

Reporting Accomplishments

Service trips are challenging, educational, and potentially intense experiences since they place students and other groups of volunteers in unfamiliar surroundings, in different cultures, and in close proximity with people different from themselves. At the same time, volunteer groups are committed to improving the lives of those affected by the hurricane, to helping rebuild the communities where they serve, and to preserving the culture, history, and environment of the region.

It is useful, then, that students and other groups create a record of their observations and accomplishments—both as individuals and as the team.

Reflection

Individual accomplishments can be chronicled through group reflection and through journals that members keep during the service trip.

Group reflection can be conducted during the evening, at a meal, or at other times during the day. It does not have to be formal, but it should be held in a place where the group can sit together in a way that all members of the group can see each other. There are many approaches and methods. Generally, though, reflection can begin with check-in and reports from group members on thoughts or ideas they had during their service, or in personal, educational, or cultural interactions.

A good way to structure the reflection is to concentrate on “the what”—what happened that day; the “so what”—the difference the experience made to individuals; and the “now what”—taking lessons learned from the experience and reapplying them to other situations and the larger picture. Reflections also can be one-on-one discussions with the trip leader(s), faculty, or staff. A number of groups have conducted follow-up reflections after returning home and before classes, jobs, and other activities begin to fade the memory of the service. Other groups continue to meet informally, and in some cases, they have planned and carried out repeated service trips to the Gulf region.

Journals or written diaries can help volunteers

record daily impressions, interactions and accomplishments. Later, they can help individuals process the experience, and they can become the basis of further writing, class papers, or discussions spurred by the service. One project collected written reflections and sent them back to the contributors two months after their service to remind them of their experiences and help renew their commitment to further service.

Members of group trips also can record their experiences, impressions, revelations, and recommendations by using blogs or other electronic means. Photographic records are particularly illuminating and can be used later to illustrate projects or presentations. Video recordings also can document the group’s work and help make effective presentations, recruit participants for subsequent service trips to the Gulf, and contribute to evidence of the institution’s civic engagement commitment.

Data

An important task is to gather information to report the group’s accomplishments, such as:

Data about the area

- Population before and after Katrina
- Demographic information
- Size of the town
- Economic base
- Estimated hurricane damage to the area
- Overseeing and cooperating organizations
- Other historic or cultural information

Statistical information

- Number of hours of service
- Types of service
- Number of people directly benefited
- Number of houses gutted/ buildings painted, meals served, etc.
- Number of student participants

Records of your service

- Photographs, videos

- News accounts
- Interviews
- Testimonials

Other useful information includes contact information for individuals who have led, supervised, or been involved with the project (for follow-up, connecting other groups from your institution, or thank-you letters).

Make use of information when you return:

- Publicize your service on campus, in the community, and in the press.
- Celebrate your group's work and encourage others to join a future service trip.
- Reach out to local foundations, corporations, and organization to support continued involvement.
- Publish a record of your service, with reflections, pictures, videos, and testimonials.

President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll

On July 31, 2006, the Corporation for National and Community Service announced the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, an annual award for all colleges and universities whose students have made meaningful contribu-

tions to community service. The program is designed to recognize the commitment to community service by institutions of higher education, including the level of student engagement as well as institutional support, such as service-learning courses, community service coordinating offices, and exemplary service projects. In its first year, the program will place a special emphasis on volunteer service performed by college students in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes. The deadline for this year's applications is September 15, 2006, and Honor Roll members and Presidential Award winners will be announced at the Campus Compact 20th Anniversary celebration on October 17. Your group's service in the Gulf Region can be recognized if your college or university applies. Information about and application for the Honor Roll can be found at: www.nationalservice.gov/honorroll.

Adapted with permission from "Organizing an Alternative Spring Break," Break Away, The Alternative Break Connection, Inc., www.alternativebreak.org.