

Civic and Community Engagement



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Service-Learning Handbook for Community Partners

Civic and Community Engagement
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Table of Contents

Our Story	4
What is Service-Learning?	5
Establishing a Service-Learning Partnership	7
<i>Step 1: Identifying an Opportunity</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Step 2: Course Requirements</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Step 3: Service-Learning Project Details</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Step 4: Establish Communication.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Sustaining a Service-Learning Partnership.....	9
<i>Role of the Community Partner.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Role of the Faculty Member</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Role of the Civic and Community Engagement Office</i>	<i>12</i>
Project Assessment.....	13
Buffalo State Service-Learning Designation.....	13
Additional Civic and Community Engagement Partnerships, Programs, and Services	13
<i>References and Sources.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Links.....</i>	<i>17</i>

Thank you for your interest in working with Buffalo State, and welcome to what we hope is a long-term and successful partnership with the faculty, staff, and students involved with Civic and Community Engagement!

Our Story

As SUNY's urban-engaged institution, Buffalo State has committed to collaborating with community organizations, government agencies, and leaders to support community priorities. Buffalo State's Civic and Community Engagement Office (CCE) leads efforts on campus to connect the institution with community groups to build and expand partnerships and it serves as the community's hub for collaborative relationships. Buffalo State has a long history of collaboration. The CCE grew out of the Buffalo State Volunteer and Service-Learning Center (VSLC) which was created in the fall of 2003 with the assistance of a Learn and Serve grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant was written in partnership with the West Side Community Collaborative (WSCC), a collaboration of more than 30 West Side nonprofit, community- and faith-based organizations, plus representatives from local public and private schools. Partnership is not limited to the West Side and the focus of the service-learning program at Buffalo State is to develop and implement activities with partners in Western New York.

In July 2017, the VSLC was renamed Civic and Community Engagement (CCE) to more accurately reflect the value Buffalo State places on community collaborations. The CCE now also supports Buffalo State's commitment as a founding member of the West Side Promise Neighborhood (WSPN), leads the institution's commitment to a national network of higher education institutions committed to the Anchor Learning Network, an initiative of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities and The Democracy Collaborative. The CCE also oversees the work of the Community Academic Center that places special emphasis on English language acquisition and citizenship supports for youth and families with refugee backgrounds on Buffalo's West Side. Increasing numbers of Buffalo State faculty also recognize the value of combining study-abroad with community-engaged learning and have developed short-term study-abroad trips to provide students with opportunities to expand their understanding of civic engagement and global citizenship. International service-learning courses that include travel to Chile, Dominican Republic, Zambia, Haiti, and Myanmar allow students to develop their civic skills, learn academic content, and explore unique global cultures.

Our Office

The Civic and Community Engagement Office seeks to create long-term, meaningful partnerships between you and a faculty member through service-learning. These partnerships result from an increasing understanding nationwide that higher education institutions have a responsibility to the communities in which they are located. Students benefit from these experiential learning opportunities; communities benefit from additional support; and classroom curricula come to life through student contact with the knowledge, experience, and expertise in the adjoining community.

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is “a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets [community-identified priorities] and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service-learning is a course-based experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations. Unlike practica and internships, the experiential activity in a service-learning course is not necessarily skill-based within the context of professional education...” and, “to be sure, at institutions where many students come from under-served populations, service activities often include on-campus as well as off-campus activities. However, few service-learning programs provide assistance to “for-profit” enterprises – except where those enterprises themselves can be regarded as serving more than proprietary interests.”

(Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education)

Positive Outcomes for the Community

Buffalo State’s goal is to develop lasting partnerships with community agencies that may result in ongoing opportunities. Service-learning initiatives

- provide the community with energetic, enthusiastic college students who meet educational, human service, safety, and environmental priorities;
- create a spirit of civic responsibility. Many students may commit to a lifetime of service and civic involvement after this experience.
- develop civic skills of Buffalo State students residing in Buffalo and Western New York. Service-learning helps students connect with their communities and begin long-term involvement in community service.

In regular community partner surveys, the Civic and Community Engagement Office requests quantitative and qualitative feedback about partnerships and projects coordinated by the office. Results are thoroughly reviewed each semester and copies of the surveys are also forwarded to the respective faculty members, so all parties are informed and capable of building and sustaining the relationship.

Partnering with Buffalo State service-learning and volunteer programs consistently enables community partner organizations to

- increase the number of clients served;
- better meet community priorities;
- increase the number of services offered;
- generate and incorporate new ideas;
- provide mentoring opportunities;
- make new connections.

