



## **OLCE's Foundations of Community Engagement**

developed by UNCG's Office of Leadership and Civic Engagement (2021)

### **About**

OLCE's Foundations of Community Engagement aim to prepare students to engage with the community ethically and effectively. The foundations were adapted from Stanford's Principles of Ethical and Effective Service and informed by the Social Change Model. They guide our work with students, faculty, and community partners to inform program design, implementation, and evaluation, as well as to ensure that our work aligns with our values.

- Students use them to reflect on their engagement with the community in order to prepare them to serve ethically and effectively.
- Faculty & Staff members use them as a structure to lead students in conversations that best prepare them to serve in communities.
- Community Partners can review the principles as a tool for developing mutual understanding of a student's role with their organization.

The foundations are aspirational and intentionally provocative. Ethical and effective service is an ongoing process—whether we are engaging in public service for the first time or have significant experience. A few general assumptions regarding the language in this document:

- The foundations are not listed in priority order and are all equally valued.
- The foundations are not intended to be a perfect typology; there are important interconnections between the principles that can be explored.
- Although the principles are applicable to all parties involved in a service activity, the language is primarily focused on the student role and experience.

The bottom of this page shares practical strategies on [how to use these foundations](#).

### **The Foundations**

Self-Awareness • Preparation • Reciprocity • Respect & Inclusion • Reflection

## Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness allows us to acknowledge the values, attitudes, and beliefs that motivate us to take action. Building a consciousness of self leads to the ability to develop stronger interpersonal relationships, more empathy towards others, and intentionality behind our actions. Being self-aware allows us to recognize congruence in our thinking, feeling, and behaving and encourages us to act with consistency, authenticity, and honesty towards yourself and others. This can then lead to a sense of citizenship and responsibly connected to the community and the society.

Questions to Consider:

- What relationship do I have with the community I will be serving with?
- How do my values, beliefs, and attitudes align or not align with this service experience or the community partner?
- What assumptions do I have about the experiences and behaviors of the community members I will be serving with?
- How will I acknowledge when my actions are or aren't consistent with my values?
- What steps have I taken to ensure my own physical and emotional well-being, as well as to respect the confidentiality and privacy of all participants?
- How will I react when the cultural norms of a given community are different from my own community's?
- How will I balance my own self-care when dealing with situations that may feel stressful or overwhelming through this experience?

## Preparation

Taking time to understand the social, economic, environmental, and historical contexts of service experiences is essential. Preparation requires researching information about the partner organizations and communities and developing awareness of past injustices and power differentials. Preparation includes developing a commitment to the experience and the community partner which implies passion, intensity, and duration.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the mission or goal of the organization I am serving with?
- What history about this impact area is important to know?
- What knowledge and skills do I need to be effective in engaging with this community and/or social issue?
- How has my academic work or previous experiences prepared me for this experience?
- What expectations do I have about this experience and how will I communicate them with my community partner?

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- What is my role and/or purpose of this service experience and what does my community partner expect from me?
- What is motivating me to stay committed to this community partner?
- How do my passions, goals, and/or future plans relate to this experience?

## Reciprocity

B. Jacoby (2003) defines reciprocity as “mutually beneficial and well-defined relationships that include a commitment to mutual goals, shared responsibility, mutual authority, and accountability for success and sharing the rewards.

A reciprocal relationship with partners is characterized by interdependence; consideration of collective strengths, knowledge, and capacity to influence others; and shared responsibility to work toward mutual benefit and growth. Reciprocity compels us to collaborate with community partners in the design, facilitation, and evaluation of our efforts to ensure value and relevance to all involved. Prioritizing reciprocity in collaboration empowers yourself and others through trust in creating collective goals towards a common purpose.

### Questions to Consider

- How can I ensure my work is focused on my community partners’ stated needs, resources available, and interests, as well as share my own?
- What knowledge does my community partner have that will contribute to my learning?
- How can show I appreciation to my community partners for their educational role?
- How can I earn and sustain the trust of community partners, those I serve alongside, and community members I am interacting with?
- How will I establish clear lines of ongoing communication with my community partners?
- How can we use our collective strengths and knowledge to make a lasting impact?
- How will I react when there is an unexpected change in needs?

## Respect & Inclusion

Respect is about recognizing the value of others and treating others how they want to be treated. It often includes attempting to understand values, ideas, and behaviors that conflict with our own with civility. Civility also implies the exercise of restraint in criticizing the views and actions of others. Prioritizing respect and inclusion compels us to recognize differences between people as valued assets, while acknowledging the visible, invisible, and intersecting dimensions of identity, power, and privilege. Inclusion requires us to actively challenge biases, stereotypes, and assumptions—particularly as we work to address forms of oppression and the

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systemic exclusion of historically disenfranchised individuals and groups and work toward equity.

Questions to Consider:

- How do those I serve with want to be treated?
- When exposed to attitudes, behaviors, and ideas that conflict with my own, how will I manage the tension between accepting others and working toward equity and justice?
- What differences exist among the people involved in this service experience, and how can I recognize and respect these differences as valuable assets?
- What visible, invisible, and intersectional dimensions of identity, power, privilege, and oppression exist in this public service context?
- What are my own biases, stereotypes, and assumptions about this community?
- How will I build a sense of trust with the community I am serving?
- How can I ensure those who are different from me feel valued and appreciated?

## Reflection

Reflection includes processing what was learned and evaluating the impact of our efforts. It is essential to make time and space for continual introspection as you engage in the community in order to strengthen learning. This foundation compels us to intentionally and creatively involve community partners when possible, and acknowledge personal shifts in perspective, understanding, and attitudes throughout the experience. We must also be aware of the direct, indirect, and unintended results (positive or negative) of our service. We do this by gathering regular feedback from community partners and participants to assess our values, refine our practices, and improve the quality of our work.

Questions to Consider:

- When, where, how, and with whom will I incorporate reflection opportunities into my experience?
- What kind of spaces do I need to reflect (quiet, discussion, journaling, buddies)?
- How will I know if I was successful?
- What goals do I have and what am I hoping to learn through this service experience?
- How will I include community partners or community members in my reflections and evaluations?
- How am I keeping track of milestones, projects, or tasks completed while serving?
- How and when will I ask for feedback from those I am serving with?
- What impact have I made on the community through this experience?

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## How to Use the Foundations

The purpose of the foundations is to prepare students for ethical and effective community engagement. The foundations should be used to create an opportunity for students to think through and discuss how they will be engaging with the community. They are best used before a community engagement experience (pre-reflection) and then revisited after the experience is completed (reflection).

The foundations are meant to be personalized for your community engagement experience. Questions to consider can be adapted and updated to include points and/or topics specific to your program. Discussion around the foundations can be done individually or with others and work best when a variety of discussion methods are used in order to keep students engaged.

### Effective Strategies for Discussing Foundations

- Have students reflect on each foundation and answer a couple questions from each.
- Select one or two questions from each principle to discuss.
- Utilize a variety of discussion methods (self-reflection, pair share, small groups).
- Focus on one principle that is most related to the experience and discuss it in depth.
- Ask for some questions to be answered individually, written down, without discussion.
- Split into groups and assign each group a principle to discuss and present to the group.

If you have any questions about the utilization of these foundations or would like discuss them further, please email UNCG's Office of Leadership and Civic Engagement at [lead@uncg.edu](mailto:lead@uncg.edu).

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