PROCEDURAL SUGGESTIONS
PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COMMUNITY PARTNER SUCCESS

1. Remember, service learners are students first and foremost. Supervisors must always keep in mind that not only do service learning students want to help meet important community needs, but they are also using the experience as the basis for understanding their college course. Students receive academic credit for learning through their service efforts. Your role would be to help students think about what the experience means to them, the organizational context, and overall societal issues and impacts.

2. Plan ahead. Clear, well thought-out service learning placement descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities, and skills needed must be prepared and given to the office of Academic Community Partnerships, the student and the course instructor. Often a fresh needs assessment with key staff will allow you to more effectively and creatively use service learners within the framework of your agency/school. Are there tasks that you and your staff are now doing that could be divided up and given to one or several students? Is there a project that you’ve always wanted to do but never had the time to organize? Positions that carry some degree of responsibility and involve client contact are ideal.

3. Orient, train, supervise. Students require carefully structured orientation to your agency/school, staff, and clients. This should answer such questions as “Where do I fit in? How do I get things done? What do I need to be aware of? What is expected of me? How do I get information/support if my supervisor is not available? What do I have to learn?” Introduce them to other staff, give them a tour of the facility, and make sure they feel comfortable and welcome. Students should also be familiarized with your mission and key community and societal issues facing your agency/school (i.e., “the bigger picture” – why you do what you do and how the student can contribute to this end). Please see the Orientation Checklist on Page 16.

4. Be aware that some students may not match your needs. Be selective. Although the university will refer student service learning candidates to your agency/school, the final selection will be made by you. If a student’s qualifications and/or motivations are not in harmony with your needs, it is your right and obligation to not accept this student.

5. Be realistic with your time commitment expectations of students. Think academic term. Remember that you will have to be aware of the academic schedule and adapt accordingly. (Offer training sessions early in the term and expect students only for a term.)

6. Be an involved teacher and mentor for our students. Throughout the assignment, the supervisor should help the student interpret the experience and the relationship between what he/she is doing and the work of the agency/school and others. The student-supervisor relationship is one of the most significant parts of the
student’s experience and often determines the success of the placement. The supervisor is truly a partner in the student’s education and should view himself or herself as an “educator.”

7. **Say thanks.** Like everyone, students want to be welcomed and appreciated. This may take many forms, either a letter of recognition, a thank you note, or a simple acknowledgment of a job well done. Students also need to see how their work is important to your agency/school’s mission. Ask the students how they’re doing and what can be improved upon.

8. **Talk to us.** Please keep the office of Academic Community Partnerships informed of any concerns, problems, successes, or other pertinent issues related to the placement and/or student. We are here to facilitate the entire process and ensure that all parties are satisfied.

**TURNING SERVICE INTO LEARNING: HELPING STUDENTS GET THE MOST OUT OF THEIR SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

**How students learn from this experience**

There are countless benefits that can result for students, community, and community partners when service learning is successful. To name just a few, students learn the value of service and their ability to make a difference, classroom learning is enhanced, they become lifelong volunteers, and they are better prepared to lead lives of engaged, democratic citizenship. Agencies and schools gain invaluable people-power, fresh ideas and energy, and client needs are met. Our communities gain a more involved, engaged citizenry who are more informed and more likely to work collaboratively to solve community problems.

However, we also know that community service in and of itself won't necessarily result in student learning or the benefits that we mentioned above. In fact, without conscious attention to the issues addressed and the learning strategies employed when engaging in service learning, students merely engaging in service may come away as civically disengaged as they were when they started participating in service learning. As John Dewey (1938) understood it, the "discipline of experience" by itself may even be "miseducative," and therefore must always be subjected "to the tests of intelligent development and directions."
Reflection - the key to helping students gain the most from their service learning experience.

In order for your agency/school to most effectively foster student learning, reflection activities should be included in the service experience. Reflection means the process of thinking about what we do and processing it to draw meaning from our experiences. Reflection is an intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something we do and the consequences which result. Reflection translates experiences into knowledge.

In your role as a community partner supervisor, it is essential that you help students reflect on their experiences - in short, help them think critically about what they are doing, why it is important, and what it means. The following are a few examples of how you can help students reflect:

**Reflection Activities for Community Partner Supervisors**

1. **Thorough orientation** – The orientation should be comprehensive, informing the student about your agency's/school's mission, goals and the work you do in the community. Talk to them about why they have chosen your site and what interests them about it, etc.

