



UW-MADISON EXTENSION



POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

3rd Annual Service Learning Project

Community Marks the Spot

Goal:

For youth to develop a sense of place and belonging as they explore selected features of a local community. Features may be environmental, historical, cultural, or other types that highlight some aspect of the community.

Life Skills:

- Planning/Organizing
- Communication
- Social Skills
- Service Learning
- Contributions to Group Effort

Grade Levels:

- High school: Planning, developing, organizing the project
- Middle school: Pilot testing with families
- Elementary: Pilot testing with families

Academic Standards:

NCSS 3—Experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Time or Length of

Experience:

Varies—Planning a game could take several meetings over a period of weeks or months.

Supplies Needed:

- Flip charts or whiteboards
- Markers



PROJECT SUMMARY

In this project, youth will plan a non-competitive game that takes players to different locations around their community, like a scavenger hunt. The locations they choose will highlight a special theme the youth want to learn more about, strengthening their sense of belonging. Through the game, players will go on a fun adventure to explore the community.

BACKGROUND

A great way for youth to learn about and feel connected to the area where they live is through place-based projects. Most youth and adults are most interested in experiences related to their own lives.

Think about it. Why would youth learn about a subject like Wisconsin geography by reading a textbook about the geography of Arizona? It is better to learn about their local geography, firsthand.

The book *Place-Based Education, Connecting Classrooms and Communities* (Sobel, 2017) defines place-based education as the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum." Place-based projects are hands-on, real-world learning experiences. They help youth:

- Connect with their community.
- Appreciate the natural world.
- See themselves as active contributing citizens.
- Do better in school.

Projects like this—that involve young people, adults as partners, and others—help the community and environment too. No matter what the youth want to teach, a great place to start is with the world around them.

References:

Sobel, D. (2017). *Place-based education: Connecting Classrooms and communities*. Orion Magazine.

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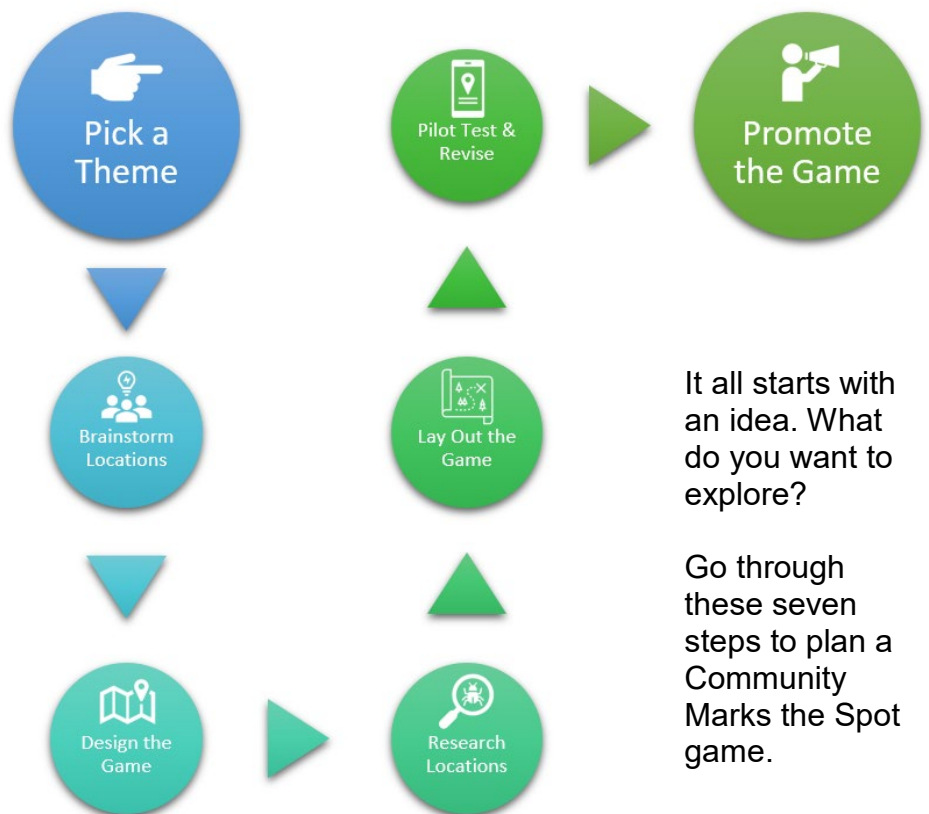
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PLANNING A GAME IN SEVEN STEPS



It all starts with an idea. What do you want to explore?

