**Service Learning Step-by-Step***By Joe Bandy*

****When you are ready to plan a community engaged course, several step-by-step guides may be useful. A common guide for community-based course planning is [PARE](https://s3.amazonaws.com/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2011/03/05101258/PARE-Model.pdf) (Preparation, Action, Reflection and Evaluation), suggested by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).  What follows is a synthesis of the PARE model and the Hands On Network's [Guidebook on Project Development](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Project-Development-Guidebook.pdf) as well as the “[Recommended Guidelines for Selecting a Service Site](http://wp0.vanderbilt.edu/cft/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/Recommended-Guidelines-for-Selecting-a-Service-Site.doc),” Center for Teaching and Learning, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

**Preparation**

It is important to prepare the group for each community experience to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for community members and students.  Issues that arise during the preparation can set the tone for a community project and should be connected to issues discussed in reflection. Preparation should include information on the following:

**Community Partner Selection**

The Center for Teaching and Learning at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis recommends the following [guidelines for selecting a community site](http://wp0.vanderbilt.edu/cft/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/Recommended-Guidelines-for-Selecting-a-Service-Site.doc). Choosing the best community partner or project is a critical step in making your community engagement a worthwhile and meaningful experience. Learning about the community partner's goals, expectations, history, philosophy, staff, and previous volunteers can help in the selection of a partner that best matches the student’s or faculty’s interests, skills, and learning goals.

* Find out if other faculty or students from your campus? have served the partner before. Inquire about the goals of the organization, as well as its duration, structure and funding.
* Consider how the partner is viewed within the larger community.
* Are they willing to be collaborative? Will they be available to you or your students for regular communications? Are they responsive to mutual problem solving and open to meeting student needs?
* Do they have an interest in the learning goals of the course or program? Are they flexible in adjusting the community projects to meet learning goals?
* Do they have adequate resources to orient and train students, if necessary? Do they have staff and procedures for doing so? Can they track student activities and contributions, if necessary?
* Do they help to define expectations for students and provide direction for project implementation? Do they identify tasks appropriate to the knowledge and skills of students?
* Is the partner sensitive to intercultural issues and demonstrate a respect for diversity? Do they provide an orientation to the culture and traditions of the agency?
* Are they accessible? Are they relatively convenient for students and in compliance with ADA or similar statutes?
* Do they have liability procedures, if applicable? Do they have liability insurance? Do they have screens or guidelines for student assistance? Do they provide a safe and supervised environment? Do they provide students with procedures for crisis management?

**Goals and Objectives**

* Set clear goals and objectives for both the learning and community-based components of the course:
* What understandings and knowledge are elemental to course learning goals and community goals?
* What more applied skills will be necessary for students and community partners to use when working with one another?
* What secondary personal development do you hope to facilitate regarding ethical formation, interpersonal skills, leadership capacities, etc.?
* What resources are necessary for students and partners to achieve these goals? Readings? Lectures? Technologies? Trainings?

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues and institutional review procedures for community based research include:

* **Ethical Issues** – If your community-based project involves students conducting research with human subjects, it will likely involve ethical issues that are important to consider before you begin. In all community projects it is imperative to ensure the just and benevolent treatment of human subjects, but particularly if students are conducting research that involves community participation. All project participants should consider carefully ethical issues before the research begins. A useful and general guide to these broad ethical considerations and the related IRB procedures is “[Service Learning Research Primer”](https://s3.amazonaws.com/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2011/03/05101258/PARE-Model.pdf) by the [IUPUI Center for Service and Learning](https://csl.iupui.edu/).
* **IRB Procedures** – At Vanderbilt, all community-based research with human subjects must have IRB approval. However, expedited approval is possible for community-based research projects that are exempt from full review. For a full review of IRB procedures, please consult the Vanderbilt Human Research Protection Program’s [IRB Policies and Procedures](http://mcapps01.mc.vanderbilt.edu/IRB/policy&procedures.nsf).
* **Exemption and Expedited Review** – IRB exemption criteria may be found on Exemption Request Form #1102. This form, as well as instructions on how to complete it, is available from the Vanderbilt University [Human Research Protection Program](http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/forms/).
* **IRB Application** – If the research is not exempt from full IRB review, one must submit a complete IRB application. There are several different applications depending on one’s discipline, the new or continuing status of the research, or other considerations. A full list of forms and instructions is available at the Vanderbilt University [Human Research Protection Program](http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/forms/).
* **Off Campus Travel** - In addition to IRB approval, Vanderbilt would like faculty and staff who oversee any off-campus travel to adhere to procedures of safety and security outlined clearly and simply in its [Academic Travel Policy](http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/docs/pdf/deans_office/policies/academic_travel_policy_domestic_final.pdf).  To ease the process, you may also care to use the [Academic Travel Checklist](http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/docs/pdf/deans_office/policies/academic_travel_checklist_domestic.pdf).

