



Service-Learning

DIRECT SERVICE MANUAL

HOW TO START YOUR SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE





What is Service-Learning?

Service-Learning allows you, the student, to apply what you're learning in class to a real life situation. In essence, the world around you becomes another textbook on your way to meeting the goals of your course. Service-learning gets you out into the surrounding community (or maybe on campus somewhere) to help meet the need of an organization or a social group while also increasing your own understanding of the topics in your class. For your marketing class, you might come up with an outreach strategy for an organization that supports immigrants. Or volunteer at a soup kitchen throughout the quarter to better understand food insecurity as part of your nutrition class. You might design a community garden alongside veterans for a sustainability program. Or give much appreciated company to homeless teens for a sociology class. No matter what you do in your service-learning course, you will make the community around you a better place, learn more about social and/or environmental issues, and walk away from your class with a stronger application of its concepts and theories. Plus, service-learning looks good on résumés and transfer applications!

Your instructor is here to support you in making this a robust learning opportunity for you. Don't hesitate to approach them with any questions or concerns.



Get started now! A quarter is really short, and sometimes it takes a long time to get started. Onboarding processes and background checks (see below) could slow you down. And keep in mind that you might not be the only one vying for this volunteer role. You could be up against students from your class, from other classes, and from other academic institutions, not to mention everyday people just looking to volunteer. Therefore, again, it's best to start this process **as soon as possible**.



Start by registering for BC's service-learning and volunteer portal, BC in the Community, and go to your class (aka "User Group") to look at the list of opportunities and agencies available to you.

Review them or search based on cause, type of volunteering, or location of interest. Click on the Agency (in a box on the right) and their website to learn more. As you do all this, consider the following questions:

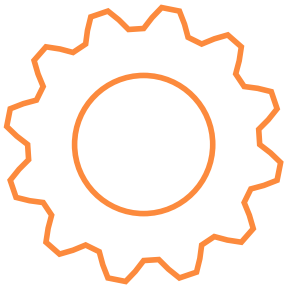
- What organizations work with a community or on an issue that I am interested in and/or passionate about? Or maybe I know nothing about it and want to know more! Would I be open to challenging my notions or assumptions around certain communities or issues by volunteering for organizations advocating for them?
- Would I rather take on a people-facing role that allows for maximum interaction, or work on projects that support the organization with minimal interaction?
- What type of setting interests me? An office or a farm? A homeless shelter or an encampment? A health clinic or a childcare center? Am I cool with getting down and dirty in a farm or a warehouse? Do I have any physical limitations that might make some sites more challenging than others?
- Does this organization have opportunities that are accessible to me? Are they near work, school, home, daycare, etc.? If not, would I be willing and able to travel to it? Note: most, but not all, of these sites are easily accessible from Bellevue College by bus or train.
- If the organization is faith-based, would I be comfortable working alongside members of that faith? *Note: You do not need to belong to that faith to volunteer.*



Once you have picked your top 2-3 choices, click "Respond" to send a note to the agency. A few might ask you to also go submit an online volunteer application through their website. Even in those circumstances, you will still need to go through the BC in the Community portal.

When writing your note, say hello and talk briefly about yourself and your class, answering the following:

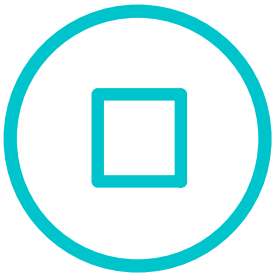
- Who am I, and why am I interested in this organization/role?
- What service-learning class am I in, and how does this organization/role fit into what you're learning in class?
- What are my goals for this service experience?
- If the agency has multiple locations, are there a few that would be most convenient for me? Or, are there some locations that would be just too challenging for me to access? (NOTE: each location will appear as a different opportunity)
- Am I fluent in a language other than English? Spoken and/or written?
- Do I have time restrictions? When are the best days and times for me to volunteer? *Note: The more flexible you can be, the greater variety you will find.*
- Some opportunities might have restrictions that appear in colored boxes. If you see one of these boxes, ask about it in the email. For example, if 'Age Restrictions,' then "I'm 17 years old. Would I be able to volunteer with you?"



Some agencies have strict policies and procedures they follow for volunteers, often because they work with vulnerable populations (e.g. refugees, children, the homeless, battered women, etc.). Keep these in mind, follow all instructions, and hopefully you won't be discouraged if asked to submit additional paperwork. Just **do it quickly** to get started!:

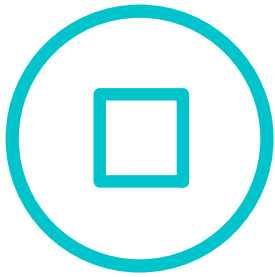
- **Pre-Volunteering Onboarding:** Most agencies will require you to fill out documentation before you can start volunteering. Some may request references; make sure to follow the instructions carefully to check whether you or the reference needs to complete these forms. Others may ask you to submit liability waivers or confidentiality agreements. Many agencies require volunteers to go through an orientation; keep in mind that they may occur sporadically, so check the dates to make sure you don't miss out. Some organizations may even ask you to take a TB test or get certain vaccinations. All these procedures, including background checks, take time, which is why you should start **as soon as possible**.

