



Tips on working with WU student volunteers

(This information and its links are available at
www.communityservice.wustl.edu/agencies)

1. Be sensitive to the demands of students' schedules and coursework.

Although students are very eager to volunteer their time with local non-profit agencies, they face multiple demands on their time. In addition to prioritizing their academic commitments, most students are also involved in student groups, research, and paid work. Typically, students are available to volunteer 1-2 hours per week. Their availability tends to be after 3pm on weekdays. On weekends, their schedules are usually more flexible though they still have many commitments and lots of studying, and don't tend to like to make commitments before 10am or 11am.

It is also important to make note of the university's [academic calendar](http://calendar.wustl.edu/). [link to: <http://calendar.wustl.edu/>] Classes tend to start earlier in the fall (late August) and end earlier in the spring (late April) than most other schools (especially K-12), and vacations don't always correspond to other school calendars. The vast majority of WU students come from outside the St. Louis area and do not stay in town during vacations, so most students will not be available to volunteer with you during these times.

Additionally, from mid-semester through finals, students are increasingly focused on their academics. Though they are usually consistent in their pre-existing commitments, it can be difficult to ask them to get involved in new community service opportunities once their academic demands increase. Students tend to be most excited about beginning new commitments and trying new activities at the start of each semester.

2. Understand the level of student autonomy at WU.

Students, including student groups, are quite autonomous at WU and take significant initiative to plan and organize their projects. While our office is available to assist you in reaching students and working effectively with students, we do not function as a placement center. We are happy to help you [publicize your volunteer needs](#), and we work hard to inform the campus community of your opportunities, but we empower students and student group leaders to respond to your volunteer needs and make a connection with you if they are interested in working with you.

3. Take the opportunity to educate students about your agency.

Community service has great potential to educate about social issues and our students tend to develop a lot of questions through their service work. We strongly encourage you to take the time to talk with our students about your agency's work and the issue(s) you address. Who do you serve? Why do your clients need your assistance? Are you able to serve everyone who needs your help? What are your current successes and challenges? What would it take to put an end to the problem you are addressing?

If you are working with a group, you can take 5-10 minutes at the beginning and/or end of their time with you for this discussion. With individual volunteers, be sure to offer a good orientation and check in periodically to discuss new questions and observations. Resources you might consider offering include: brochures, newspaper articles, videos, statistics, tours of your facility, and speakers. Hearing directly from clients, if appropriate, can be very powerful. It can also be educational to hear from current staff of the agency.

This brief education does not take much time, but can influence our students' interest in returning to your agency and, more broadly, might influence their outlook on the issue you are addressing. Don't let this valuable opportunity pass by just jumping into the service project without a context!

4. Be aware of transportation challenges for students without cars.

New undergraduate students at WU are not permitted to have cars on campus, and many upperclass students also do not have cars. This can be a major limitation for students wishing to reach your agency if they do not have access to a car. If your agency is at a MetroServe location (accessible by MetroLink, MetroBus, or foot with up to one transfer), our office will provide a link to online directions in our [St. Louis Non-Profit Agency Database](#). If your agency location requires a car, encourage students to carpool and investigate other transportation options available to [individual volunteers](#) and [student groups](#). You can also look into putting together carpools with some of your current volunteers who may live or work near WU.

5. Offer attractive volunteer opportunities when possible.

Community service projects, whether one-time or ongoing, should be mutually beneficial. They should meet a need within your agency or a community at the same time that they are of interest to our students. When possible, students prefer to interact directly with your clients. We know this is not always possible for a number of reasons and work hard to explain this to potential volunteers. When indirect service opportunities (such as painting, cleaning, or sorting) are the best option, it is even more important to provide an [educational context](#) to students so they appreciate how their work benefits the mission of your agency.

Additionally, many student groups look for one-time group projects for 10-20 volunteers. These usually take place on the weekend, for about three hours. It helps to have some projects in mind for and, to the extent possible, be flexible with your availability.

6. Ask questions and contact us for assistance!

Our office is available and happy to help with any questions you may have about connecting with volunteers from the WU community. You can [contact us](#) by phone or email at any time.