
e-Service: A Guide for Students

July 27, 2020

INTRODUCTION

In a time of great uncertainty and flux due to a global pandemic (Jesse 2020), students who wish to serve others are faced with a challenge. Whether you want to serve because you are part of [LSU's Engaged Citizens Program](#), are motivated internally, or are looking to design a service-learning contract for an LSU course, you have choices to make. Where will you do service? What kind of service will you provide? How can you ensure it connects to your course, career goals, sense of purpose, or skills? How can you ensure you, your loved ones, and everyone you work alongside while doing service remain safe?

In this context, many people are choosing a route that ensures physical distancing protocols are followed and that is less likely to get disrupted due to any person's potential COVID-19 exposure: e-service. E-service is a form of giving support to others—while learning more yourself—in response to a community-articulated need (Waldner, McGorry, and Widener 2012). While e-service *can* mean less contact, interaction, or relationship-building with a community partner, it does not have to. In addition, it offers benefits face-to-face service does not always offer: a chance to connect with people across the globe, to serve organizations who do not have offices in your local area, and/or to hone your technological and social skills using modern platforms for electronic engagement (Moore and Kearsley 2012; Goertzen and Greenleaf 2016). It is an up-and-coming area of professional development for students and practitioners. It is a “facilitator rather than a barrier” to service because it frees service from geographical barriers (Waldner et al 2012: 123).

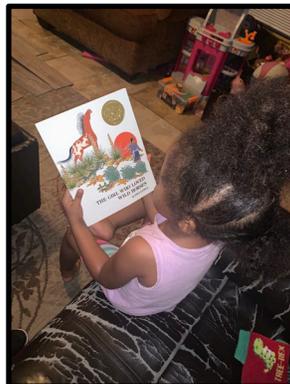


PHOTO: Students in AAAS/SOCL 2511: Race Relations created “read-aloud” videos for the [Zeiter Literacy Center](#), read the book to a child in their life, and gifted it to that child or non-profit afterward. This is an easy example of how to do service safely from home, in line with CDC and state health guidelines. (Photo credit: Alaina Kately, LSU Communication Disorders major).

E-SERVICE BEST PRACTICES

Online courses and degree programs are outpacing their on-campus counterparts in terms of growth rates (Lederman 2018). Learning how to do multiple types of engagement online, then, is great practice for you in your field. “Best practices” for doing e-service closely mirror best practices for service in person, they merely take place with different tools and in different venues. If you have done service before, you will recognize the parallels in best practices for e-service and face-to-face (F2F) service here, with one exception: technology and tools get added to the *top* of the list.

Tools and Technology

Prior to conducting e-service with a community partner, you should understand what tools and technology they need or expect you to use to engage with them. Many organizations with pre-published e-service opportunities will have this information publicly available online. If you are working with a local community partner you have collaborated with in the past to design work you can do from home, you can ask about tools and tech directly. If your partner is comfortable working via email and phone calls only, be sure you are prepared to check your phone and email frequently. If they want you to upload videos to YouTube, host meetings on Zoom, create Instagram videos, or utilize a specialist tool such as free transcription software, ask yourself if you are prepared before you agree to begin. Do you know how to make and edit videos? Do you have access to the software necessary to do the work? Are you familiar enough with it to do the job? Or do you need some practice and training first?

To ensure you are prepared to engage, be sure you have: a) familiarity with and access to the tools the community partner needs you to use and b) access to technological equipment necessary to communicate and collaborate (eg. computer or phone that can record good video, high-speed internet connection). You can watch video tutorials online, practice the skill (eg. video making or Zoom conferencing) with friends and family, or read FAQ and instructional pages online prior to entering a service agreement with a community partner. If you do not have stable internet access at home, research resources your local public library or your educational institution may offer. During the early months of COVID-19 in 2020, for example, the East Baton Rouge Public Library system worked to provide high-speed internet to people in library parking lots when the buildings themselves had to close. Resources such as these could be available to you if your locality goes into another stay-at-home order and/or your internet access at home is not reliable enough to do the service you would like to.



PHOTO: Saturday Night Live cast poking fun at the awkwardness of Zoom calls

Service Structure

When approaching a service opportunity, ask yourself some questions: Am I serving a need people in my community or another community have said they want support with? Does it fit with my skill set? How and what can I learn from this about my field, my area of education, the world around me, a social issue, or even myself? Who will be my support system as I embark on this new journey? Ideal service agreements will have the following elements, much like service-learning classes do (Jacoby 2015):

- **Reciprocity** – You and the community partner benefit from the arrangement: it is a “win-win.”
- **Serving a community-identified need** – Community members (not outsiders) articulated the need they are facing and what they want done about it.
- **Working toward the public good** – Service performed works toward enhancing quality of life, broadly speaking, for the public.
- **Asset-based** – You are aware of (or seek to learn about) the community’s existing strengths and the resources they have historically used to make change rather than focusing solely or primarily on challenges it faces.
- **Reflective** – You are prepared to critically reflect on the need you are collaboratively addressing with the community partner, the history behind it, and yourself in the process of doing service. You are prepared to grow as a person.

