



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

Working with Students

Introduction

Students are always looking for new things to get involved in whilst at university, especially in areas where they can have autonomy and responsibility for what they do and how they spend their time. Student led volunteering projects are an excellent way for students to gain a wide range of skills that they may not be able to gain through regular volunteering, such as budget management, volunteer recruitment and project planning. It also gives students the autonomy to run with their own ideas, without so many restrictions that set volunteering opportunities might bring.

Student led projects should support a community need, often new projects develop because a student sees a gap in a local service, supporting new areas that are not currently supported elsewhere. This could involve working with a specific charity or directly with school/youth group/old persons home or other organisation. Running their own project requires a greater commitment to the cause, as they are fully responsible, therefore less likely to miss weeks, lose interest. This is mainly true of the project leaders.

This guide aims to help you in supporting these students to design and deliver these activities, to ensure they are feasible and do meet a local need as well as providing the students with an enriching volunteering experience.

Getting started

Every student led project starts in a different way but below are some guidelines for supporting students through each stage from finding the right idea, to recruiting student volunteers and evaluation.

Researching a project

Coming up with an idea can be easy, though making sure this idea is feasible and needed in the community is important before starting with a new project. Projects could involve working on campus with other student volunteers, to working closely with a particular charity or with a local community group, the environment or a school.

1. **Passion and Interest** – It is important that whatever the project, the student(s) have a strong interest in this area or reason for volunteering. This will help push things forward and not just fall by the wayside as soon as student gets a last minute essay deadline
2. **Need in the community** – student led volunteering projects aim to support an area of the community in need and so making sure the project is needed is very important. Researching a need can be done in a variety of ways. Personal experience can give students

and idea of an area to support, be it through realising a gap when volunteering somewhere else. Local newspapers and reports can give students an idea of problems that a volunteering project might be able to support, for example, local children could be causing damage to local parks, but an afterschool community group could entertain them in ways to help prevent this damage. Looking into other student led projects at other universities and colleges could give you ideas for needs being met in other communities

Top Tip: Meet a community need. Case Study: [On Our Doorsteps, University of Brighton](#)

In response to 'studentification' issues, the project developed a consultative approach to working with the community on a range of student-led activities. It enabled students and residents to work together in enhancing their neighbourhood.

1. **Past projects** – many projects start and run for one year or so. They could have ended for various reasons, be it lack of active student volunteers or funding. Asking around about past projects to see why they ended and things that went well or not so well in the past can help prevent the same mistakes from happening again
2. **Skills** – Volunteering is as much about learning new skills as it is using skills students already have. The passion to get involved is vital when students want to set up a project as this is more likely to keep them involved. However, guiding students through certain areas will help them make less mistakes and keep them on the right track. There is more information on setting up the project below
3. **Funding** – Student led volunteering projects can often manage with very little to no funding depending what the project is, but being able to offer some funding or advice on where to find it can be hugely beneficial to students

Promotion and recruitment

Student led projects can either be the idea of the student or of the Volunteer Coordinator who seeks students to set up the project and run it. Here are a few ways you could recruit students for new projects/ideas.

1. Start a competition for new project ideas and get student or staff to vote for their favourite;
 - i) Ideally there will be money available for the students to set up the project
 - ii) When students are bringing their own ideas they may be more likely to feel a sense of ownership over the project
2. Decide on an initial project idea yourself or from a community group and recruit student leaders for the role;
 - i) Promote via specific departments that might relate to the project, such as art students might be interested in running an art group for the elderly
 - ii) Link with societies that relate to the project as they might be keen to add a new project to their work

Top Tip: Work with students interests. Case Study: [Societies in Schools, Brunel University](#)

Brunel Volunteers recruited the Netball, Rugby and Dance societies to pilot a student led approach to working with schools, to develop after school clubs. This approach found students who were highly committed to the project and ensured a strong model for working could be developed for the future.

3. Try and offer training where possible alongside the project, for example training in budgets, volunteer recruitment and chairing meetings that could be an extra 'sell' for getting students involved.
4. Students will often come to you with ideas without any promotion necessary, seeking advice and support to make their idea happen.
5. Think about how students may obtain recognition through the project, could it be promoted through a university award scheme or connect to v awards.

Early stages of setting up a project

The beginning stages of setting up a project can be quite time consuming, without much back in return. However it is important to get the initial stages right to help with a smooth running project throughout the year.