**Logistics**

Logistics considerations, including when and where the group will meet and how the group will get to the community site:

* **Liability Issues** – Not all projects have liability concerns, but some may. It is important to consider such issues in advance, such as drivers insurance and licensing for those providing transportation, van certification, site/agency insurance for volunteers, developing an emergency binder with home contact information, or agency certification/screening, particularly schools.
* **Off Campus Travel** - Vanderbilt would like any student traveling off campus to sign the [Vanderbilt Release form](https://wp0.vanderbilt.edu/cft/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/Vandberilt-student-travel-form.pdf).  If a course will entail multiple field trips, a form need not be signed and submitted for each trip, but only once at the beginning of the course.
* **Media Coverage** – Decide if local media will be involved during and after the project is in action, and/or seek alternative ideas, such as writing letters to the editor of the local newspaper.
* **Participant Roles** – Roles may differ from those in a traditional classroom setting. Students may be cast as planners and collaborators and teachers may be seen as community resource experts or public relations directors. Be clear with all project participants what their respective roles may be.
* **Scheduling** – Figure out how much time is needed for each component of the project. Plan each unit and site visit carefully to make sure the students' time and that of the community partner is well spent.
* **Supervision** – Students may supervise themselves or need some guidance from faculty or the community partner. It is important to know what supervision is needed and to ensure it is in place before project work begins.
* **Timeline** – Map out a timeline for the project. Include start and end dates, onsite activities and any classroom instruction or reflections related to the project.
* **Training** — Training is a good idea for all participants before community placement because it gives participants a better understanding of expectations and procedures, and may signal other needs. Tailor the general training needs to the project. Formal or informal training can take place in the classroom, on site, or in smaller meeting spaces, if appropriate. Prior to starting the project, a preliminary meeting for all participants, where students can ask questions or raise concerns, is advised.
* **Transportation** – If the community project takes place outside school, the issue of transportation needs to be addressed. Options include school buses or vans, public transportation, walking (if appropriate), or student cars.  At Vanderbilt, students without transportation may wish to reserve transportation with the Office of Active Citizenship and Service via their [Vehicle Loan Program](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/for-students/vehicle-for-service/).  Reservations and driver certification may be obtained through this site.
* **Presentations and Celebration** – It is important to have students share the project results with their community partner and to celebrate everyone’s achievements.

**Expectations**

Expectations and assumptions of the students and community partners, including what they hope to gain from the project and any concerns that they may need to consider.

**Course Content**

The following are components you should consider including as you develop content for your course:

* Information about the content of the project including training, community work performed, what will happen after project completion and where and how reflection and evaluation will take place.
* Information about broader issues relating to the project aids in understanding. This includes information about the population the group will be working with within the context of larger social issues such as power and inequality.
* Activities that stimulate the acquisition and application of course understandings, knowledge, and skills.
* Promotion of high levels of problem solving, critical thinking, analysis, application and theorization, and reflection.

**Student Assessment**

Assessment of student and project progress that are integrated with instruction (journals, oral presentations, essays, products, research papers, and self-evaluations).

**Action**

Use this list below as reference when you implement your plan.

* Provide syllabi, roles, and schedules to students and community partners.
* Provide course resources and trainings to students.
* Engage in site visits and orientations.
* Incorporate community partners into the course.
* Ensure regular progress reports and assessments of student and project development.
* Maintain regular contact with the community agency.
* Include reflection and formative evaluative moments throughout the course.
* Host final student presentations or dialogues with community partner.
* Celebrate student and community achievements.

**Reflection**

* Reflection allows those participating in community to:
* Think critically about their experience.
* Understand the complexity of their community experience and put it in a larger context.
* Challenge, although not necessarily change, their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, privileges, prejudices, and stereotypes.
* Transform a single project into further involvement and/or broader issue awareness.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation of each community experience is important in determining to what extent the goals and learning objectives of the project were met.  Evaluation helps ensure the success of the next community project — reinforcing design and implementation practices.

Community projects should be evaluated from the perspectives of the community partner, those who use the partner’s services, and students.

Develop a brief set of questions and ask students to respond in writing and then in small groups. Questions might include:

* To what extent did the experience meet expectations?
* What might have made the experience better?
* What community needs did your work fulfill?
* What community needs were not addressed?
* What changes would you suggest to improve the project?

To enhance the experience from the perspective of the community organization, faculty should ask the community partner’s staff how successful they found the experience to be.  Additionally, ask what people could do differently next time or how they could be better prepared for their involvement in the community in the future.

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