

So You Want to Plan a Service Project?

Service and volunteerism can be rewarding for all involved, but where do I even start?

Step 0: Tap into Your Why

Planning a service project is no small undertaking, so it can be an important step to figure out the “why.” What are your motivations? Is it because you feel compelled to or is it something your student organizations wants to do? Maybe it’s a requirement for a class.

To help you narrow down, here are some questions to point you in a direction:

What are some of my (my group’s) values? Why am I (we) interested in planning a service event? _____

What are some causes I (my group) care about? _____

Why do I (my group) care about this? _____

Why should other people care about it? _____

Step 1: Listen!

Listen to the members of the community you want to serve.
Listen to what they are telling you they need.

You may be a part of the community you want to serve! Organize your project around that – even better if you are able to develop a project with a community organization who is doing that work and has ties to the community. We are more powerful together!

What are some local/national/international groups who are already doing this kind of work? See if NDMU already partners with any groups linked to the cause/issue. If all else fails, Google is your friend here! Try searching for something like “*Baltimore non-profits disability rights*” or “*Baltimore non-profits environmental volunteer opportunities.*” _____

Popular Volunteer Search Engines

Volunteermatch.org
Marylandnonprofits.org
Catholiccharities-md.org
MobileServe.com
Uwcm.org (United Way of Central Maryland)

Step 2: Reach Out

Once you get a better understanding of why you're planning a service project and who are some of the organizations working with the community, next comes outreach. Some of your service projects won't be partnered with a non-profit or organization and that's okay! Maybe you're doing something on your own – cool! Skip to **Step 3: All in the Details**.

If you would like to partner with an organization, see if you have any connections with the organization. Maybe a friend's parent works there, maybe NDMU already has a contact person there – don't be afraid to ask around! A personal connection is a great way to get in contact.

If you don't have a relationship to the organization, you can always reach out. See if they have a Volunteer Opportunities page and/or a way to contact them. If you're wanting to volunteer with them outside of their established volunteer opportunities, it's best to reach out through email or phone.

Here's a sample email/phone script:

Hi _____!

My name is _____, and I'm a student/faculty/staff at Notre Dame of Maryland University. I/my organization (describe what your organization does) am interested in the work you do at _____, and I was hoping to learn more about your work and collaborate on a project. I'd love hear more about what your organization's specific needs are and how we can turn this into an event for my peers/organization.

Can we set up a time to meet (in-person/virtually/phone/email) to discuss?

Thank you!
(Your name)

**If you want, you can describe what you were hoping to accomplish if it's pretty straightforward for the non-profit/organization (ex: hosting a school supplies drive for an elementary school).*

Step 3: All in the Details

By now, you should have established your motivations, your interests, organizations that exist, communication with an organization, and a tentative idea of when/what you want to do.

Now we're getting into the nitty gritty of planning. Depending on your project and the community organization, you may be planning this together or mostly solo. For example, if you're pursuing the school supplies drive idea, you mostly need the school's permission to collect items, a list of wanted supplies (and whether or not they'll accept used items like backpacks), and a tentative date of when you'll be able to deliver the supplies. If your project requires you to be on site, you might need to work a little more collaboratively with the community organization.

Here are some prompts to guide you through the details:

What is the event? How would you describe what you'll be doing in a couple of sentences? _____

Who are the people involved in planning the event? _____

When is the event? _____

Where will the event take place? _____

How many people will attend? Is there a maximum/minimum? Do I need people to RSVP? _____

What kind of tools/supplies will I need? Who will be providing those? Do I need to think about food/water for volunteers (if it is a long or strenuous project)? _____

How will I be publicizing this event? Do I want media there to cover it (if a large scale event or something the NDMU community would want to hear about)? _____

How do I envision the schedule looking like (including prep, travel, actual event, and then wrap up tasks)? _____

Step 4: The Event Happens!

Experience what you're experiencing. Be present. Engage with those you're serving and serving with. Check in with folks to make sure things are going okay and problem solve when/where needed.

Note on Photography

Be mindful when taking photos and communicate this to participants ahead of time. Make sure to have the consent of all involved, and in general, avoid photographing children (unless there was prior written consent from parent/guardian and the child is okay with having their picture taken). When you are working with people, the service you're providing could be encountering people in a vulnerable situation. Be respectful, ask for consent, and question your motives if your intention is to post those pictures online/social media.

Step 5: Reflect

Reflection is a crucial component of the service experience. Often, we might think of writing reflections in school for a book report or a newspaper article, but we need to think beyond journaling and essays (although very valid forms of reflection!).

One of the most popular models of reflection is the What? So What? Now What? model, and it can take you and your participants through what actually happened, why does it matter, and how the experience can influence the future.