1. **Partnership with community group** – The student led project could be helping the environment, a local old people's home, a school, the homeless or many others. It is important to start by making sure those you want to help actually want support. Setting up initial face to face meetings is the best way to do this, trying to come up with a project that is what they want and will interest students. Though it can be a good idea to put down on paper some form of formal agreement, this is not always necessary.
2. **Funding** – What will the project cost to run? A lot of projects run on very little, paying only for student expenses, though many can incur other costs, such as a beach clean-up would need gloves, bin bags and other items. Ideally the university will be able to offer seed funding or regular funds for the projects, if not here are a few places to approach for funding:
 - i) [UnLtd](#) – funding for social entrepreneurs that could be used for bigger projects
 - ii) [Big Lottery Awards for All](#) – grants up to £3000 for community projects
 - iii) **University Annual Fund/Alumni funds** – most universities have annual funds students can apply for with new ideas, or you could approach your alumni department who might be able to approach potential funders.
 - iv) [Funding Central](#) - There are various funding websites such as funding central, where people can search for a range of potential funders. Most will not be applicable to student led projects, but it is always worth a look.
3. **Volunteer roles** – There will be a range of responsibilities for running the project, such as volunteer recruitment, budgets, community liaison and logistics. Splitting these roles up

and advertising specific roles can again help students have a sense of ownership and responsibility for their areas. Estimating the weekly time commitment for students can help them know what they are signing up for, including any particularly busy periods in the year.

4. **Resources** – Projects can run with very few resources, but even if it is just travel expenses and a few promotional leaflets the project will need some resources and funding. Help students figure out what they might need and how the Volunteer Centre, University, community group or funding can help source everything they need.
5. **Training** – Students may need training to help them with the project, though they will also learn a lot through ‘doing.’ Try and signpost them to training already happening in the school that could be relevant, for example Careers Services often run a range of skills sessions, such as leadership skills and holding successful meetings.

Recruiting volunteers to support the project leaders—Once the project leaders have set up the project they will more than likely need a number of other volunteers to support with the activity of the project. Promoting through related societies can often bring higher numbers of applications. Guides on recruiting new student volunteers can be [found here](#).

Top Tip: Hold a ‘Dragon’s Den’ style event. Case Study: [Kids College, The University of York](#)
Within the planning stages for all of the student- led modules there is a Dragon’s Den style event. This gives the students the opportunity to pitch their ideas and gain critical feedback from a panel of marketing and university management. This gives students the motivation and necessity to have well thought through plans, whilst providing a unique experience which builds upon the opportunities presented by the volunteering project.

Sustainability of the project

Students can change each year so it important to support them through the changeover process to make sure it can continue each year.

1. Regular check-ins – ultimately the project is student led and students should have the autonomy to run the project themselves, however offering support throughout the year can help make sure they are on the right track. Different student led projects will require differing levels of support dependent on the students.

2. Recruiting new project leaders – The project leaders are the most important part of a successful project and it is integral to make sure there is always suitable student volunteer leaders in place. Recruitment will generally take place once a year, but depends if students will lead a project for more than one year or less. Recruitment should usually begin before or during the final year of term to make sure someone is in place before students leave for the summer. Recruiting current volunteers can make sure you have someone who is already involved in the project, this

will make handover much easier, with them hopefully already understanding the basis of the project. It is beneficial to leave plenty of time for the new project leaders to have a full handover with the outgoing leaders, going through general running processes, problems and ideas for the future.

Top Tip: Create a resource pack. Case Study: [Re-create, Manchester Metropolitan University](#)

Throughout the development of a student-led creative arts project all the planning and delivery resources were kept alongside the development of a comprehensive training guide which now at the end of the project has been collated to produce a project resource pack to enable the project to be easily replicated in the future.

3. Evaluation- Taking the time to research what is going well and not so well and the impact in the community can help develop the project to be more successful.

Survey students – Sending a short survey to students who have volunteered with the project can help get new ideas and see how the project can be developed. Making the survey anonymous will help get a more honest response.

Survey community groups – Short surveys for the community members involved in the project will again help you see what they like and don't like about the project. Asking Impact related questions will help to assess the impact of the project to its beneficiaries which in turn can help prove your worth in the future if looking for funding.

Group feedback – arranging a group meeting to discuss how the project has gone. This could just be the student volunteers involved or could involve members of the community that the project has been supporting.

External resources

- [Student Hubs](#) support students directly through organising events and sharing best practice. There are hubs in Oxford, Cambridge, Southampton and Bristol. They also organise national events that other students can get involved with.
- [Junction49](#) – This is a great website for students to network with other young project leaders and get advice and support from the Junction49 team.