



CampusEngage

Network for the Promotion
of Civic Engagement
in Irish Higher Education

A Student Guide to Community Engagement

**Connect your learning and research to the needs
and experience of civic society organisations**



What is Community Engagement?

Higher Education Institutions offer many opportunities for students to engage with community and civic society. Working in collaboration with community organisations enables students to use and enhance skills, competencies and knowledge in a real world capacity, which leads to an enlarged and more fulfilling educational experience.

You can also have FUN, meet NEW PEOPLE, rise to a CHALLENGE and MAKE a DIFFERENCE. Consider the following evidenced outcomes from student community civic engagement:

Personal

- Increased sense of personal achievement, self-efficacy, spiritual growth and moral development;
- Greater interpersonal development, ability to work well with others, and build transferable skills such as leadership and communication;
- Heightened psychosocial wellbeing and capacity to personally flourish;
- Giving and sharing leads to personal enrichment.

Academic

- Positive and more meaningful impact on academic learning;
- Real opportunity to test knowledge, skills and attributes, including scope for problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking;
- Greater complexity of understanding and cognitive development;
- Increased satisfaction with course of study.

Career

- Better understanding of how society and community groups function;
- Enhanced connections with professionals and community members for learning and career opportunities;
- Transferable skills gained can enhance career confidence, illuminate opportunities and augment CV.

Social

- Stronger relationships with peers and faculty staff;
- Enhanced connection with academic social environment;
- Reduced stereotypes and greater intercultural understanding;
- increased understanding of the facets of service: justice, compassion, diversity and social responsibility;
- Augmented citizenship skills and greater involvement in community service after graduation.

Key questions to consider before starting

Motivations: Why are you looking to be engaged in the community? It is important for you to understand exactly why and what you expect to get from the experience.

Values, interests and skills: What type of experience are you looking for? What are you passionate about? What skills do you have to offer, what does the organisation need? Aim to ensure a good fit.

Schedule and time commitment: How much time will you commit? Be honest and realistic with yourself and the organisation about how much time you can offer.

Where to start

The first step is to contact a relevant staff member or lecturer to get specific direction, they may already have suitable contacts and projects in motion, which you could join. If in final year of study, lecturers may have community based research opportunities requiring researchers.

Some Higher Education Institutes (HEI) have dedicated Community Civic Engagement Offices or Teaching and Learning centres, with personnel equipped to support and direct student engagement experiences and projects. These will have a portal of opportunities to choose from. Extra-curricular courses focusing on community leadership development are often enabled through this entity, as are awards for civic engagement. If your programme includes a work placement component, speak with your placement coordinator about suitable community based placements, and examine the benefits of these versus more traditional industry based environments. Modules with a community-based learning element are increasingly available to students, which enables module specific community engagement to enhance the academic learning experience.

Case study

Enhancing student community leadership

The Community Leadership Initiative (CLI) module is an elective module in the Institute of Technology Tralee. Students select specific community leadership projects from a list which has been developed through staff consultation with Institute and external community partnerships.

While engaging in practical leadership roles, students have real opportunity to apply their theoretical leadership knowledge and refine their leadership skills. A reflective journal requirement in the module allows for opportune time to deepen and augment the meaning of the experience. Weekly group debriefs, enable group problem solving, and exploration of citizen behaviours, which encourage a cooperative, positive learning environment.

Sample projects include:

- **Activity Organiser in student wellbeing intervention;**
- **Exercise leader in older adult day care centre;**
- **Institute liaison officer with Jigsaw;**
- **Mature student mentor.**

Further information:
www.ittralee.ie/en/InformationAbout/Community/



The Student Union provides a myriad of opportunities in which to volunteer - student sports clubs, societies, advocacy campaigns, Raise and Give (RAG) events,

ranging from interactive hands on volunteering on/off campus to virtual volunteering from home.

CAMPUS ENGAGE is a network for the promotion of civic engagement activities in Irish Higher Education and is open to all higher education institutions staff, students, community organisations and local companies in Ireland.

The network aims to strengthen the relationship between higher education and wider society, through civic engagement activities including community-based research, community-based learning, volunteering and knowledge exchange.

Additional resources

Literature

Global Citizens, Mark Gerzon (2010)

Lending a Hand, A Report on Young People and Volunteering in Ireland, NYCI (2011)

Thinking about volunteering, a step by step guide, Volunteer Ireland (2005)

Web-based

Volunteer Ireland www.volunteer.ie

The Wheel job search www.wheel.ie

Comhlámh www.volunteeringoptions.org

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Irish Aid www.dci.gov.ie

United Nations Volunteers www.unv.org

World Volunteer Web www.worldvolunteerweb.org

International Volunteerism Resource Centre www.idealists.org

Voluntary Service International www.vsi.ie

European Volunteer Centre www.cev.be

Social networking site for volunteering www.i-volunteer.org.uk

International charity operating in the world's poorest countries www.vso.ie

Irish Association of Non-governmental Development Organisations www.dochas.ie

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For more information on Campus Engage and to access a database of case studies and resources go to:

www.campusengage.ie