2. **Processing meetings** – Ask students open-ended questions about their experiences (e.g., What are you learning? What has surprised you? What can we do to solve this societal problem?)

3. **Critical thinking questions** – Ask students questions that challenge them to explore and think critically about your agency/school and the societal issues it addresses. Ask them to find answers to these questions during the course of their service and process that they discover with them periodically. (Why can’t children read? Why does homelessness exist?) Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a career in this field.
RISK MANAGEMENT

Various types of safety issues may arise at different steps in the Service Learning process. These are examples of some of the potential issues about which all participants should be aware.

Screening Participants And Supervision

- Develop an appropriate ratio between supervisors and student participants
- Screen the person who will be supervising student activity to ensure that the individual is both willing and able to provide good supervision
- Create and enforce supervisory policies and procedures
- Screen the student participants to ensure that they are academically, mentally, and physically qualified for the experience
- Inform students of any invasive screening tools that might be used (drug test or check of driving record)
- Advise students of the risks of the off-campus environment and the anticipated activity
- Provide appropriate safety training and address special needs that must be accommodated to perform the activity safely
- Ensure respect for the student’s privacy, dignity, and civil rights
- Develop policies and procedures for reporting allegations of discrimination or harassment and advise the student about them.
- Develop policies and procedures that will enhance safety (such as use of protective equipment, time limits, prohibited activity in certain types of weather or under certain conditions, safety reminders posted near power equipment or in hazardous areas)
- Restrict a student’s access to confidential and proprietary information at the off-site location and to materials with great value (narcotics, cash, or negotiable instruments)

Premises Safety

- Maintain heating, cooling, and ventilation that is appropriate for the environment and anticipated activity
- Ensure a safe means of ingress and egress and communicate an evacuation policy to the student
- Perform periodic inspection to ensure that the paths of ingress and egress are clear and safe
- Initiate/ enforce appropriate crime prevention policies (such as good lighting and locks, escorts to parking lots)
- Perform inspections to ensure that the facility and its equipment are safe and ergonomically appropriate

Transportation

- Establish clear guidelines as to who is responsible for transportation to the from the agency site; students typically must arrange their own transportation without facilitation by faculty
- If transportation is needed on-site, safe transportation must be ensured, including checking the safety of the vehicle and the driving record and ability of the driver.
Emergency Preparedness And Response

- Establish a contingency plan if the off-site location is unavailable for use for the anticipated activity
- Create a procedure to respond to a medical or other emergency
- Handle communications with campus constituencies (such as concerned faculty, staff, students, alumni) if a problem arises
- Handle media or governmental agencies inquiries if a problem occurs

Legal Compliance

- Obtain any licenses or permits for the activity or its anticipated location
- Comply with laws governing the off-campus activity (such as building, or health or life safety codes)
- Comply with mandated reporting laws applicable to the off-campus activity (such as suspected child or elder abuse, release of hazardous substance into the environment, or workplace injury)
# Orientation Checklist

Orientation of all students should be completed prior to their first service learning activity either individually or in a group. You may want to consider this a brief training session and conduct it as you would with new employees or volunteers. Training can include verbal and/or written information. Coverage of the following should be included:

- Details related to serving at the site
- Mission of the community partner
- List of programs and services
- Specific policies and procedures related to the service placement
- Review of any proof of eligibility that is needed, including the cost and other details (e.g., fingerprinting, background check)
- Expectations
- Job description detailing the scope of the service to be performed
- Contact information of the site supervisor
- Who the student should call if unable to make scheduled service or late
- Appropriate attire
- Learning outcomes including qualities or skills to be developed
- Confidentiality rules including if photos and/or video are allowed
- Risk management
- What students should do if harassment occurs
- Service schedule: beginning and end dates, days, times
- Place where students check in
- How students’ service hours are recorded
- Location of sites including directions and parking information, public transit information
- Evaluation

Once students have arrived it is important to reiterate crucial information including:

- Site specific information
- Tour including location of restrooms and break room
- Check-in information
- Location of logbook
- Review of safety rules
- Location of emergency exits
- Review of emergency procedures
- Introduction of students to other staff
- Emergency contact information
- Accident procedures at the site