

SERVICE LEARNING

For WIL partners

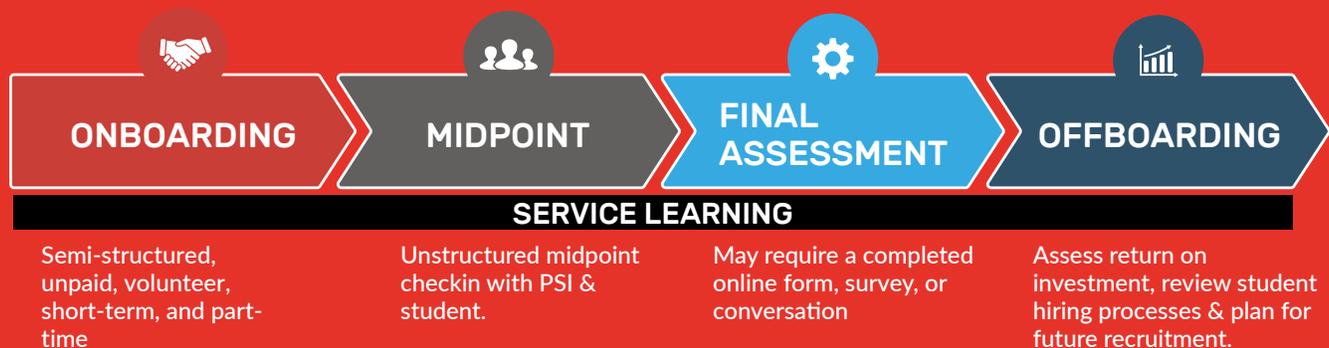
Service Learning, often referred to as Community Service Learning (CSL), integrates meaningful community service with classroom instruction and critical reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen communities.

CSL placements and projects can be initiated by either an organization with an idea or interest in having student support, or by staff or faculty at a post-secondary institution (PSI) with a desire to help students integrate and apply their learning in a way that contributes meaningfully to the health and wellbeing of the community.

While CSL will differ from one institution to another, it usually means:

- It is an unpaid, volunteer opportunity
- It is short-term, with an average of 3-4 hours of engagement a week
- It is offered as part of an academic course (ie. over 4 months)
- Students are evaluated by faculty at the end of the course.

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SUPPORTING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES WITH SERVICE LEARNING

Top 5 ways Service Learning can support your business objectives

1. Provide a source for innovative ideas and boost competitiveness
2. Complete short-term projects and undertake research
3. Access resource support for new or existing projects
4. Provide leadership development opportunities for your staff team
5. Connect with local institutions and form a reciprocal relationship

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ONBOARDING & PRE-ENGAGEMENT

Now that you have decided that a Service Learning (CSL) project is right for your needs, and you have found a faculty or staff contact with whom to work, the onboarding process will help you to build rapport, establish good lines of communication, and to get on the same page about expectations and outcomes.

It is never too early to begin the onboarding stage, as it may take a few discussions to iron out the details. Post-secondary institutions (PSIs) often work on a semesterly basis (fall, winter, spring/summer), and many of your PSI colleagues begin planning CSL projects anywhere from a few weeks to a few months in advance. Your PSI contact will help guide you through the onboarding process and suggest onboarding topics for you to have with students once the placement or project begins.

Here are some suggested topics and questions to cover in this onboarding process.

1. Objectives and scope
2. Resources, requirements, and risk management
3. Formalized Agreement

OBJECTIVE & SCOPE

Review your business objective

- What is the mission of your organization, the objectives you have for the CSL project, and the learning objectives for students? Do they align?

- What would you like students to complete or be involved with? Are there any deliverables that you expect by the end of the project or placement?
- Is the scope reasonable for students' skillset, capacity and time?
- What skills, knowledge and attitudes do you require and/or wish students to have, and what will they learn or develop in the process?
- Will students be developing content for publication? If so, it will be important to discuss proprietary rights, and how students will be recognized for their contribution.
- How and when will recruitment of students be coordinated at the PSI?

