COASTAL CAROLINA
UNIVERSITY
Civic Engagement

# Student Guide to Connecting with Community Partners & Planning Service Events

## I.      Before Contacting A Community Partner

### 1.  Identify a Social Issue

What social issue would you and/or your group like to address?  Many students identify the type of service task they would like to complete instead of doing the appropriate research to identify a social issue.   For example, environmental conservation and preservation would be the social issue for a service project with doing a beach clean-up. Researching community partner before calling or emailing will help you determine if a community partner works closely with the social issue that you are interested in addressing.  Check out community partners' websites, social media accounts, and mission statements to learn more about their role in the community. CCU's Civic Engagement office or the United Way of Horry County are great resources in identifying community partners to work alongside various social issues.

### 2.  Appoint a Facilitator

If you are serving with a group, one person from the group will need to be the primary contact between the group and the community partner.  The facilitator is responsible for delivering information to both the group and the community partner.  This person will receive all communication on behalf of the group regarding information from the community partner and will be responsible for communicating with all group members.

### 3.  Determine Number of Volunteers

If you are serving with a group, determine the number of volunteers who will participate in the service. When you contact a community partner, it is helpful to offer an estimate of how many volunteers will be coming.  Be honest about how many people will follow through on their commitment given class and work conflicts.  If you have 15 people in your group, it is unlikely that all 15 will sign up and/or follow through.

Most community partners consider groups of 10-20 to be large service groups.  It may be challenging to the community partner to manage and supervise groups larger than 20 people.  Be flexible in working with the community partner with how many volunteers they can manage at one time.

### 4.  Choose Dates and Times

Community partners will want to know when you want to volunteer.  It helps to be as specific as you can and to offer a few options.  Be realistic about the start time (how early will people really get going on a weekend, how long does it take to get from campus to the community partner site) and the duration (what else do people have to do that day?) of the project.

If you are serving independently and looking for a long-term commitment, you should let the community partner know of any recurring commitments (classes, work schedule, etc.) that you have going on in a given semester.

## II. Things to Know Before Reaching Out to Community Partners

While student volunteers can be an invaluable resource to community partners, they also require time and energy from community partner – so it's important to be sure that CCU students know what is most helpful to community partners.

As you think about how you can be involved in our community, listen to what community partners have to say: it can help you enrich their work rather than become a drain on their resources.

### What Community Partners Need from Students
- **Openness**: Be prepared to see what service work is really like, rather than idealizing service and volunteerism
- **Local focus:** Find the connections between broad, ambitious impact and local engagement and learning activities
- **Positivity:** Everything you do is a learning experience – particularly the challenging things. Seek that and you'll find the goodness in each experience
- **Patience:** Social change takes time! Ask your community partner to help you see the long view.
- **Tenacity:** Remain committed through the time you've agreed to; stopping mid-way leads to many negative effects
- **Consistency:** If you are completing service for a course, a requirement, or are looking to engage in long-term service, plan to volunteer at the same time each week
- **Be realistic:** For example, can you really do one year, for two hours per week?
- **Punctuality:** Show that you respect your community's time by being on time
- **Curiosity:** Be willing to learn, and to take the time required in training to do so
- **Make connections:** Define how your service experience relates to your academic and career goals

## III. Reaching out to Community Partners

## 1. Email AND Call the Community Partner
First, call the community partner. Some community partners are fortunate enough to have a designated volunteer coordinator. Volunteer coordinators would be the first point of contact with the community partner and setting up your service. If a community partner does not have a volunteer coordinator, call the main line of the community partner and ask to speak with the representative who works with volunteers.

Be professional in all phone conversations and emails with community partners. Feel free to utilize the phone call/voice mail and email templates below when reaching out to community partners. **Do not send a text message to a community partner for the first few initial conversations.** For initial conversations or setting up a one-time opportunity, text messages are not a professional method of communication. Always use the community partners' preferred method of communication (email, phone, etc.).

Calling a community partner is the most efficient way to set up a service. Ask them what activities they have available and for how many people. If you reach their voicemail on your first call, send an email.

When you do connect with the community partner, ask them about their preferred method of contact. Some community partners prefer phone calls over emails or vice versa. Some community partners are open to both.

If you don't hear back from community partners right away, be patient. Many community partners wear multiple hats and may have missed your call or email. If you haven't heard after a few days, contact the community partner again. You may have to contact multiple community partners before a service project is finalized.

