



## **USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference**

### **SERVING AND LEARNING: A Model for Watershed-Based Water Quality Improvement**

We developed and implemented a strategy that addresses both the technical needs of communities and the educational needs of students in water quality through service learning. Service learning is a learning approach that engages students in organized experiences that combine academic learning with service in ways that benefit both the students and the community. Our goal was to engage colleges and universities with local communities as partners in water quality restoration and protection through service learning, with the ultimate goal of improving water quality in high priority watersheds in Kansas. Communities benefit through the projects and activities implemented together with students, and students benefit from enhanced understanding of important social problems, increased civic responsibility, and higher academic achievement and motivation to learn. Through this process we are:

- identifying community/watershed needs and linking them to college/university technical resources through service learning projects aimed at water quality improvement;
- providing training and support for communities and colleges/university partners in ways to effectively design and implement service learning projects in watersheds in need of restoration and protection;
- fostering communications and information flow among potential participants and providing public information about the opportunities and accomplishments of service learning; and
- Monitoring and evaluating the service learning process.

To date, we have implemented 17 projects with 7 institutions. We provide financial incentives for participation to both communities and colleges/universities in the form of mini-grants. Additionally, we offer travel grants for faculty to attend conferences or professional meetings that will enhance their capacity to implement service learning projects or travel grants for community members to attend meetings, conferences, or trainings that will enhance their capacity to implement water quality improvements. We have professional educational evaluators to monitor and evaluate the service learning process and the project outcomes through a comprehensive evaluation system that includes a variety of surveys and focus group protocols.

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