SERVICE LEARNING USE CASES

- Individual placement where students volunteer 3-4 hours/week
- Group project/ placement where students are tasked with a challenge to address
- On site at your organization, in the community, or on the PSI campus
- In-person, virtual, or a hybrid
- Related to a particular academic focus, or interdisciplinary

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RESOURCES, REQUIREMENTS, AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- Where will students engage with your organization (in-person, virtually)?
- What resources (eg. technology, software, equipment, transportation) are required for them to successfully participate, and who is responsible for providing them?
- What requirements will students need to fulfill prior to and upon beginning their CSL placement (police check, vaccinations, mandatory training, etc)?
- What proof of third-party liability insurance do each of your institutions require?
- Depending on your province, discuss what coverage and process exists for workplace insurance claims for unpaid, for-credit work placements.

FORMALIZED AGREEMENT

Once you have discussed all the parameters, expectations, and intended outcomes with your PSI partner, it is important to formally outline these in a “Letter or Memorandum of Understanding”, or in a partnership agreement outlining your roles and responsibilities. Whether or not this is required on an institutional level, it’s good practice to outline the scope of the project, roles and responsibilities, and intended deliverables.

Community Partner and PSI

It is important to spend time in conversation with your PSI partner to establish a strong working relationship before students are involved, to agree on a realistic scope and the intended outcomes of the project or placement, and to clarify the responsibilities of the students, the PSI and your own.

As part of their CSL course at the University of Ottawa Telfer School of Management, 20 graduate-level students completed a 6-week CSL placement supporting iSisters, an Ottawa-based not-for-profit that mentors and supports women to access technology skills development programs. The students were tasked with developing a digital campaign strategy to celebrate iSisters 20th anniversary and to increase their reach and visibility within the Ottawa region and beyond. A few weeks after the students’ presentations, iSisters was already implementing several of the suggestions.

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Community Partner and Students

Together with your PSI partner you will decide how students connect with your organization for the first time: is there an initial meet and greet with students in class? Will you interview students for the placement? Will students select your organization to work with if the course involves more than one organization or project?

There may also be a suggested, guided or streamlined process for you and the students to follow for the onboarding process. Here are some helpful topics to discuss:

- Orientation to organization's history, purpose, people and space,
- Expected timeline and deliverables of the project or placement,
- Policies and procedures associated with your organization, and required or offered training opportunities,
- Student learning and development goals and how you can support them,
- Ongoing communication expectations,
- When and where are students expected to perform their responsibilities, and,
- Professionalism in your workplace.

The Brock University "Music and Memory" program features virtual pairings of neuropsychology students and seniors from a local hospital's Extendicare Unit. Throughout this 6-week program, students & their partners work to develop playlists of music from the past. By forming these connections with older adults in the community, students help to alleviate feelings of isolation for them while providing meaningful social interactions and attempting to counter the effects of dementia and other degenerative cognitive conditions.

SERVICE LEARNING EXAMPLES

- Program or administrative support
- Data handling and analysis
- Survey coordination
- Drafting a research-based report of recommendations
- Program assessment and evaluation
- Creation of tools, resources, or communications materials
- Developing public engagement or fundraising campaigns
- Marketing and communications consultations
- Event planning and management

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MIDPOINT CONSIDERATIONS

As a student progresses through their Service Learning placement, what should I expect?

Now that your Community Service Learning (CSL) placement or project has started, the mid-point check-in with your Post-Secondary Institution (PSI) contact and the students can be an opportunity for you to provide feedback about how the project is going, and to discuss solutions to any unexpected challenges.

This discussion is usually held at the halfway point of the student's work experience. If your CSL placement or project runs throughout the academic term (ie. over 3 months), a mid-point check-in might be organized within the first 6 weeks following the beginning of your project. Not all CSL placements will require a mid-point check-in: your project might be too short (over a few days or less) or you may prefer more frequent communication with your PSI contact.

