



PLANNING A

Service-Learning Spring Break

A Planning Guide for College Clubs, Fraternities, Sororities
& Student Groups

Plan a service-learning trip with clear goals, responsible
partnerships, and time to explore.

START WITH PURPOSE

Before choosing a destination, project, or price point, decide why your group wants to travel together. Early answers help you plan for the group you actually have, not the group you hope might participate.

Spring break can combine service, cultural exchange, exploration, and time together. Start by deciding what your group hopes to learn and contribute.

ASK YOUR GROUP

WHY DO WE WANT TO GO?

What do we hope this experience gives our members, the people we work with, and the communities we visit?

WHAT DO WE WANT TO LEARN?

Consider culture, conservation, community issues, language, environmental challenges, or another shared interest.

HOW DO WE WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?

Think about the skills, time, energy, and perspective your group can realistically bring.

WHAT WOULD MAKE THIS TRIP MEANINGFUL?

Imagine looking back six months later. What would make your group say, "That experience mattered"?

START WITH 2–3 GROUP GOALS

Write down two or three goals before researching destinations or organizations.

Examples:

- Contribute to a locally identified conservation or community need.
- Learn directly from people who live and work in the destination.
- Strengthen relationships and leadership within our organization.
- Understand an environmental or social issue beyond the classroom.
- Return home with ideas for continued service or action.

Purpose comes before place.

A destination makes a trip memorable. A clear purpose gives it direction.

TURN INTEREST INTO COMMITMENT

A successful group trip needs more than people who say, “That sounds fun.” Identify who is genuinely interested, what responsibilities need to be shared, and what participants need to know before committing.

START WITH INTEREST

Share the basic idea with your organization before promising dates, prices, or activities.

Ask potential participants:

- Are you interested in a service-focused spring break?
- What type of service or learning interests you?
- What approximate budget feels realistic?
- Are there dates or requirements that could prevent you from participating?

Early answers help you plan around the group you actually have—not the group you imagine you might have.

BUILD A SMALL LEADERSHIP TEAM

Don't put the entire trip on one person.

Consider assigning responsibility for:

GROUP LEAD

Keeps the planning process moving and communicates with partners.

FINANCES & FUNDRAISING

Tracks projected costs, payments, fundraising, and deadlines.

PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATION

Keeps members informed about meetings, forms, expectations, and preparation.

CAMPUS / ORGANIZATION COORDINATION

Works with advisors, student-life offices, chapter leadership, or other required contacts.

KNOW WHEN INTEREST BECOMES COMMITMENT

A name on an interest list is not yet a participant.

Before making reservations or financial commitments, establish:

- estimated trip cost
- payment/deposit expectations
- expected dates
- participation requirements
- service expectations
- cancellation policies
- important travel requirements

Plan for committed participants, not an interest list.

CHOOSE SERVICE RESPONSIBLY

Not every volunteer opportunity creates meaningful service. Before choosing a project or organization, look beyond the activity itself and ask who identified the need, who benefits, and how your group's participation fits into work already happening in the community.

SERVICE OR VOLUNTOURISM?

MEANINGFUL SERVICE

- Responds to needs identified by local people or organizations
- Supports work that continues beyond your group's visit
- Respects local knowledge and expertise
- Gives participants appropriate roles and expectations
- Includes learning, preparation, and reflection
- Considers the impact on both the community and participants

WATCH FOR RED FLAGS

Be cautious when:

- The experience is designed primarily around what visitors want to do
- Short-term volunteers are given roles requiring skills they do not have
- Local people have little voice in defining the project
- The organization cannot clearly explain how the work contributes to a larger goal
- Photos, access, or emotional experiences seem more important than meaningful contribution

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU COMMIT

Who identified the need?

Look for projects shaped by community priorities.

Who leads the work?

Local organizations and community members should help guide the project.

Why are volunteers needed?

Ask what your group will contribute and how it supports ongoing work.

Are we qualified for the role?

Enthusiasm does not replace training or expertise.

What happens after we leave?

Look for work that continues beyond a one-week visit.

The goal is not to arrive with solutions. It is to contribute responsibly to work already being led by people who understand the place, the need, and the community.

BUILD A REALISTIC BUDGET

A meaningful trip still has to be financially possible. Build a realistic estimate early so participants understand the commitment before they say yes.

START WITH THE FULL COST

TRAVEL

Airfare or other transportation to the destination.

LODGING

Accommodations for the entire trip.

MEALS

Included meals plus meals participants will purchase independently.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Airport transfers, transportation to service sites, and travel between activities.

PROGRAM & SERVICE COSTS

Project coordination, local guides, materials, activities, entrance fees, or program costs.

TRAVEL PREPARATION

Insurance, documents, health requirements when applicable, personal equipment, and other predeparture costs.

DON'T FORGET A CONTINGENCY

Prices change and unexpected expenses happen. Build some flexibility into the budget rather than planning to the exact dollar.

CALCULATE THE PARTICIPANT COST

Estimated group expenses

- + individual expenses
- confirmed group funding
- = estimated cost per participant

Be clear about what the quoted cost includes and what participants will need to pay separately.