Additionally, community partners have rated their level of satisfaction with their connection to the Buffalo State service-learning program. Organizations were influenced in positive ways, including improvement in meeting community priorities, increases in the number of clients served and services offered, new ideas introduced by students, and assistance with meeting the organization's mission and goals.

Positive Outcomes for the Students

The Civic and Community Engagement Office assesses students prior to and following participation in service-learning. In these evaluations Buffalo State students have revealed positive change in nearly every measure, including course-related learning, civic responsibility, diversity awareness, and skill development. Additionally, 90% of students reported that taking a service-learning course helped them to understand that they can have a positive impact on community challenges facing the community; 86% encouraged other students to take courses that offer service-learning, and 77% of students stated that the service-learning helped them to better understand the required lectures and readings.

Enhanced Course-Related Learning

Many student respondents reported that they learn course content best when connections to real life situations are made. In addition, this question was impacted positively when students were given the opportunity to write about or discuss classroom learning, indicating that effective reflection in service-learning classes positively impacts student learning.

Improved Civic Responsibility

Remarkable differences between pre- and post-survey results were found in response to students' perceived responsibility to support the community. Students also reported growth over the course of a semester in their perceived ability to make a difference. The prolonged contact with individuals through service-learning provides Buffalo State students with an opportunity to contribute to community improvement.

Diversity Awareness

Students also self-reported increases in their diversity awareness from pre-survey to post-survey. Through contact with diverse populations in and around Buffalo, students demonstrated

- an increase in their awareness of their own biases and prejudices;
- an increase in their comfort working with people from diverse backgrounds;
- an understanding that there is a lot they can do to affect other people's prejudices.

Skill Development

The primary purpose of service-learning is to support the academic learning objectives of the course. In addition to this benefit, participants have also reported noteworthy gains in the following personal and professional skills as a result of their service-learning experience:

- written and verbal communication
- public speaking
- problem-solving
- social responsibility and citizenship
- organization
- social self-confidence
- leadership
- working as part of a team

Establishing a Service-Learning Partnership

Step 1: Identifying an Opportunity

The role of the Civic and Community Engagement Office is to match the priorities of the community with appropriate faculty and courses on campus. This can happen in one of two ways:

Community-Driven

CCE believes strongly in community-driven projects and tries to match courses with priorities that are expressed by the community and agencies with which we partner. The staff gathers information and project ideas from the community and shares these ideas with faculty in order to find the best match for the learning objectives of the course.

The agency must provide students with experiences that will teach. The CCE staff can help the community partner identify the learning in the project to be developed. No matter what the mission of the organization/agency/school, the student can, through the service activity, learn to communicate, organize, and think critically. The student can learn specific skills that will one day be used in their chosen field or profession. The community partner can function in the role of co-educator by keeping the learning objective(s) in mind and checking in with the student at each visit.

A few examples of mutually beneficial service-learning opportunities are

- Marketing students who hone skills by promoting an organization's identity or advertising services;

- Sociology students who learn about community development through data gathering and information analysis of community strengths and challenges;
- Anthropology students who learn about the cultural aspects of death and dying from senior center members;
- Education majors who are preparing for their career by tutoring K-12 learners;
- Hospitality students who learn about special event planning by assisting with the planning of an event in the community.

Faculty-Driven

The other way a partnership may come to fruition is when faculty members at Buffalo State decide to incorporate service-learning into a course they already teach or develop a new course that includes a service-learning experience. If the faculty member has specific goals for service-learning in mind, the Civic and Community Engagement Office may need to identify a community partner who can benefit from students performing such a service. The service-learning that students will complete relates directly to the content of the course.

Step 2: Course Requirements

Once the decision is made to include service-learning in a course, the faculty member then

- identifies what objectives the service-learning will meet;
- decides whether the service-learning will be a requirement or an option within the course;
- revises the course syllabus to include service-learning information.

Step 3: Service-Learning Project Details

Once service activities are broadly determined, details of service requirements must be worked out. The CCE staff coordinates two large group planning meetings with community partners and faculty prior to the start of each semester. Additionally, there can be individual meetings between faculty and a community partner. At these meetings, or as a follow-up, the following are suggested areas for discussion and resolution:

- total number of service-learning students the agency partner can accommodate and the number of students to be on-site at any given time;
- dates that students will begin and end their service;
- hours that the agency is open, and the hours that students are needed to assist with the designated project;
- Who will be supervising the students?
- details of what the students will accomplish (This may be a specific project to be completed, a template or timeline, or general expectations of daily activities.);
- expectations of students in the community such as appropriate dress, punctuality, etc.;

- an introductory orientation for students at the service site, if appropriate;
- the level of involvement from CCE staff;
- a course outline and/or syllabus given to the community partner, so that everyone is aware of the learning objectives of the service.

