This schematic is designed to provide you with as many successful tools, examples and suggestions to create an effective day/weekend of community service and community building. Although this is an outline for a single day or weekend project, the original intention of this initiative was to develop lasting relationships in organized community collaboration. The intention in bringing your community closer together to focus on your common values and unifying goals will certainly help support the growing needs of any community, however it’s the relationship building that is fundamentally most sustainable.

The following outline is based on the successful Interfaith Weekend of Community Service created by S.A.R.A.H., a cooperation circle based in Southern California which resulted in an initiative by the URI to propose a project that exemplified the Principle, Purpose and Preamble and resulted in receiving the 2009 Bowe’s Award for the North American Region. The overarching idea was to bring together diverse houses of worship, non-profits, schools, university clubs and civic groups to address the specific needs of their community and provide service together. It is through community service, working shoulder to shoulder while focusing on our common values that the opportunity for creating new experiences and developing relationships across boundaries can occur.

Ideally, intentionally mixing up the congregations so that there is a very diverse group on each project can be achieved. To do this, it’s a good idea that each project is proposed (form attached) first to your group, which can then be managed in a manner to encourage equal participation from several different congregations.

This ambitious project includes the entire county, however it has proven as a successful model for 2 organizations in a single city in both Syracuse (URI CC, Women Transcending Boundaries) and WISDOM (Metro Detroit). Each year the Interfaith Weekend of Service grows, improves and new ideas emerge because of the nature of the spirit of volunteerism and collaboration. In more than one occasion, groups have gone on throughout the year to collaborate on projects, invite one another to worship services, study groups, activities, etc.

Attached are Project Forms, detailed Hub instructions and ideas.

Planning for a day or weekend of service should begin, ideally, 6-12 months in advance.

In order to best organize the community, “Villages” are created. Starting with the geographic corners of the community, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc are invited to convene and explore the needs in their immediate city. Of course, starting with one Village is a good idea so that your first year is manageable.

Social Action or Community Outreach chairs, clergy, active congregants meet to create a working group. Ideally, monthly meetings are convened and move each month faiths hosting each meeting is a creative and interesting way to convene.

From that conversation, Projects are identified. Some included painting the Boys and Girls Club, weeding and/or reforesting the parks, collecting food outside of the supermarket for the local food pantries, painting over graffiti, etc. Other forms of projects may include arranging for a make up artist and hair stylist to come to a women’s shelter and offer makeovers, resume writing and interview coaching. Visiting retirement homes and shut ins are more examples.

[Each year, volunteers are organized in groups of 2 or 3 in front of each door at a supermarket and invited shoppers to add an additional item to their basket and drop it off with them on their way out of the store. Each year, more than 20,000 pounds of food is collected and delivered to the food pantries.]
Most every congregation already supports local non-profits. It is important that those are the projects that are started with, or included. It’s a great way to expose those to another congregations in your “Village” and further strengthen the support to the needy.

[Following the 2009 Weekend of Service The Irvine Village decided to collaborate on a backpack and school supply drive for inner city kids going back to school.]

Once the need is identified, contact the organization you plan on helping; the Dept. of Parks and Recreation, the Homeless Shelter, the Boys and Girls Club and make sure those are the specific needs they have and ask how best you can help them. They will tell you everything you need to know, from how many volunteers they can handle, what to bring, what ages are appropriate, and plan for your volunteers to arrive. If your city has a Volunteer Center, contact them, as they are a great resource. Invite them to join in your day/weekend. They can also advertise your event to encourage more volunteers, which is also an important way to create new experiences with those in the outer community.

Each project is facilitated by a designated “Captain” who is on the project to greet everyone, get them started and to make sure everyone is safe and happy. The Captain is the contact person for that project and manages the volunteers. The Captain contacts several times in advance of the day of project to remind them what to bring and any necessary information. This step is essential to insure a successful turn out of volunteers. Hubs need a Captain as well, including a core planning committee.

Hubs are places the community can come to on that day(s) for indoor projects and are ideal in a large social hall so there’s lots of room for lots of projects. Projects such as putting together care packages for the local women’s shelter, making lasagnas for the homeless shelter, writing letters to soldiers, sorting clothes that were previously collected for the homeless shelters or a yard sale to raise money for a specific cause. Hubs are a great opportunity to do “e-cycling” where the community can bring their electronics that would otherwise be discarded. A blood drive is always a great idea for a Hub activity. It is also the Hub where volunteers can return at the end of their day to share, discuss and meet more people over pizza.

[The Stake Center in Laguna Hills held a car wash and raised $400.00 for Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. The United Congregational Church Hub held a Mother’s Day luncheon for women whose families were affected by AID’s. Together the Village organized entertainers, speakers, a lovely luncheon, gifts and crafts for their children.]

Adventures are when a collaboration of groups decides to take inner city kids to visit the stables, take children from the orphanage to help clean up the park, then a picnic with fun, games, music and pizza.

[In 2009, the Orange County Islamic Foundation shared with Temple Beth El their support of The Illumination Foundation, a homeless family shelter, and together they took all the families to the park for a fun day in the sun as an Adventure.]

The Spirit of Volunteerism is one component to this outline that cannot be instructed, only experienced. Witnessing selfless giving, willingness to collaborate for the needs of others, overcoming inconveniences or unexpected obstacles because the need of the community are being addressed is the most revealing and humbling lessons.

Additional Resources
Contact the media (see media tool kit)
Project Proposal Form
Hubs