilot projects involving highly motivated students and community partners, evaluate the success of the project and disseminate the results to further motivate stakeholders to participate in digital empowerment projects.
- Provide relevant methods, courses, domestic and foreign literature on SL, support networking with teachers and community members/organizations.
- Develop methods and tools for SL evaluation. Keeping a close connection with community participants and students and monitoring their experience and the value they receive allows HEIs to safeguard quality and satisfaction.



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