

10 Steps to Planning & Executing a Community Service Project

1. Determine what you're looking for!

- **Identify an issue:** What community issue would your group like to address? **Determine numbers:** When you contact an agency, it is helpful to offer an estimate of how many volunteers will be coming.
- **Choose possible dates & times:** The agency will want to know when you want to volunteer. It helps to be as specific as you can and try to offer a few options. Be realistic about the start time (how early will people really get going on a weekend morning?) and the duration (what else do people have to do that day?) of the project.

2. Research possible agencies:

- If you're interested in an agency, it's always wise to call and see what projects they might have available for your group.

3. Contact the agency's volunteer coordinator

- **Make multiple calls at once:** We recommend calling all 3-5 agencies at once on the assumption that some will not work out. If you can agencies one at a time, play phone tag, and then find that the agency is not a good fit for whatever reason, then you may have let a significant amount of time go by only to start at "square one" again with the next agency. It is important to note that when you outreach to multiple agencies at once, you need to be respectful and responsive to all of them once you have picked your project. If you find an agency to work with and another returns your call, be sure to call that agency back and let them know you've already found someone to work with.
- **Be patient but persistent:** Community agencies are often small, overwhelmed with work, and have high turnover. Even if you have a contact name, that person may have moved on, so be sure to ask for the volunteer coordinator and explain why you are calling. Be patient but persistent! You may not hear back right away, but also be sure to follow-up and leave professional messages with your full name, purpose, your affiliation with Junior League, your phone number, and the best time to reach you. If you can establish email contact, this may be the most effective way to make contact and work out details.

4. Develop a plan that will be mutually beneficial.

- When you make contact with the volunteer coordinator, inquire about possible volunteer projects for your group and share with them your numbers and possible dates. Your project should fit your group's needs and be educational, fun, and rewarding – but it also should meet an identified community need as articulated by the agency. Be sure to listen to what the agency needs! If your ideas do not mesh or scheduling conflicts arise, it is alright to tell the agency that the project will not work out. Be sure to communicate this clearly and with advance notice.

5. Confirm, Confirm, Confirm!

- **Confirm with the agency:** If you need to bring the information you've collected back to your group, do this now. Whether you make a group decision or you decide which agency to work with on your own, it is important to make sure the agency knows you do plan to work with them. If you've established email communication, this is a great way to articulate the details you've discussed so there's no confusion.
- **Confirm with your group:** Get commitments from members of your group and make sure they know when and where to meet, how to dress, and when they'll be back to campus. The more you can tell them about the agency's mission and what you'll be doing, the more excited and committed they'll be to the project. Be sure to offer reminders just before the project.

6. Arrange for transportation and get there (safely & on time)

- Make appropriate arrangements with the group!. Allow enough time for travel, orientation, the service project, clean-up, and reflection. Be sure to arrive to your project on time, dressed appropriately, and ready to work!

7. Ask for an orientation

- When your group arrives for the project, a critical component of your service will be learning more about the mission and goals of the organization. Why and how did the agency develop? What are its current successes and challenges? How will the project you work on contribute to the overall mission of the organization? Be sure to ask for an orientation, even if it's just a quick 5 or 10 minute overview. If you are doing [indirect service](#), it is even more important to learn about the agency so that you have a context for the work you are doing.

8. Enjoy the project and make a difference!

- Have fun and stay on task. Be sure everybody is involved in the project and ask for more guidance if you need it. When St. Louis community-based organizations were asked to describe their favorite volunteers, this is what they said: **Enthusiastic, Committed, Hard-working, Self-motivated, Prompt, Caring, Flexible, Wants to make a difference, Willing to learn, Patient, Follows directions well, Willing to do whatever is needed, Outgoing, Respects confidentiality and privacy, Reliable, Cheerful, Energetic!**

9. Allow time for discussion & reflection

- Reflection allows your group time to think about their experience in broader terms: How did this affect me? Did I make a difference today? How did my expectations compare with my experience? How might I get more involved in this issue? It's important to not just walk away from the agency, get back into your campus routine, and never consider the service experience again. Allow time to ask questions of the agency staff, have some brief discussion on the way back to campus, or, if time allows, go to ice cream, coffee, or lunch with your group to keep talking about your experience.

10. Follow-up & wrap-up

- **Evaluate for your group:** Your project is not quite complete when you leave the agency. It is important to evaluate the experience with your group. Did they like the service project? Would they go back? Did the logistics work? Would you recommend the agency to other groups or individuals? Keeping this information in your group's files can help future leaders in your group. You can do this by completing a [Community Service Project Evaluation](#).
 - **Say Thanks!** Be sure to thank the agency for hosting you. Although you offered a service to them, they took time out of their schedules (often on a weekend or evening) to be with you and to prepare for your project. You can say thanks by mailing a note, sending an email, or leaving a voice message. Don't forget to thank your group for their participation as well.