What? So What? Now What? additional questions:

- **What?** What happened? What did you do? What expectations did you have of this experience and were they met? What was different than you expected?
- **So what?** What did you learn from this experience? Why does this experience matter to you? To the community partner? To society as a whole?
- **Now what?** What might you do differently as a result of this experience? Can you envision yourself acting on this experience in the future? If so, how?

Step 6: Share and Celebrate

Depending on the event, you may choose to share and celebrate the work you've done! You should definitely keep record of your planning process and any other resources that might help future folks in your organization, especially if it is a reoccurring event.

Log your hours on MobileServe (the volunteer hour tracking app/website that NDMU uses). Let the Office of Service and Community Engagement (ServiceNDMU@ndm.edu) know so we can celebrate you too!

If you opted to publicize the event, reach back out to the Communications Office to see if they'd be interested in writing an article or sharing the success on social media. Even sharing on your group's social media page/newsletter can be a great way to share (*Please refer back to the "Note on Photography" under Step 4: The Event Happens!*)

Celebrating your work could also be in the form of a party or event for those who participated – especially if they worked hard and long hours on the event. Practice reflection and gratitude for the experience. Reflect on the **Now What?** for future events.

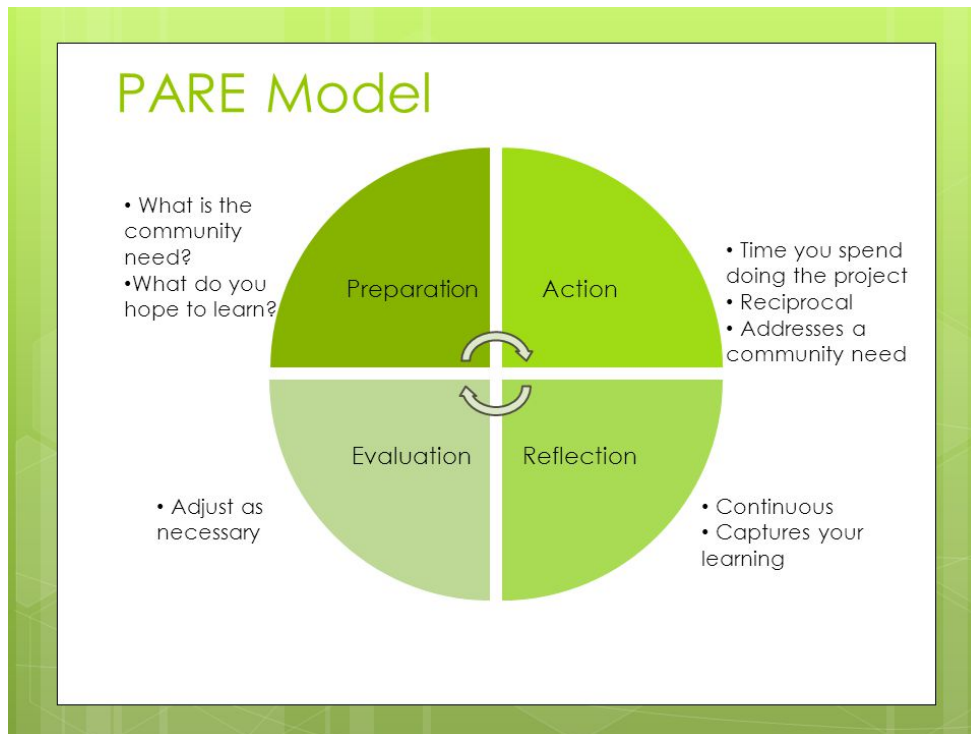
Write the organization or Community Partner you worked with a thank you note/email. It doesn't have to be long, but thanking them for working with you all is important in the relationship building process.

Other Service Resources/Models

Most models seek to guide the planner from idea to action. Models share many similarities but might use different wording or processes.

PARE Model

- *Preparation* – overview, logistics, expectations and assumptions
- *Action* – the service event itself
- *Reflection* – thinking critically about the experience and the complexities of society in addition to examining own attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions.
- *Evaluation* – assessing whether goals or objectives were met, where improvements could be made



Five Stages of Service-Learning

1. Investigation
 - Social analysis
 - Community needs assessment often done by conducting a survey, interviews, or community listening sessions
 - Bringing in community partners and community stakeholders
2. Preparation & Planning
 - Service/volunteer planner works with established community partner(s) to outline how to meet community needs
 - How to improve the situation
 - Planning out the details of what's being done/accomplished

3. Action
 - Do what was discussed in the planning stage
 - May take the form of direct service, indirect service, advocacy, research or a combination
4. Reflection
 - Participants consider how the experience, knowledge, and skills the used can be channeled toward solving the issue
 - Thinking about what worked, what didn't work, etc.
5. Implementation/Demonstration
 - Evaluating whether the project met its goals or course objectives, usually measured outcomes