Go through these seven steps to plan a Community Marks the Spot game.

INVOLVE ALL YOUTH

This project is a great chance for high school-age youth to lead. Adults can encourage their ideas and interests. Support their creativity. Partner with them *without taking over*.

Remember to involve younger youth too. Elementary and middle school-age youth need more hands-on experiences too. They are great at trying things out and saying what they like or do not like. Give them plenty of chances to share what they think every step of the way.

A NOTE ABOUT GEOCACHING:

Project Recommendation:

For this project, we **do not** suggest placing or listing geocaches through [geocaching.com](https://www.geocaching.com). However, we **do** encourage participants and families to check out geocaching on their own. Go explore!

Geocaching is a kind of treasure hunting game. It uses apps and GPS-enabled devices to find cleverly hidden containers, called geocaches. People involved in this activity often share their experiences online. Geocaching is a fun for individuals, families, and groups. However, it has limits for large groups and other individuals.



1. PICK A THEME

Start by defining community. There are many ways to think about it. Is your community a physical place, like a neighborhood, town, or county? Is it a group of people with similar interests? Something else? Decide how your group defines community. Then, brainstorm about that community.

Brainstorm Themes

Start by brainstorming about community themes. Make a list for each of the following:

- What makes your community special
- What needs your community has
- What community group(s) you want to connect with more
- What issue in your community you want to explore
- What would be fun to learn more about

Find your Focus

Combine small ideas for one big one, or break larger ideas into smaller pieces. This helps you expand or narrow the theme to something that feels doable.

Choose three main themes to share with your club/group. Explain the themes clearly and simply. Use pictures if you can. Then choose one of these ways to get quick input.

- **Fist of Five**—Ask participants to vote for how much they like an idea by holding up their hand. Tell them to hold up five fingers up if they like it a lot. Hold up two or three fingers if they like it a little. Hold up their fist if they do not like it at all. Then, ask a few people to share why they voted as they did.
- **Opinion Line**—Make a line on the floor with a long piece of tape or rope. Explain that standing at one end of the line means you like an idea a lot and the other end means they do not like it at all. Participants can stand anywhere on the line. Ask a few people to share why they stood where they did.
- **Make a Pro/Con List**—Take notes while the youth tell you about the strengths (pros) and weaknesses (cons) of the theme.

Choose a Theme

Use the input from your club/group to choose the final theme. Remember this does not have to be the only project you do. Try another idea next year!

Explore Different Perspectives

Before you move on, think about how your theme might affect other people. Think about it from another group's point of view.

- What might they think about the theme you chose?
- How can you learn about what they think?
- How can you share that point of view in a way that respects the group?

For example:

- A group chooses a theme of historical buildings. Some buildings are only accessible by car. The group indicates which sites are close to public transportation lines.
- A group chooses a theme of visiting statues in the community. Some of the statues bring up strong emotions. The group adds a note about the history of the statues from different points of view.
- A group chooses a theme of visiting great hiking trails in their area. Some of the trails are accessible for wheelchairs, but others are not. The group marks the accessible trails on a map to make it easier for people with disabilities to know which sites to visit.

Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Connection to Community” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.



2. BRAINSTORM LOCATIONS

When you choose a theme, it is time to start planning. Be sure to answer these questions:

- **Audience:** Who do you hope will play the game?
- **Possible locations:**
 - What locations do you want to explore? Locations could be almost anything: a building, island, boat landing, landmark, park, or spot to complete a task. Use your imagination.
 - How might locations feel important to different people in different ways? Think about historical, cultural, environmental, or social significance.
 - How do these locations help teach people about the theme?

A good starting number is about five locations. This makes it interesting and challenging without being too hard or too long. However, after you think about all these planning questions, do what fits your audience/players.

Think about Each Location

- **Access:**
 - How can participants get to the locations? Are they accessible for people of all abilities? Ensure that the locations are [accessible](https://go.wisc.edu/08bn49) (<https://go.wisc.edu/08bn49>) for wheelchairs or those with limited mobility.
 - Can participants drive, use public transportation, or walk to get there? What is parking like (i.e. avoid busy street parking)?
 - Are the locations on public property or have public access? What hours are the locations available? Are there fees to visit the locations?
 - Is it easy to get lost? Will there be construction during the game? Do things sometimes change at the locations in a way that affects the game?
- **Safety:**
 - Are the locations physically safe and easy for people to get to? What are the possible risks at the location? Could people get lost?
 - Will all players feel emotionally safe and welcome at that location?
 - What kinds of signs and information are at the location? Do they show respect to all groups of people?
- **Time:**
 - How long do you want the game to last? Think about distance between locations, if the locations are permanent or temporary, if there are bathrooms available, etc.
 - How many locations do you want to use? How long does transportation take between locations?