If these elements are in place, you have a wonderful opportunity in front of you! If they are not, can you work to make them emerge? Or would it be better if you looked for a different partnership? Once you have found the right connection, there is one additional idea to think about: Are the expectations my community partner and I have of one another clear to everyone or do we need a “memorandum of understanding” (MOU)? Many service-learning practitioners utilize MOUs to facilitate shared understanding of mutual expectations. They can be as simple or complex as is needed for the situation. See [CCELL’s webpage](#) for examples of agreements you might use to make sure everyone is on the same page prior to beginning. MOUs may not be necessary, however. For example, with remote service opportunities posted by existing non-profit organizations, where their needs and directions are clearly spelled out online, all their expectations are already limited, clear, and publicly available. You will not need an MOU.

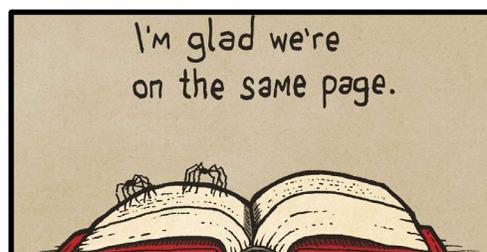


PHOTO: In service partnerships, it is paramount to get everyone on the same page to prevent disappointment and to facilitate high-quality experiences for all involved.

Communication and Relationship Building

Relationship-building is a core component of successful service partnerships and, as we all know, communication is key to maintaining healthy relationships. As such, it is a good idea to remember that the work you are doing is not the only moving piece to consider. Every interaction you have with your community partner (email, phone, text, or Zoom call) matters. Bring your best self to the table each time, even if you hit speed bumps along the way. If you are ever feeling confused or frustrated, take time to center yourself before calling, emailing, or communicating. You might even talk to someone in your support network—including the team at [LSU CCELL](#)—about the issue you are facing and how best to address it prior to acting.

Midpoint check-in

- How do you think things are going so far?
- What is working well?
- What could we change, if possible?

If you are doing service with an organization with pre-posted opportunities on the web where all the expectations are clear and they need little to no contact from you until the service is complete, you will have less to consider when it comes to relationship-building with individuals. More of your effort will be focused on professional and kind communications. If you are working with a community partner you have developed an individualized plan with, however, you might consider things such as a “midpoint check-in,” to see how things are going on their end around the halfway point in your work. It never hurts to check in to see if things need to shift to make the partnership as beneficial to everyone as possible.

Another aspect of relationship-building to consider is whether or not you are humanely and skillfully crossing boundaries of difference, if they exist in your partnership. Critical S-L scholars have long pointed out how when students and/or faculty, who may have little exposure to the group, neighborhood, or community they are working with, enter into service partnerships, they can sometimes engage in ways that are unintentionally harmful (Cole 2012; Mitchell and Donahue 2009; Mitchell 2008; Hollis 2004). Scholarship suggests these issues can be amplified in online service work because of “online disinhibition,” or “a reduction of self-regulation that occurs when communication becomes digital” (Shah et al 2018: 190). Are you working with a community you are a part of or deeply familiar with? If so, you might be better prepared to navigate your communications and relationship-building skillfully. If not, what kind of personal work can you do to ensure you are crossing boundaries of difference (across status positions such as social class, race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, sexuality, and/or experience contrasts) in ways that facilitate mutual bond-building and avoid unintentional slight or injury?

Critical scholarship offers great suggestions for doing the latter kind of work. Let’s pretend you are working with a non-profit in a neighborhood people in your town inappropriately refer to as a “ghetto.” Maybe your parents or friends say things like “thank goodness you are working online rather than going there—that place *isn’t safe*.” These kinds of statements are deeply impactful. Are you thinking about how they affect you? How they affect the way you view and treat the people you are working with? Are you prepared to unpack all the beliefs and experiences you had before starting? If the answer is yes, you are honing the skill of being a highly engaged and mutually supportive service partner. Here are some tips for doing the work of “unpacking” personal viewpoints and opinions which are shaped by the broader culture you live in:

1. **Utilizing “preflection” exercises.** One simple step to beginning a humane service partnership arrangement is to journal or write in a diary about all the pre-existing beliefs, feelings, and thoughts you have about the community, community partner, social issue, neighborhood, and people you will be working with. Be honest with yourself—that’s the only way to ensure you bring your preconceptions to the forefront so you can engage with them critically prior to trying to be of service to others.
2. **Adapting an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model.** Before doing service, spend time identifying the assets and resources community members and community partners have used and continue to use to transform local social and physical environments (Shah et al 2018). Do some historical research about the area. Ask your community partner about the work they’ve done and the community leaders they know. Think about the assets they carry that outsiders do not: How do they, who have lived with the experience they are working to address, see the problem and work to address it? How have other local organizations gone about the task? What is the history of the area? Have outsiders ever tried to intervene in ways that were not helpful? What roadbumps did they encounter that you can avoid?
3. **Doing your homework.** Read up on the history of the social issue the organization you are partnering with is working on. Pick up a book on race relations, being an LGBTQIA+ ally, or interfaith coalitions (see Appendix A for a list of resources and suggested readings).

E-SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Plentiful opportunities to serve remotely existed online prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and even more have emerged afterward. If you do not have a local community partner you have been working with who has remote service you can perform, please look to [CCELL’s online service opportunities document](#). You can find ways to match your skill set, academic area, career goals, and/or personal passion with a chance to serve alongside community partners all over the globe. You can also examine our [Spring 2020 service-learning assignment adaptation document](#) for an idea of how to design a personalized service opportunity. We cannot wait to see what you do. Please reach out to the team at CCELL (ccell@lsu.edu) if you have any questions or need our support.

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APPENDIX A: RESOURCES AND BOOK SUGGESTIONS

Consider asking an LSU expert for a 30-minute Zoom meeting to help you identify more things you can read or study as a part of your service work. You might find someone who does research on the social challenge you will be addressing, the history of the community you are working alongside, or the boundaries of difference you will have to cross, for example. You'd be surprised how many are willing to have a short conversation with you to help you find ways to better educate yourself. Consider talking to faculty in LSU's: [African and African American Studies Program](#); [Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program](#); [History Department](#); [School of Social Work](#); [School of Kinesiology](#); [School of Education](#); or [Sociology Department](#), for example. You could also sign up for a class that helps you learn more about the subject. For advice on finding an individual faculty member to consult with or ask for support, contact CCELL at ccell@lsu.edu.

Recommended books, readings, and resources:

- Cavalcante, Andre. 2018. *Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life*. NYU Press.
- DiAngelo, Robin. 2019. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Driskill, Qwo Li, Chris Finley, and Brian Joseph Gilley. 2011. *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. University of Arizona Press.
- Free books and resources from Taylor and Francis Publishing on addressing racism and inequality ([Click here](#))
- Hendry, Petra Munro and Jay Edwards. 2008. *Old South Baton Rouge: The Roots of Hope*. Lafayette, LA: ULL Press.
- James, Winston G. 2005. *Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity*. Redbone Press.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. 2011. *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Kendi, Ibrahim X. 2019. *How to Be An Antiracist*. One World Publishers.
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- Lee, Erika. 2015. *The Making of Asian America: A History*. NY: Simon & Schuster.
- LSU Office of Multicultural Affairs: LGBTQ+ Project [local](#) and [national](#) resource pages.
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- Mogul, Joey L, Andrea J Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock. 2012. *Queer InJustice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. Beacon Press.
- Ngai, Mai. 2014. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton University Press.
- Rajunov, Micah and A. Scott Duane. 2019. *Nonbionary: Memoirs of Gender and Identity*. Columbia University Press.
- Rivera, Gabby. 2019. *Juliet Takes a Breath*. Dial Books.
- Rothstein, Richard. 2018. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. NY: Liveright. (Also see an NPR interview with Rothstein for an abbreviated discussion of his research findings: <https://www.npr.org/2015/05/14/406699264/historian-says-dont-sanitize-how-our-government-created-the-ghettos>)
- Takaki, Ronald. 2008. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Back Bay Books.
- Tatum, Beverly. 2017. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*. NY: Basic Books.
- Taylor, Jami K., Daniel C. Lewis, and Donald P. Haider-Markel. 2018. *The Remarkable Rise of Transgender Rights*. University of Michigan Press.
- [Video on health impacts of food insecurity](#)
- Wolf, Sherry. 2009. *Sexuality & Socialism*. Haymarket Books.

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CCELL facilitates LSU service-learning classes and community-engaged research working with university faculty, students, administrators, staff, and community partners. You can find more information about us at www.lsu.edu/ccell or by emailing us at ccell@lsu.edu.