Build the realistic budget before asking people to commit.

FUNDRAISE WITH PURPOSE

Fundraising can make participation more accessible, but it works best when your group starts early, sets a clear goal, and can explain what the money will support.

START WITH THE GAP

Before planning a fundraiser, determine how much money your group actually needs to raise.

TOTAL PROJECTED COST

- PARTICIPANT CONTRIBUTIONS
- ORGANIZATION OR CAMPUS SUPPORT
- = FUNDRAISING GOAL

USE MORE THAN ONE APPROACH

GROUP FUNDRAISING

Events, sales, campus activities, or group campaigns that reduce costs for everyone.

INDIVIDUAL FUNDRAISING

Give participants tools to reach their own networks and explain why they are participating.

CAMPUS SUPPORT

Explore student government, service offices, academic departments, grants, chapter funds, or travel support.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Local businesses, alumni, families, or community organizations may be willing to support a clearly defined project.

TELL PEOPLE WHAT THEY ARE SUPPORTING

“Help us go to Costa Rica” tells people where you are going. Explain why you are going and what their support will make possible.

Tell supporters what your group hopes to learn, what service you will participate in, who you are working with, and how funds will be used.

BE TRANSPARENT

Be clear about whether donations support travel, service-project expenses, participant scholarships, or a combination. Never imply that all funds go directly to a community project if they also support travel.

Good fundraising communicates purpose, not just destination.

YOUR SPRING BREAK PLANNING TIMELINE

Starting early gives your group more choices, more time to fundraise, and more time to prepare for the service experience.

6+ MONTHS BEFORE

- Define the trip purpose and goals
- Gauge interest and identify a planning team
- Research destinations and partner organizations
- Ask how service projects are selected and managed
- Develop an initial budget
- Check university, chapter, or organization requirements

3–6 MONTHS BEFORE

- Select the destination and partner organization
- Confirm dates and expected group size
- Set participant costs and payment deadlines
- Collect deposits or commitments
- Begin fundraising
- Confirm lodging, transportation, and major logistics

1–3 MONTHS BEFORE

- Finalize participants
- Confirm travel and program details
- Collect forms and emergency information
- Check passports, insurance, and health requirements
- Learn about the community and service context
- Prepare participants for the work they will be doing

FINAL MONTH

- Confirm arrival, transportation, and itinerary
- Complete payments and documents
- Review packing, safety, and emergency procedures
- Discuss cultural expectations and responsible travel
- Review the service project and your group's original goals

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Ask one final question:

Are we prepared not only to travel, but to learn, contribute, and represent our organization responsibly?

GROUP LEADER CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to keep the details moving while helping your group stay focused on the purpose of the experience.

GROUP & COMMITMENT

- ☐ Trip purpose and goals are clear
- ☐ Participants understand that this is a service-learning experience
- ☐ Final participant list is confirmed
- ☐ Leadership responsibilities are assigned
- ☐ University, chapter, or organization requirements are complete

FINANCES

- ☐ Full trip budget has been developed
- ☐ Participants understand what is and is not included
- ☐ Deposits and payment deadlines are established
- ☐ Fundraising plan is underway or complete
- ☐ Contingency funds have been considered

TRAVEL & LOGISTICS

- ☐ Transportation is confirmed
- ☐ Lodging is confirmed
- ☐ Local transportation is arranged
- ☐ Passports and travel documents are checked
- ☐ Insurance requirements have been addressed
- ☐ Emergency contacts and participant information are available

SERVICE & LEARNING

- ☐ Partner organization has been carefully evaluated
- ☐ The service project responds to an identified need
- ☐ Participants understand their roles and limits
- ☐ The group understands the community and project context
- ☐ Appropriate preparation or training has been completed
- ☐ Time for reflection has been included

FINAL CHECK

- ☐ Everyone knows where to be and when
- ☐ Everyone has the final itinerary
- ☐ Everyone knows what to bring
- ☐ Everyone knows whom to contact if something goes wrong
- ☐ Expectations for respectful behavior and responsible service are clear

Good planning lets the group focus on learning, contributing, and being present once the trip begins.

MAKE THE EXPERIENCE MATTER

A service-learning trip includes more than the hours spent volunteering. Preparation, participation, and reflection are all part of the experience.

BEFORE YOU GO

Learn about the place, people, and issues connected to the project
Consider assumptions your group may be bringing
Understand what the partner organization expects from participants

WHILE YOU ARE THERE

Listen before assuming
Ask questions
Learn from local knowledge and expertise
Participate fully, even when the work differs from what you expected
Notice connections among the community, environment, and project

AFTER YOU RETURN

Reflect on what you learned, not just what you completed
Ask whether your understanding of the place or issue changed
Share the experience responsibly and credit the people and organizations involved
Decide whether your group can continue learning, serving, or supporting the work

SERVICE + LEARNING + REFLECTION

Service learning matters when we use the experience to better understand the work, the community, and our own responsibilities.



EXPLORE SERVICE LEARNING IN COSTA RICA

Explore ways your college club, fraternity, sorority, or student organization can combine service, cultural learning, conservation, and travel in Costa Rica.

<https://learningthroughservicecostarica.com/>