An innovative partnership between the City of Hamilton, McMaster University, Mohawk College & Redeemer University, CityLAB Hamilton brings together groups of students and community partners to co-create a better Hamilton for all. City leaders work together with students and academics to advance the City of Hamilton's Strategic Priorities. Through this mentoring, participants take on tough challenges while experimenting with new solutions and participating in rich experiential learning opportunities.

Community Partner and PSI

Your PSI contact is invested in the success of your CSL placement or project. They want to ensure it meets your organization's needs and that you are satisfied with the quality of students' work throughout the term, while also ensuring a positive learning experience for students. The midpoint check-in is also an opportunity to identify any concerns or issues you might have with how the project is going to find a suitable solution. The check-in can be in the form of a conversation, an email, a site visit, or filling out a formal evaluation document.

The midpoint check-in can be an opportunity to:

- Connect on how the project is going
- Understand if communication with students, your PSI contact and the course faculty (if applicable) is satisfactory
- Validate that the timeline for the project or placement deliverables is still realistic or discuss any adjustments
- Discuss questions you have about the course requirements or your supervisor responsibilities (ie. approving hours, completing evaluations, attending an end of term class presentation)
- Inform your PSI contact and/or your students of any concerns you have about the quality of the work and performance

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Community Partner and Students

You may also be encouraged or wish to hold a midpoint check-in with your CSL student(s) to provide constructive feedback on the project and their overall engagement. Remember that students are contributing to your project as part of their course: while they are eager to apply their knowledge and skills towards your placement deliverables, they may also be learning how to do so in a community setting and will appreciate feedback and coaching from a professional like you.

CSL placements and project timelines will differ from one institution to another, but a good idea is to provide feedback at the halfway point of your planned timeline so students can adjust or adapt their next steps based on your comments. The PSI contact may be present, or you may want to have a conversation directly with the student(s).

At Ontario Tech University, students from the Faculty of Social Science & Humanities joined partner organization 'A Greener Future', for a one-day lake clean up. The students collected more than 3,000 pieces of litter from the lakefront as a part of the 'Love Your Lake' initiative. Students gathered and analyzed data from items found to identify waste trends and develop potential sustainable solutions. Through participation in this project, students were able to identify "problem items" in the area and advocate for solutions related to plastic pollution in Lake Ontario.

The midpoint check-in with your student(s) can be an opportunity to:

- Discuss how you and the student(s) think the project is going
- Provide student(s) feedback on the frequency, quality, and professionalism of their communications with you
- Review and ensure the timeline for the project or placement deliverables are still realistic (end of term submissions - project outcomes)
- Discuss any concerns you have about the quality of the work, the contributions and the agreed upon timeline. Ideally, you would also let your PSI contact know as soon as possible if you have these concerns
- Provide positive and constructive feedback on the student's overall performance.

Check with your PSI contact to see if they have an approach they recommend. It can take multiple forms, such as:

- A phone, virtual or in-person conversation with your student, or with you, the students, PSI contact/CSL faculty
- An online form
- In-class presentation or group discussion

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FINAL ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

As you near the end of the Community Service Learning (CSL) placement or project, it is time to think about wrapping-up and providing final feedback. The final evaluation is an opportunity for you to assess the project's outcomes and students' overall contributions to your organization.

This is also a good time to review the work completed and to determine if there are any next steps or additional projects to build on the work completed.

While providing feedback to the student should be ongoing throughout the project, the final evaluation should take place within a few days or weeks of its completion. Keep in mind that your evaluation will likely be reviewed by the faculty and may influence the student's grade.

Community Partner and PSI

Your PSI will share details with you about the process and your role in students' final evaluation. The evaluation may take the form of a survey, online form, or conversation. You may also be asked to complete a Community Partner evaluation form, which measures the impact of the experience, deliverables of the project. This offers a chance for you to express your level of satisfaction with the experience.

Your PSI contact may also want to hold a debrief conversation with you on the project's overall successes and any challenges you faced, for example: Were the identified outcomes achieved? Were expectations met? How was the experience for all parties? Are there tasks left to finish? How should this be completed and by when? Is there interest and capacity to launch a follow up project?

