

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: UTILIZING CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS FOR SERVICE

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Issue(s) Being Addressed:

Community members often think that it is easy to find volunteers on campus because there are so many students; however, it can be difficult to actually recruit volunteers for community projects. In order to adequately recruit, it is necessary to know where and how to look for potential volunteers.

Overview:

Service on college campuses is becoming more prevalent all over the country. It is not only initiated when students are engaged in service learning classes but is also lead by students who are passionate about the issues on campus and in the community around them. According to the Campus Compact 2003 Annual Membership Survey, "an average of 36% of (college) students participates in service activities" and "53% of students at faith-based campuses are engaged in service, significantly above the national average." With that in mind, why does it always seem so difficult to find volunteers when they are needed?

Actions to Consider:

Communicating with Student Organizations

Frequently students do not have the time to seek out service, so it becomes necessary to help them discover opportunities and allow them to select what they want to do. In order for students to perform service, the message must be readily delivered to them. Everyone reacts to propaganda differently so every message must be tailored to each targeted organization. Some people may like the personal request for help by someone in need, while others may respond to an email, a flyer or newsletter handed to them. Perhaps the creation of a website is an effective way to keep students updated, but requires frequent revisions.

Though newsletters, flyers, and emails inform students who have the time to read them, they may not always be an effective means of communication. It has been discovered that people respond best when they are personally invited to volunteer, especially if the request comes from someone they know or respect. It is hard to develop trust in and respect for people with whom you do not have daily interaction. Often it is most effective to communicate with a contact person from each student organization so they can request the help of their membership. Many student organizations spend a portion of time volunteering. Though they may have different mission statements, each group could be solicited to support diverse requests based on their group's goals and areas of interest.

Evaluations/Feedback/Reflections

All volunteers need to receive positive feedback and be thanked for the services they provide. This is crucial so they know that they are appreciated and are helping to meet a community need. Along with feedback and praise, it is also necessary to evaluate the project that was completed. A post service survey can evaluate a student's service experience and help with the reflection process. Reflection can be difficult to facilitate. Students can be told what a great service they are providing but also need to be encouraged to reflect on their learning and how their service has made an impact in community. With this in mind surveys have become a tool for both evaluating the service project and thinking about what was accomplished. Some options for post service survey questions include:

- Do you feel like you made a difference with your service?
- Do you feel you received adequate support and supervision from program staff?
- What aspects of the service did you like the best/least?
- Do you intend to continue to serve your community in the future?
- Describe your personal satisfaction level with this service. (10, high through 1, low)

These evaluation questions allow for reflection on service projects and how the service has impact the students.

Outcome Achieved:

On each campus the lines of communication will vary. Remember that there is service both on campus and in the community that needs to be completed and there are willing students. Proper communication with student groups is essential to ongoing partnerships with community organizations. Each student organization has interests. Tapping into these will yield increased service to community.