Note:

Is the location on private land or a Sovereign nation's tribal land? If so, you must ask permission.

Visit the Locations

As you plan, visit the locations in person. Go through all the questions in the “Think about Each Location” section to be sure of the answers.



Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Contributing to Group Effort” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.

Print this page to share safety instructions with youth leaders or participants.

SAFETY FIRST

Stay safe when you visit possible locations. Then, share these safety tips with anyone who plays your game.

- **Take a buddy with you.** Avoid traveling or walking alone. Tell a friend or family member where you are going and when you think you will be home.
- **Be prepared.** Carry a map, water, appropriate clothing for the weather, and
- **Carry a cell phone.** Use it to stay in touch with family or friends during your
- **Dress appropriately.** Add/remove layers as needed to prevent overheating or
- **Plan for your needs.** Plan ahead for when and where to find restrooms, food,

SAFETY FIRST

Stay safe when you visit possible locations. Then, share these safety tips with anyone who plays your game.

- **Take a buddy with you.** Avoid traveling or walking alone. Tell a friend or family member where you are going and when you think you will be home.
- **Be prepared.** Carry a map, water, appropriate clothing for the weather, and snacks. If you are hiking, take compass, light, matches, first aid kit, and signal
- **Carry a cell phone.** Use it to stay in touch with family or friends during your adventure. Remember, it may not work everywhere you go.
- **Dress appropriately.** Add/remove layers as needed to prevent overheating or chilling.
- **Plan for your needs.** Plan ahead for when and where to find restrooms, food, and water along your route.



3. DESIGN THE GAME

At this point, you should have a theme and some excellent locations ready! Now, it is time to design the structure of game. Think about:

- If there is a specific order for players to find the locations
- What players need to do at the locations to prove they were there

For some games, players collect information. For others, they take a picture as proof. For still others, players need to get a stamp. What will players in your game need to do, if anything?

Create a Simple Plan

Create an outline of your locations. Use it to keep information about the locations organized.

- Do the locations need to be visited in a certain order? If so, what is the final location?
 - For some games, it is best to start with the final location and work backwards. For example, in a mystery game, use something about the final location to build clues for the other locations. That way, they need to find the other locations to get to the final one.
- What happens when players visit all the locations?
- Where do players go? What is the big finale, if there is one?
- Is there a reward everyone should receive for finding the locations? Remember, this is a non-competitive game, and we want everyone to have fun.

Ways for Players to Show They Participated

- Pictures
- Sharing on social media (create a hashtag)
- Gather clues from each location to figure out how to get to the final location
- If you can leave something at the location, leave a stamper or QR code so they can show they found it.
- What other ways can you think of?

Having a good plan from the beginning helps the game run smoothly. It makes the game fun to play!

Test the Plan

Do others understand how you laid out the hunt? Is it easy to follow? Test the design with middle or high school-age youth. They can tell you if your plan is clear or confusing.

- Explain the plan in a way they will understand. Show them the outline you created.
- Then, ask for feedback. Depending on how much time you have, ask them to:
 - Explain it back to you. Pay attention to see if they understand it correctly.
 - OR
 - Use your sample layout and pretend to play the game.



Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Successes and Challenges” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.



4. RESEARCH LOCATIONS

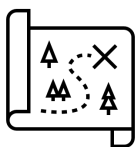
How can you research the locations? Reach out to your local library, chamber of commerce, historical society, community groups, and newspapers. Invite them to work with you on the project.

- Who are the people in your community that are especially interested in your theme? Why is each location important?
- What interests YOU about the location?
- Are there stories about the locations?
- Where does this research take you? Are there opportunities of more discovery that you can share with your players?

If you plan to share stories and specific information in your education, make sure you cite your sources! That means you tell players where you got your information.

Also, keep in mind that most people have a very short attention span (only about five seconds). Try to keep your information short, interesting, and easy enough for a 5th grader to read.

Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Connection to Community” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.



5. LAY OUT THE GAME—VISUALLY

Think about how to show and talk about the game. Players must be able to understand it and easily take part.

- Will they use an app or website that points them to your locations?
- Can players still take part if they do not have a device like a smart phone or tablet?
- Consider what people from different ages and backgrounds might need (e.g. words and images to improve understanding). Is there a way to make it easy, fun, and accessible for all?

