



**LEVERAGING SERVICE LEARNING, FIELD SITE RECRUITMENT &
FAITH-BASED PARTNERSHIPS**

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Leveraging Service Learning, Field Site Recruitment & Faith-Based Partnerships

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WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- Understand the need for innovative approaches to recruit and retain quality internship training sites.
- Recognize both training potential and program needs of small to mid-size faith-based social service organizations.
- Learn how to develop an agency partnership and structure a successful student service learning project.
- Consider potential challenges in working with faith-based organizations.
- Learn “donor development” tactics to achieve a triple bottom line: organizational capacity building, social work field capacity building and increase quality of student learning.

RECOGNIZING MSW PROGRAM NEED FOR QUALITY TRAINING SITES

Challenges:

- MSW Programs located in large urban centers are experiencing increased competition to secure quality clinical training sites.
- There has been an increase in graduate online programs, resulting in increasing competition for internship sites
- Psychology clinical training programs continue to expand, and MFT and Psychology students compete with MSW students for available slots
- Difficulty retaining professional social workers as field instructors when decreased government funding and increasing workloads in social service agencies strain their capacity to mentor students (Poulin, Kauffman & Silver, 2006).
- Limited number of mezzo and macro practice trainings sites with an available qualified MSW field instructor (Nandan and Scott, 2011)

INNOVATION REQUIRES ASSESSING YOUR ASSETS

Azusa Pacific Social Work Program STRENGTHS:

- Our MSW program has strong ties to faith-based organizations due to our rich Christian institute of Higher Education.
- Our faculty have expertise working with faith communities and integrating spirituality in and treatment planning.
- Our faculty have clinical competencies in working with diverse populations providing mental health and care management services
- Our faculty have macro expertise in organizational management, program planning and evaluation and community organizing

= MSW Program goal: Matching our assets with the needs of faith-based organizations to develop mutually beneficial partnerships



THE OPPORTUNITY

Our program is situated in a large city with a proliferation of urban community and faith-based nonprofits engaged in serving the homeless, low income families, immigrants, elderly, disabled and foster children.



NEEDS OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING COMMUNITY SERVICES

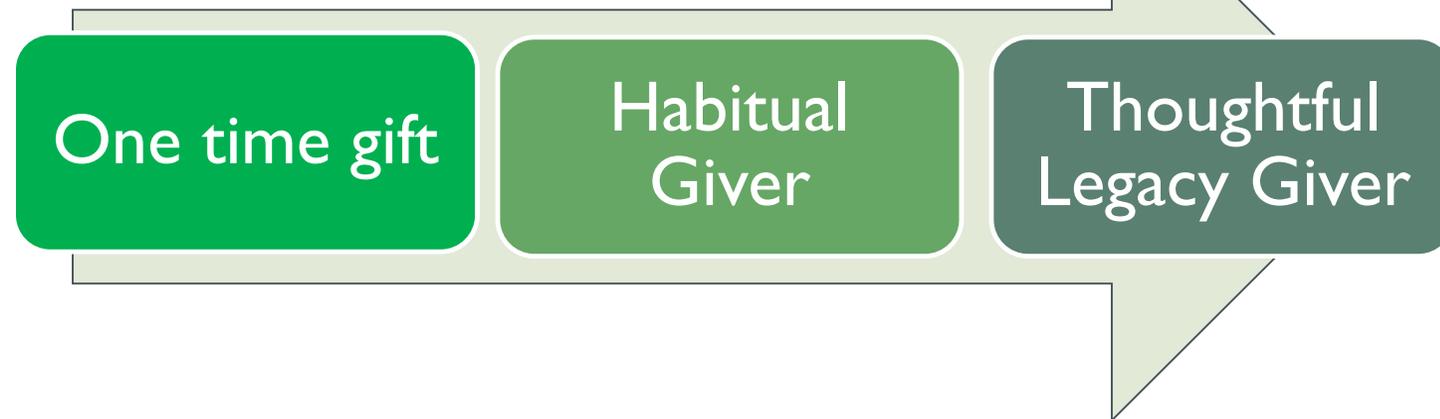
- FBOs are uniquely situated to service vulnerable populations such as impoverished families, prisoners in their rehabilitation and reintegration processes, children of prisoners, homeless individuals, and high-risk youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
- Leake, Green, Marquez, Vanderburg, Guillaume & Gardner (2007) conducted a survey of 44 faith based organizations and found that only (56%) of organizations had a grant-writing template, 31% had process evaluation plans and few had either a fund-raising plan (15%) or an outcome evaluation plan (18%).
- Faith-based programs often have organizational weaknesses in capacity, including “inadequate personnel policies, hiring practices, fiscal management, and fund-raising capacities; [and] a general lack of program knowledge” (Ericson, 2001, p. 2).
- According to The Urban Institute community and faith-based organizations are vital to communities because of their ability to provide *highly flexible, often low cost, responses to local needs*. However, “many such organizations have relatively little experience in the formal contracting requirements, financial tracking, and caseload tracking, including outcomes, required to meet audit requirements of federal, state, and local programs...there is a widespread need for technical (Retrieved from www.urban.org).