It is up to the community partner site supervisor to make sure the activities are focused, useful, and connected to the agency's priorities. It is also important that the agency stick to the activities outlined in the initial meetings and follow through with the agreed-upon objectives. If circumstances warrant, a change in the initial plan can, of course, occur, but communication between the faculty and community partner must take place before this happens.

Step 4: Establish Communication

It is important to have early and regular communication among the involved community members, the faculty member, and the Civic and Community Engagement staff. After the initial planning meeting, CCE facilitates communication throughout the semester. Its staff regularly check in with agency staff, students, and faculty members to ensure the success of the project. The faculty and staff may call, email, or make an appointment to visit and talk with service partners and students in the field. Community partners should also feel comfortable and confident contacting faculty members or CCE with questions, concerns, or positive remarks.

Sustaining a Service-Learning Partnership

The Civic and Community Engagement Office assists not only in the establishment of service-learning, but also the coordination of community-based activities. At times, it may be difficult for community partners to have service-learning students involved. It can be demanding on time, the students may accomplish more (or less) than what was expected of them, and the additional people may pose scheduling and coordination problems. The CCE staff can assist with logistical challenges through regular site visits, scheduling assistance, email and phone communication, and regular meetings.

Role of the Community Partner

- **Orientation:** CCE believes that a thorough service-learning orientation is important and encourages faculty to provide one for their classes. Community partners are often asked to participate in the in-class orientation, as well as conduct an on-site group orientation for service-learning students at the beginning of the semester.

An **on-site group orientation** provides students with an introduction to the agency and the staff which can often ease apprehension they may have about beginning their service requirements in an unfamiliar environment. We encourage you to work with the faculty member and CCE staff to establish the best time for an orientation.

The following are some suggestions for what you may want to include in your on-site orientation:

1. **Agency Information:** Educate the students about your organization. What is your mission? Whom do you support? What are the demographics of the clients? How are you funded?
 2. **Staff:** Who are some of the staff and what are their positions? Is there any particular language used by staff that students should know?
 3. **A List of Contacts/Numbers:** Please list people and agencies that will be useful for students in completing their work.
 4. **Responsibilities:** What is expected of the students? Describe the role students play in your agency.
 5. **Policies:** Sign in/out, dress code, office rules.
 6. **Training:** If any additional training is needed, what kind, when, and where?
 7. **Final Product:** What is the final goal for your agency that is expected from the students by the end of service?
 8. **Scheduling:** What special information do they need to know about hours of operation, when assistance will be available, and when the office may be closed?
- **Supervision:** Community partners should supervise service-learning students as they would a volunteer; they should be assigned appropriate tasks and they will need feedback and guidance on their activities and progress. Buffalo State students cannot be left unsupervised with youth or children.
 - **Service logs:** If the faculty requires [service logs](#), you will be asked to verify hours and sign the service-learning form.
 - **Communication:** The community partner should certainly take the initiative in contacting the faculty member and/or the Civic and Community Engagement Office during the semester if need arises, or simply to keep the campus partner aware of how the project is progressing. The CCE staff and faculty will also make efforts to stay in regular contact. The more contact the community partner and faculty member have during the project, the better the quality of the service-learning experience for all.
 - **Service-Learning Agreement:** During the semester, the community partner may receive a service-learning agreement that summarizes the terms of the partnership. If you receive a service-learning agreement via email from the CCE, please acknowledge acceptance using the e-form.
 - **Reflection:** Reflection is a critical link between service and learning. The faculty member will incorporate reflection in a variety of ways to help the students see the connections between the service they are providing and the course curriculum. The students may ask the community partner to assist with reflection, or reflection may take place in the classroom only. Formally or informally, the community partner can provide opportunities for the students to think critically

about what they are learning and can check in with the students to help them process their experiences in the community.

