Applied sociology is basically what sociologists do for nonsociologists and sometimes for themselves. Applied sociology includes the teaching of sociology as one of the liberating arts and sciences. It also involves the practice of sociology outside academia in the public and private sectors. Either way, applied sociology needs support groups, and state sociological associations need useful things to do beyond their traditional interests in academic teaching and research. Professional sociological associations, and especially those that serve at the local, state level, can become important support groups for applied sociology. This article suggests five types of applied sociology projects appropriate for state associations. These are volunteering applied sociology; doing applied sociology through consulting; making the value of sociological applications more visible; identifying applied sociology jobs for our baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral graduates; and helping to improve the socioeconomic outlook for our academic colleagues and, in turn, ourselves. State associations provide an organizational base, proximate members, and local opportunities for applying sociology.

We still have a lot to learn about sociology, and we may understand less than we know. The problem is, we spend precious little time applying the sociology we do know and understand. Indeed, academic sociologists have not developed applied counterparts such as clinicians in psychology or business administration in economics. Doing sociology outside the classroom may not be as easy as teaching it. However, the challenge and new experience of using sociology can take it to a new level.

Ron Wimberley, William Neal Reynolds Professor of Sociology at North Carolina State University, teaches sociological research methods and does research on the southern Black Belt and other topics. He also attempts applied sociology through volunteer work, consulting, and occasional leaves from his university position. Catherine Harris of Wake Forest University is appreciated for suggesting the topic. The author is responsible for the views expressed in the article.
What is applied sociology? Essentially, applied sociology is what sociologists do for nonsociologists, and occasionally for themselves. In abstract, applied sociology attempts to put sociological knowledge, methods, and understanding into practice to solve social problems.

However defined in the abstract, applied sociology has many operational meanings. At the grassroots, applied sociology is:

- Getting your child to do his or her homework, on time, all of it.
- Using the right social psychology to lose weight, change a bad habit, or try to help others to change their ways.
- Administering social justice to disputes between employees according to the rules and for the good of the organization and in fairness to its employees.
- Writing an op-ed piece for the newspaper to give a sociological perspective on an issue of public interest.
- Knowing how and when to inject your ideas during a meeting so that they have a higher probability of being accepted.
- Developing community or environmental policy from research findings.
- Drafting possible legislative programs for places that experience cut-backs in government funding and must, somehow, become more self-reliant if quality of life is to be maintained or improved.
- A report on the state of demographic research on migration needed by a government funding agency by 11:00 tomorrow morning.

Add your own examples.

The Liberal Arts Application

There are at least two types of applied sociology. One is the humanistic, liberal arts type. The liberal or liberating arts—one of which is sociology—are to help one to better understand and feel what it is to be human, or to become a better, well-rounded, educated person. Applying sociology for this purpose means teaching sociology to people who will never be sociologists. This enrichment is an application of sociology that we have been doing—by teaching—all along. The humanistic, liberal arts perspective—the application of sociology as part of a liberating education—then, is actually one type of applied sociology.

We probably overlook this as an application of sociology, but we teach sociology to a lot of people who will not be sociologists, and that is how most of us apply sociology most of the time. Some of our teaching is to sociology majors; some is service teaching to nonmajors. Either way, sociology is part of the liberating education that helps students understand and use the alternatives one’s society—and other societies—has to offer.

Along with sociology, music is another subject offered in a traditional liberal arts education. Some music graduates return to teach music to still more students of whom some, in turn, repeat the cycle. The majority of music students, however, do not get jobs as music teachers but are simply enriched by a better appreciation for music in and of itself. A third group of music students go on to