CSL Project evaluations typically take place during the final weeks of the term (December, April, or August). If the project is an ongoing collaboration between the PSI and your organization, you will probably be asked to assess the performance of each student or group of students at the end of each academic term.

It is critical to share honest feedback with your PSI partner to help further programming and to strengthen your relationship. Through the evaluation process, you and your PSI contact can begin to explore future projects and collaborations, and to discuss if there are other forms experiential learning opportunities on campus that would meet your needs (ie. CO-OP program, research). Consider:

- Would you like to host another student or group of students for a similar project?
- Do you wish to further the scope of the current project, or are there new ideas?
- Do you have the capacity to explore new forms of WIL?

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Community Partner and Students

The final evaluation allows for both the student and you to reflect on the project and determine whether key outcomes or deliverables were met. Students will have applied their knowledge and skills in a unique community setting; they will appreciate your feedback on the impact of their contributions and overall role.

This is typically a formal process in which you may be asked to complete a student evaluation form to assess if CSL placement objectives were met, and to evaluate competencies such as professionalism, communication skills, and ability to complete duties as assigned.

There are other ways you may be asked, or want, to provide constructive feedback:

An exit conversation with the student about their overall performance, that can help them make connections between course work, career aspirations, and role within the community,

Invitation to attend student in-class presentations, end-of-term showcase, online wrap-up session, or celebration event, and,

Opportunity to review reflection reports related to the work that they have done with you. This is also an excellent opportunity to receive feedback from students about your organization and identify any gaps in programming or opportunities for future collaboration.

Note: If the experience went well and the student(s) performed in an exemplary way, consider offering letters of reference or recommendation for them. You can also encourage student(s) to apply to work for your organization or make a job offer.

Teams of 3rd year software design students in the School of Computer Science at the University of Guelph develop software solutions in collaboration with a variety of community partners. Liaising with these community partners throughout the term, students develop software prototypes to address a particular issue, and collect feedback to refine potential solutions. Students have the option of taking a 4th year course to refine prototype development.

SERVICE LEARNING HIGHLIGHTS

- Unpaid
- Part-time
- Typically 3-4 hours per week
- For credit
- Mandatory
- No competitive recruitment process

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**OFFBOARDING CONSIDERATIONS****After the Service Learning Placement ends, what should I consider?**

Once the WIL experience has concluded, you should review the work done by the students, as well as any notes from the faculty member, and work within your organization to identify which deliverables are able to be implemented, and how your organization might go about doing this. Will additional resources be required, or will additional projects be needed to address follow up concerns?

Community partners may receive recommendations from the students that specifically identify next steps that can be supported by another CSL placement or project, or through more in depth research opportunities in other departments.

Project coordinators, and faculty may also seek feedback from you to learn more about your experience. This feedback allows any adjustments to be made to the placement or project, and identify areas of success, as well as areas of concern. This may also be an opportunity to discuss with the faculty member or project coordinators what you believe the appropriate next steps for your organization will be now that you have all the recommendations from students (ie: another student, project, hiring, utilizing external resources, etc.).

It may become clear that additional WIL projects will be required by the community partner, and these can be conversations you may wish to have with the project coordinator, faculty member, or any initial contact you had to get this project up and running. Community partners are encouraged to share their organizational needs with their WIL contacts in the institution when discussing potential projects. Providing a full picture to the institution may spark additional project options or allow you to be connected to other units on campus.

Building a talent pipeline

In some cases, community partners have identified students who they wish to bring onto their team, whether that be for full time, part time, or contract opportunities. By working closely with students, your organization may be able to develop insight into the work that students could do if they had the dedicated time, as well as build professional relationships to build a talent pool. You may also wish to explore other WIL opportunities that will build on the work done, including Applied Research Projects, Internships, Co-op, or Work Placements. Institutions can work with community partners to identify opportunities and pathways to continue to work together if the organization sees the need.

For more information about Service Learning for WIL partners, visit the [CEWIL Resource Hub](#)