- **Background Checks:** Many agencies, particularly those working with youth or with vulnerable populations, will require you to go through a background check. The background check forms may ask you to provide a Social Security Number. If you do not have an SSN or feel uncomfortable going through the process, be honest about this with the agency's contact. S/He might be able to find you a role in the organization that does not require you to provide your SSN or undergo a background check at all. FYI – It's very rare for a student **not** to be selected due to a background check, and the agency will feel more comfortable knowing that you went through one. Some background checks - particularly for international students or for those who have not lived in Washington for very long - can take up to a few weeks to process, so, again, **get started soon!**



Some volunteering opportunities have restrictions for you to consider. It is important that you check with the agency contact about all of these so there is no confusion before selecting an opportunity:

- **Age:** Many that work with vulnerable populations require volunteers to be above or below a certain age range. Some places won't allow volunteers below the ages of 18 or even 21, while others may only want younger volunteers. Confirm during the conversation whether there are age restrictions for the role and/or for the agency as a whole.
- **Identity:** A few organizations prefer that volunteers come from similar backgrounds as the clients they serve. For example, an organization might favor people of color, transgender people, women, veterans, homeless people, etc. They should still have different opportunities for volunteers of other backgrounds / identities, so just check.
- **Duration:** In order to make the role more meaningful, many agencies require students to volunteer regularly for 3, 6, or even 12 months. These often are for roles that involve direct client interaction. In these circumstances, you will need to agree to volunteer for that entire duration, including after your class ends. Don't let this discourage you. Instead, look at this as an opportunity to better connect with people and to dig deep with causes or issues. It'll also look really good on your resume. And you might be able to count that time towards another service-learning class in the next quarter!



- **Timing:** Some volunteer opportunities occur at times that clash with BC's quarter system (e.g. helping with an educational program, fundraising, or gleaning). Or they only occur in the mornings, evenings, nights, or weekends (e.g. night shelters for homeless populations). If there is a clash, ask the agency contact for other options. You should distribute your volunteering hours to about 2-3 hours per week for 7-8 weeks (unless the agency requires a different schedule). Don't limit yourself; do more hours if the need or interest is there! The number of hours required by your course instructor is just the minimum. But try not to skip weeks or end early just because you've completed your hours. That can negatively affect your ability to learn from the experience, and can sour relations with the agency.
- **Locations:** Some agencies offer services at many sites. Find out where the one you're interested in is at, and if it's too far, see if there's something closer or with better accessibility for you. Remember that most, but not all, options are easily accessible by bus or train from Bellevue College. If you cannot find one that is accessible to you, there might be opportunities on the BC campus or that can be done remotely; talk with RISE to learn more. However, to maximize your experience, such options should be utilized as a last resort.
- **Create your own:** Some agencies provide opportunities for students to create their own volunteer projects. These would take more energy, and potentially time, but would allow you to really own your service work. Talk with the agency contact about what type of service work uses your interests and skills to benefit the agency and its programs/clients.



After your conversation with the agency contact, both sides can determine whether this will work. Just as you can say “You know, I don’t think I’d enjoy this,” an agency can say “I’m not sure this person would be a good fit.” Therefore, consider your conversation, in some fashion, to be like a job interview. If you feel uncertain about an option, talk with other agencies in order to choose the strongest one for you. However, **don’t wait too long**, since the agency contacts may not wait for you. Also, be responsive. If you do not respond to an email within a day or two, the agency will assume that you’re not interested and will move on. ***And you will not have the opportunity to find your own agency for this course, so you must choose one of the ones provided here.*** And remember that someone else in your class might take one of the limited volunteer spots, so don’t dawdle.

Some agencies may require an in-person meeting, even if you’ve already talked on the phone. And some may simply have so many volunteer requests that they prefer that you check out an online listing of volunteer opportunities and submit an online form. In that circumstance, follow the instructions given, send the note through the portal, and then wait to hear from the agency contact.

Once you start volunteering, if you have questions, concerns, or exclamations of joy, feel free to reach out to your agency contact and/or your instructor. Keep in mind that your instructor and/or RISE may conduct a site visit or reach out to the agency contact at any time during the course of the quarter as a check-in. Therefore, find something that interests you, be professional, and stay open-minded.



That's right! Don't just stand there...

LEARN BY SERVING!

*If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask your instructor or reach out to the
RISE Learning Institute at the email below.*

EMAIL

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WEB

<http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/rise>