Adapted from American University, College of Charleston, Florida State University, and the College of William and Mary

If an agency doesn't have any available opportunities consider supporting them philanthropically.

## Email Template

Hello [name of Community Partner Volunteer Coordinator/Community Partner Representative],

My name is [your name], and I am a student Coastal Carolina University studying [your area of study]. I'm interested in working with a community partner whose work aligns with [insert social issue of interest here].

I'm writing to ask if I could volunteer with your organization from [start date] to [end date] for a total of [insert number of hours here] of hours and/or to collaborate on a project. [Community Partner name]'s mission and work aligns with my interests. [Elaborate briefly here with relevant experience or skillsets, if applicable]. I would be happy to help in any capacity that is needed.

Please free to contact me by email or phone at [phone number]. (Optional: My resume is attached for your consideration).

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.
[Your name]

## Phone Call/Voice mail talking points

- Introduce yourself: Hi, my name is [your name], and I am a student at Coastal Carolina University studying [your area of study]. I'm currently looking for service opportunities with community partners that address [insert social issue here].
- The "Ask": Do you have capacity for me to volunteer with your organization from [start date] to [end date] for a total of [insert number of hours] hours and/or to collaborate on a project?
- Your own personal interest: [Community Partner's name]'s mission and work aligns with my interests. [Elaborate briefly here with relevant experience or skillsets, if applicable]. I would be happy to help in any capacity that is needed.
- Exchange contact information: if leaving a voicemail, always leave your name and phone number. If you talk on the phone, record their name and email-address for future communication.

## 2. Follow-up Conversation with the Community Partner

After the initial conversation with the community partner, schedule a meeting to conduct a site visit to familiarize yourself with the site and available resources. Ask the community partner if they provide an orientation that you and/or your group can attend. When meeting with your partner, make sure to ask and confirm the following information:

- o Ask questions about proper attire
- o Ask questions about any social media or confidentiality policies
- o Ask questions about any applications or requirements volunteers must meet prior to service
- o Discuss schedules
- o Discuss expectations
- o Discuss skill set and to develop a work plan.
- o Communicate your availability and provide sufficient notice of any absence or change of plans
  - Be flexible when necessary and remember that community often requires a high-degree of adaptability
- o Be professional in your interactions with community partners and community members
- o Confirm exact times and dates that volunteers will need to arrive on site.

Adapted from American University, College of Charleston, Florida State University, and the College of William and Mary

- o Location where volunteers should meet upon arrival
- o Availability of parking, bathrooms, a water source, ADA accessible entries, etc.
- o If tools and resources will be provided, and what volunteers are expected to bring themselves
- o Request an orientation to the organization upon arrival
- o Request a contact number for the volunteer coordinator for the day of the event
- o If an outdoor service event, talk about a potential rain/inclement weather plan

## 3. Prepare for Service

If you are serving with a group, relay all information to participants about the details of the service event such as date, time, attire, and any waivers that need to be signed. If you are the facilitator for the group, be sure to pack extra water bottles, extra waivers, a first kid kit, directions to and from the service site, and any other last minute items. Reach out to CCU Civic Engagement prior to serving to inquire about reflection resources. The week of the event, connect with the community partner to confirm the service event and send an updated list of participants. If there are any changes to the project on your end, contact the community partner immediately. Ensure that all CCU Liability Release Forms and CCU Personal Vehicle Travel Liability and Insurance Forms (if applicable) are completed.

## 4. Participate in Service

Be punctual and responsible. Call the community partner contact if you anticipate lateness or absence immediately. Upon arriving at the service site, meet with the community partner representative. If you are serving with a group, provide your community partner with the total number of individuals in the group and request a brief orientation to the organization and the task ahead. **Remember, you and your group represent ALL Coastal Carolina University students.** We strongly advise you to turn your cell phone off during service. Thank the community partner for allowing you to serve with them and to take the time to lead you through the service task.

## 5. Following Service

Coordinate a de-brief/reflection session with your group. Ask your group to reflect on the following areas:
- What did you accomplish today?
- What issue does this organization address in your community?
- How will this service experience impact your development into an active citizen?

Document your service experience into Coastal Connections. If you are facilitating a group, show them how they can document service experiences into Coastal Connections. Send a thank you letter to the community partner for accommodating your group. If you are representing an on-campus organization, keep track of all previous service experiences for future organization leaders to reference.

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