Questions the community partner may ask:

- Do you feel like you are making a difference? In what ways?
 - Has this experience influenced the way you view your role as a member of the community?
 - How does this relate to your coursework?
- **Evaluation:** The community partner should solicit feedback from service-learning students and agency staff, and critically evaluate the program using the CCE Community Partner Survey provided. Did the service meet a critical priority for the agency? Did participants learn from the experience? The community partner should reflect on what might be done differently next time and discuss this with the faculty partner and CCE staff. The Civic and Community Engagement Office provides assessment instruments to evaluate the impact of service-learning on the agency, staff, and students. Honest and regular feedback is vital to the success and long-term sustainability of service-learning at Buffalo State. Please see the Assessment section for additional information.

Role of the Faculty Member

- **Establish Objectives:** The faculty member will set learning objectives for the service experience that relate to the course objectives. These objectives, as well as a course syllabus, should be shared with the community partner prior to the start of the semester. This will help the community partner structure activities that complement the service-learning objectives.
- **Communication:** Communication among community partners, faculty, students, and CCE is very important to the success of the service-learning activities. It will be especially effective if the partners communicate throughout the semester (recommended: beginning, middle, and end of semester). The Civic and Community Engagement Office can assist by setting up a meeting at the beginning and end of the semester. Telephone or email communication may be sufficient during the semester, but we strongly encourage faculty to visit students in the community. Faculty involvement at the site reinforces the value of the project and demonstrates faculty willingness to invest time in its effectiveness.
- **Reflection:** Structured reflection activities are a key component to successful service-learning. Faculty members will have structured activities for students to reflect on the service they are providing, and how it relates to course material.

- **Evaluation:** Faculty members utilize various means to grade students on the service-learning aspect of the course. The grade will often be associated with students' reflection activities, whether it is a paper, presentation, participation in discussion, journaling, or other demonstration of learning through service.

Role of the Civic and Community Engagement Office

- **In-Class Orientation:** CCE provides an in-class orientation when the faculty partner chooses to arrange this presentation. The orientation addresses what service-learning is, what the benefits are, what the community project entails, key factors related to accepting and understanding service in the community, and professionalism. Community partners may be asked to participate in this orientation to provide an overview of the agency or project. We also have an online orientation video and PowerPoint slideshow available on the faculty resources and development webpage.
- **Scheduling:** Depending on the level of involvement the community partner prefers, CCE staff may be able to assist with some of the student scheduling within the parameters set up by the faculty and agency. Student schedules are acquired at the in-class orientation, and an initial schedule may be generated.
- **Transportation:** CCE staff can coordinate and provide information to students on transportation options to get to and from their service site. All Buffalo State undergraduate students have access to an NFTA bus pass, and bus route schedules are available at www.nfta.com/.
- **Communication:** The faculty member is the first link for students who have questions or problems when completing their service requirements, but the Civic and Community Engagement Office can also assist in this area, especially if we are assisting students with scheduling. Our staff is accessible throughout the semester to community partners via phone, e-mail, or in-person to check in about progress and concerns. We will keep you informed about feedback from students and faculty.
- **Evaluation:** CCE collects data from students, faculty, and community partners at the end of each semester, and will distribute this information appropriately to build on the partnerships and projects. Faculty are encouraged to facilitate evaluation efforts as well.

Project Assessment

It is important that we gather feedback from students, faculty, and community partners on the progress of the service-learning program and the successes and challenges of each project. Our long-term goals include institutionalization of service-learning at Buffalo State in order to provide all students with opportunities to participate in community-based learning and to sustain strong community-campus partnerships.

We send community partners surveys via email at the end of the academic year (however, in the future, we hope to send surveys each semester). Completing these evaluations will add value to the partnerships from the agency perspective as well. For the service activity to be worthwhile to the organization/agency/school, there must be a positive contribution to its mission and impact on its services. Buffalo State needs to know if the service is effective in order to improve the service activities in future semesters.

Buffalo State Service-Learning Designation

A service-learning course designation, approved by the College Senate, was implemented at Buffalo State beginning in the spring 2012 semester in response to students' request for service-learning course information during registration. In order to receive the designation, faculty must ensure that their course meets the approved criteria, request designation, and be reviewed by a service-learning designation review committee.

Service-Learning Criteria Approved by College Senate:

9. Students meet an identified community priority through service in partnership with organizations, schools, or other community groups. The course requires a minimum of 10 hours of service for designation (for a 3-credit course); however, the Civic and Community Engagement Office recommends at least 15-20 hours of community-based work.
10. The service experience relates to the subject matter of the course and is clearly described in the syllabus. Students are provided structured opportunities to reflect critically on their service experience through writing, discussion, presentation, artistic endeavors, etc.
11. At least 15% of the final grade for the course must be based on academic assignments that explicitly link the community service to the academic content of the course.