PARTNERING WITH FAITH BASED SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT TRAINING

- As a Christian university, faith integration is one of our 11 core competencies. Partnering with faith-based social service organizations matches both our university and graduate social work program unique context, mission and core competencies.
- Many national religious organizations, such as Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and the Salvation Army, as well as many smaller, local coalitions receive government funds to provide specific social service programs and as such offer rich social work training opportunities (Ebaugh, Pipes, Saltzman & Daniels, 2001, p. 412).
- Congregations and faith-based non-profits have strong ties to the community and are most often engaged in front line relief services such as soup kitchens, recovery homes, food pantries, elderly visitation programs, and other emergency relief programs (Garland, Wolfer & Myers, 2008; Williamson, 2005).

APPROACHING AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS LIKE DONOR DEVELOPMENT

- In this competitive environment, field directors may do well to frame training site recruitment as “donor acquisition.” Kettner (2011) outlines donor acquisition strategies as a three tiered process.
- First time contact with agency partner, like donor the goal is to get an initial short term commitment (i.e. student project) then move to cultivating the relationship to convert new donor into a “habitual donor” who regularly partners with the university as an internship site. This then becomes your pool for cultivating thoughtful legacy donors, agency partners that may become involved in your advisory boards, joint fundraising or grant acquisitions. Kettner (2011) also emphasized new donors must be given additional opportunities to give and connect, and like nonprofit development directors, faculty must understand the importance of regular communication contacts through newsletters, emails and invitations.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND STUDENT SERVICE LEARNING: REVIEW OF THE BENEFITS

A review of the literature evaluating various student service learning projects strongly supports service learning having a positive impact on student learning and skill development (Lemeux & Allen; 2007, Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray; 2001; Billig & Furco; 2002).

Positive benefits include:

- Changes in students critical thinking
- Ability to analyze problems
- Ability to apply academic learning
- Increased social responsibility and citizenship skills
- Increased commitment to service

(Eyler et al., 2001)



WHAT ARE THE BEST STEPS TO SET UP A SERVICE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP?

CONSIDER THESE STEPS:

1. AGENCY RECRUITMENT & SCREENING
2. DEFINING GOALS AND ROLES
3. STUDENT TASK ASSIGNMENTS
4. TRACKING PROGRESS
5. ENSURING DELIVERABLES



SERVICE LEARNING AS METHOD TO BUILD AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

FACULTY CASE STUDY:

SOCW 400 Grant and Proposal Writing Course (taught 2008-2014)

- Service Learning involved matching student teams (3-4 students) with a local community non profit organization to develop a grant proposal to submit to a foundation for funding.
- Professor invited and required local FBO and CBO agencies to submit application in order to participate in service learning project.
- Agency application process ensured agency understood purpose of project, role of students and the importance of designated agency representative making a commitment to be available to students.
- Students and agency representative required to meet at least three times over the course of the semester
- Utilizing technology for blended/hybrid online learning reduced student in-class time and released them to meet with agency partners.
- Concurrent with course lectures, students applied needs assessment, program planning and evaluation skills in developing the following sections of the grant proposal, 1) agency credibility & capacity, 2) statement of need, 3) proposed program goals and objectives, 4) the evaluation plan, 5) project/program budget, 6) sustainability plan.
- Proposals drafts were submitted for in class peer review and then professor review, multiple revisions ensured a quality final product.

STRUCTURING A 15 WEEK SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

CHALLENGES AND TIPS:

- Teaming students into small groups for Student Learning Projects is desirable when creating a large deliverable (report, proposal). A team of 3-4 students can also protect your project if one or more students drop out.
- Team/Group assignments can be challenging when some group members are more motivated than others. Require all group/team members rate each others performance and tie rating into class participation points.
- Team/Group assignments can look and read as disjointed if very divergent writing styles. Therefore structuring peer reviews and professor review is essential to well edited document.
- Students also want to be graded on their individual performance. Early on provide a mix of some individual assignments, like a midterm or initial needs assessment write-up that requires an individual grade.