Before you build it, ask community partners what they think. Share your ideas for how the game will work. Then ask them, “Will this work for you?” Getting other perspectives will help you involve more players in your game.

When you have a plan you think will work, start to develop it. This step may take time. Talk with your Club/Group Leader, community partners, or Extension Educator if you need help posting online, making copies, or taking other steps.

Game Layout Ideas

- Create a brochure with pictures, directions, and more information ([Iron County Waterfalls](#)—link at bottom of page).
- Create a story to follow. Publish it in book form or online. ([Legend of Eloise example](#))
- Road Trip Challenge ([Walworth County example](#))
- Virtual Google classroom

Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Sparks and Careers” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.

Need tips about how to use technology?
Search YouTube for simple tutorials about
a new technology or strategy you want to try.



6. PILOT TEST AND REVISE

A pilot test is a chance to try ideas with a small group. Think of it as a practice run. The group says what they liked or did not like. They give suggestions for how to make it better. Youth in elementary and middle school, with their families, can help with this.

Here's how to pilot test your game:

- Look for a variety of people—different ages, backgrounds, experiences—to test your game.
- Ask each youth or family to follow your instructions to explore one (or more) of the game locations you identified.
- Then, ask them to answer these questions:
 - Was it fun?
 - What worked well?
 - What was difficult or confusing?
 - How can we make it better?
 - Was it easy to show they took part?
- To gather feedback about the hunt:
 - Use a short survey (on computer or on paper during a meeting);
 - Use a short phone call or virtual meeting to talk to the youth or family about their experience. Take notes about what they say *or*
 - Use Fist of Five or the Opinion Line in a group setting. Take notes about what people say.

Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Successes and Challenges” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.



7. PROMOTE THE GAME

After you test the game and gather feedback, decide if you need to change anything. If not, it is time to promote your event!

How do you want to promote your game?

- Brainstorm how you and others in your community learn about events. Use the ideas you list to promote the game. Consider both print and online resources like newspapers, posters, websites, social media, radio spots, or school announcements.
- Ask your community partners to help with marketing. Who do they hope participates in the game? How can they help spread the word?
- As you create your publicity, make sure to use approved logos and graphics.

If your project is technology-based, consider including that information in your publicity (i.e. QR codes to the app store or your game website). If you are creating posters and brochures make sure you plan how to distribute them throughout your community.

Daily Wrap-Up: Use the “Service Learning” questions on page 8 to lead reflection.



REFLECT AND APPLY

This project may take several weeks or months to plan. At the end of each planning meeting, choose a set of questions from the list below to help the youth reflect on their experiences.

Successes and Challenges

- What successes did you/your group have as you worked on this project?
- What was challenging about this project?
- How did you work through challenges?

Contributing to Group Effort

- How have you used your skills and ideas to help the group?
- What has someone else done that has really helped the group?
- How has the group worked through challenges together?
- What would you do differently to make the teamwork even better?

Skills

- How have you used communication skills to work on this project?
- What planning or organizing skills have you used for this project?
- What is a new skill that you or the group might like to learn more about to help with this or a future project?

Connection to Community

- How did this project help you feel connected with people or places in your community?
- Do you think that feeling connected to people or places in your community is important? Why or why not?
- How would you like to stay connected with the people and places you learned about through this project?

Sparks and Careers

- What was your favorite part of working on this project? Some ideas might include planning, learning about history, doing research, visiting new places, working with a team, or promoting the project.
- What careers might use those skills you liked most?

Service Learning

- What have you learned about generosity through this project?
- How do you think you/your group have served your community through this project?
- What other service project ideas do you have because you participated in this project?



EXPLORE MORE

Explore more about geocaching or using GPS with these resources:

- [NASA GPS activities and learning](https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/search/GPS/) (<https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/search/GPS/>)
- Explore geocaching at geocaching.com

Learn more about GIS – Global Information Systems. Join the [4-H GIS GPS Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/4hgisgps/) (<https://www.facebook.com/4hgisgps/>) or explore the [4-H Maps and Apps activity](https://4-h.org/parents/4-h-stem-challenge/maps-and-apps/) (<https://4-h.org/parents/4-h-stem-challenge/maps-and-apps/>).

Visit the library to find historic, topographic, or other maps to learn more about the features of the land now and in the past.

Think of another theme in your community you want to learn more about. Where can you learn more about it? Who else would be interested? How can you share what you learned?

Think about a career you are interested in because of your work on this project. Find someone in your community who has a career in that field. Interview them to learn more about how they got started.