Additional Civic and Community Engagement Partnerships, Programs, and Services

In addition to service-learning course support, CCE has a number of other partnerships, services, and programs that support student engagement in the community, foster civic responsibility, and develop students' civic skills. Current activities include:

- **The Buffalo State Community Academic Center (CAC):** Through a generous gift from longtime Buffalo State supporters Eleanore Woods Beals ('50), and her husband, Vaughn Beals, the CAC is currently located at Buffalo State College and aims to coordinate and provide cradle-to-career educational support programming for youth and families on Buffalo's West Side. Programming is developed and designed in collaboration with campus and community partners to support youth academic achievement and educational enrichment.
- **WSPN:** West Side Promise Neighborhood works together with families, children, and individuals on Buffalo's West Side to ensure their success from cradle-to-career and beyond. A diverse group of partners, public and private, share a vision and a commitment to improve the quality of life for all its residents.
- **Applied Learning:** Our office also supports applied learning efforts. Applied learning refers to an educational approach whereby students learn by engaging in direct application of skills, theories, and models. Students apply knowledge and skills gained from traditional classroom learning to hands-on and/or real-world settings, creative projects, or independent or directed research, and in turn, apply what is gained from the applied experience to academic learning. The applied learning activity can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience and/or be embedded as part of a course of study or program.
- **Buffalo State Bengals Dare to Care Day:** Once a year, the college organizes a half-day of service to introduce students to service and community involvement through organized projects with community partners. Not only is Bengals Dare to Care a part of the Buffalo State tradition, but it's also a great first-time volunteer experience for students. It also encourages thoughtful reflection on service and continued ways for students to be involved.
- **CCE Alternative Break:** Alternative Break is a student-led program organized by CCE to engage students in service and community-building during their fall, winter, spring, and summer break each year. Participants complete service during the day, engage in conversation and reflection around the issues being addressed, and develop a sense of community as they live and work as a team.
- **President's Certificate of Recognition for Community Engagement:** Students who complete at least 200 hours of service in the community during their college career can receive the Certificate of Recognition for Community Engagement to represent their diverse commitment to social responsibility and community participation. The certificate will distinguish students as active citizens and leaders in the community.

- **Online Resources for Career Opportunities (BengalLink)**

[BengalLink](#) allows community organizations to attract and inform members of the Buffalo State community regarding ongoing and one-time only volunteer opportunities. Community organizations can create an account to instantly manage and update volunteer opportunities at their agency. Community partners are invited to post volunteer positions on BengalLink. Select “New Employer” to create and manage your profile and postings.

- **Campbell Student Union Tabling**

Community organizations can reserve a table to recruit student volunteers. Contact the Civic and Community Engagement Office at cce@buffalostate.edu to make arrangements.

- **CCE Connection**

Each month, we send an e-newsletter with service-learning and volunteer information, resources, and ways to connect with Buffalo State students, faculty, and staff. Sign up on [Community Partner Resources](#).

- **On-campus Meeting Space**

Community partners can request on-campus meeting space by calling (716) 878-3919 or emailing cce@buffalostate.edu. Once a reservation is confirmed, CCE will arrange temporary parking permits.

- **Recognition:** The recognition of service is an important aspect of encouraging student community engagement. Community partners as well as students, faculty, and student groups are recognized for their outstanding service to the community at the end of every spring semester at an awards ceremony, Celebration of Community Engagement. The CCE will email you an announcement regarding the [awards nomination process](#). We encourage you to consider submitting nominations.

Please call us at (716) 878-3919 or email cce@buffalostate.edu for more information and assistance.

References and Sources

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Links

American Association of Community Colleges

<http://www.aacc.nche.edu>

Integrating service-learning into the institutional climate of community colleges

AmeriCorps

<https://www.americorps.gov/>

AmeriCorps members address critical needs in communities all across America. This is the national site.

International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement

<https://www.slce.org>

International non-profit organization devoted to promoting research and discussion about service-learning and community engagement

National Service-Learning Clearing House

<https://www.nylc.org>

Repository of service-learning resources for kindergarten through higher education

Service-Learning Ideas and Curricular Examples (SLICE)

<https://www.compact.org/>

Easy-to-search database full of hundreds of high-quality service-learning lesson plans, syllabi, and project ideas

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Community Service Projects

<https://epa.gov/>

Ideas for community service projects for youth