CASE STUDY: STUDENT GRANT PROJECT OUTCOMES

SOCW 400 Grant & Proposal Writing Course Outcomes

- Over 1.5 million in student secured grants for community and faith-based social service agencies
- Increased publicity and recognition for the university and agency partner
- Increased student learning, both knowledge and applied skills (Student surveys, 2013- 2014)
- Increased student's motivation to work in nonprofit community and faith-based organizations serving with at-risk populations
- Follow up faculty cultivation of agency relationship resulted in 75% becoming a social work internship training site within 2-3 years.



STUDENT FEEDBACK

On a scale of 1 to 10, students were asked to rate the following statements:

1. I rate my current knowledge and skills in grant writing and research at the following level:

Pre-Class 2.6 Post-Class 7.6

2. I rate my ability to write a successful grant proposal and get it funded at:

Pre-Class 2 Post-Class 7.6

3. I rate my work/volunteer experience with non-profit resource development and funding activities at:

Pre-Class 5.3 Post-Class 8.9

4. I rate my future interest in working in a non-profit setting to help communities and at-risk groups of people at:

Pre-Class 8.8 Post-Class 8.9

STUDENT FEEDBACK COMMENTS

- “I loved that we could work with an actual organization. We were well equipped to write a grant.”
- “I learned such practical information in this course and I feel well equipped for grant and proposal writing!”
- “Service learning... enhanced my ability to understand and apply concepts”
- “I learned so much about writing, working with a non-profit to gain resources for it”
- “Real world experience enhanced my ability to understand and apply concepts”
- “Course provided great opportunities to engage in practical work. I found my relationship with my organization extremely helpful in understanding the inner workings of nonprofits and foundations.”

NEXT STEPS: AGENCY FIELD SITE RECRUITMENT

1. Follow up meeting with agency partner, debrief on what was valuable about social work students contribution to the organization. Invite feedback regarding the student service learning project experience
2. Highlight benefits and strengths of social work skill set
3. Invite agency partner to consider developing a social work student internship opportunity
4. Provide packets and outline requirements. Describe types of clinical and macro practice assignments students are expected to engage in, and see if this matches agency need and if agency can provide appropriate experience.
5. Identify qualified agency staff who could precept or supervise a student intern.
6. Finalize training affiliation agreement and complete agency site approval process.
7. Invite designated agency staff to *Field Preceptor/Field instructor Orientation & Training*.
8. Assist them with designing *intern orientation to the agency, internship job description and intern policies*.
9. Place first time student and provide additional support and early follow up visits as need to ensure success

FROM STUDENT PROJECTS TO SOCIAL WORK TRAINING SITE DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS LEARNED

- New faith based and community based organizations may still be brand new to appreciating the role of social worker and professional social work practice
- Important to orient agency staff and key leaders to the role of the social worker, their scope of practice, the Code of Ethics and CSWE core competencies & skills BEFORE the student is placed.
- Providing clear expectations and information is essential. Our faculty developed a specialized agency application packet and orientation to Social Work Field Education binder.
- Important to discuss and understand how faith is integrated in the agency mission, culture and services. Faculty should convey they understand, value and support the organizations faith and values, while ensuring student interns practice faith integration in an ethical manner.
- Often faith-based organizations can only contract for a part-time MSW supervisor, so ensure there is a strong Preceptor presence to oversee student interns daily tasks.
- Plan to meet at least three to four times with agency director and designated agency preceptor and field supervisor PRIOR to and in the FIRST MONTHS of intern placement.

CHALLENGES WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOS)

- FBO may be newly formed, may lack clearly defined program goals, objectives and outcomes. Start up faith-based nonprofits may not be established enough to be ready for a student learner.
- Some faith-based social service agencies had misperceptions or misgivings about the role of a social worker, i.e. that social worker students may be resistant to supporting religious mission, may be quick to make reports like child abuse, may be more suitable for government services, or may be less qualified to provide counseling.
- Faith-based organizations hire staff based on family or ministry relationships. Some staff may not be the best qualified or are kept on despite problems due to “ministry culture”, staff ministry/care is also seen as the mission of that ministry, and Christian loyalty may be valued higher than professional skills.
- When developing social work internships at faith-based sites, there is a need for increased professionalism and formalization of policies and documentation in service delivery. Ministry cultures may resist formalizing, for example one director stated they did not have formal treatment plans because they wanted to retain ability to individually tailor services to each client.
- Faith-based organizations are dependent on donors and often have tight budgets. They may not be able to pay competitive salaries to retain a Masters level MSW on staff. Lower salaries result in higher staff turnover.

REWARDS

- As faith-based organization scales, investment in relationships and partnership results in **excellent resources for student training and professional development**
- **The local community benefits** as student interns increase FBO nonprofit services such as case management, counseling, program development, grant writing and policy and advocacy
- Upfront time invested pays off over a 3-5 year period and can result in **a triple bottom line:** increased field training capacity, community capacity and asset building, and improved student learning!



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