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service- learning



a tool for developing service-learning projects
with a community or university partner

Service-learning: A definition

“Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.”

· Learn & Serve America
National Service-Learning
Clearinghouse

Service-learning:

At the core of service-learning is the principle that community service can be connected to classroom learning in such a way that service is more informed by theoretical and conceptual understanding and learning is more informed by the realities of the world.

Characteristics of service-learning:

- Service projects are part of a course; students get academic credit for their service work in the community
- Service projects must relate in some way to the content of the course
- Service projects should be meaningful to the student and beneficial to the organization
- Service projects are usually limited in scope (e.g., 2-3 hours per week or 15-20 hours per semester)

What service-learning is *not*:

- **An Internship:** Service-learning differs from internships, which typically require students to spend more time on site (e.g., 10 hours per week or even up to 40 hours per week during the summer). Internships may or may not have a connection to an academic course.
- **Regular volunteerism:** Service-learning students differ from other volunteers in that the latter group usually has no educational requirements connected to the community service work.

Types of service-learning

While service-learning varies from course to course and from organization to organization, what follows is a list of general types of service-learning that you may want to consider for your course or organization.

Direct Service:

Service-learning students who do direct service typically work on-site at an organization for 2-3 hours per week. The service typically offers students a taste of the core operations of an organization and contributes to its central mission.

Project-based Service-Learning:

This approach involves students, often working in teams, serving organizations as pre-professional “consultants.” The students work with agency staff to identify a problem and apply discipline-specific knowledge and skills to suggest possible solutions, usually with a written report as the “deliverable.”

Community-Based Action Research:

This approach involves students using a wide range of research methodologies to examine important community issues. In some cases, community organizations and/or their clients are involved in various steps of the research process, such as developing the research question(s), identifying the appropriate methodolog(ies), collecting and analyzing the data, and interpreting the results.

Please use this template as:

- inspiration for designing a service-learning project for an organization
- a tool for developing a service-learning course
- a guide for conversation

Community organization information

Agency staff: Begin by thinking about the work of your organization, breaking it down into concrete tasks. How much time does each task take? What are the required skills to do the work? What additional assistance, skills, and knowledge does your organization currently need? How could service-learning students help to fill this gap?

- Organization name and contact information (including mailing address, telephone, fax, website, email address, and map with driving and/or walking directions)
- Site supervisor's contact information (including telephone numbers, fax, email and preferred method of contact for faculty, service-learning staff, and students)
- Back-up or alternative supervisor contact information
- Organization mission statement
- What type(s) of service-learning assignment would best serve the organization?
- How many students can the organization adequately manage, and in what roles?
- What will the students do, specifically, for the organization (e.g., type of direct service, desired deliverable)? Provide as many details about the project as possible.
- What kind of pre-service training or orientation will be provided for the students—and who will provide it? What special skills are required of the students, if any? What information about the organization and/or project needs to be included in that training?
- How much on-site training and supervision are the students likely to require? How many hours per week will the staff have to mentor service-learning students?
- What will students learn from their service experiences at the organization? How does this link to the course goals and requirements?
- What are the intended short- and long-term goals of the service-learning project for the organization?

- How can the service-learning project further the organization's mission?
- How will the organization implement the recommendations, use the research findings or sustain the service after the service-learning project ends?
- How can the organization build on the service-learning project with a future service-learning course in the future (in either the same or a different discipline)?
- Mechanisms for keeping track of student work (e.g., time sheets, attendance slips, sign-in logs, etc.)
- Mechanisms for communicating problems to university partner
- How else could the organization contribute to the class (e.g., guest lecture, attend or host student class presentations, assist with student/project evaluations) – and vice versa?
- What other kinds of assistance could the organization use to more effectively manage service-learning students?

University course information

University instructors: Begin by thinking about the goals for your course—what do you want your students to learn? What might students learn in a community context that they are unlikely to learn in a classroom? What kind(s) of service-learning assignments are most likely to accomplish these learning outcomes? Do these projects lend themselves to individual or group work?

- Course name and number / description / learning objectives
- Faculty member's name and contact information (including mailing address, telephone numbers, fax, email, website, and preferred method of contact for students, agency staff and service-learning staff)
- Other campus contacts: service-learning staff, teaching assistants, etc.
- Anticipated course enrollment
- What type(s) of service-learning assignment would best serve the learning objectives of the course?
- Will the service component be required or optional? How much credit will be assigned to the service component? How will the work be assessed?
- What kind of pre-service training or orientation will be provided for the students—and who will provide it? What information about the course and/or project needs to be included in that training?

- What special parameters are required of the service-learning assignment (e.g., direct contact with a Spanish-speaking population, ability to practice certain skills)? Are there any prerequisites for the course?
- How will the instructor incorporate the students' community experiences into classroom activities (e.g., reflection, course assignments)?
- How will the students' work at the site benefit the organization?
- What are the intended short- and long-term goals of the service-learning project for the students?
- How will the instructor facilitate the delivery of research findings, final reports, to the community partner after the service-learning project ends?
- Mechanisms for keeping track of student work (e.g., time sheets, attendance slips, sign-in logs, etc.)
- Mechanisms for communicating problems to community partner

This document was developed by Susan Harris and Melissa Gaeke using feedback from the participants of a **USC Community Based Learning Collaborative** workshop in April 2009.

We hope this will serve as a useful tool for developing mutually beneficial and truly reciprocal service-learning partnerships.

