



Day of Service: Mobilizing International Alumni

Organizing an annual Day of Service abroad where alumni can make a difference in their local communities brings alumni together and refreshes their ties with the university. The event and ensuing successful stories promote a virtuous cycle of community engagement, alumni pride, and visibility for the university: www.yaledayofservice.org.

How does a university expand the Day of Service to international alumni? Either you need a volunteer leader dedicated to the international effort for outreach or appoint a staff member as coordinator who is passionate about the idea and who is dedicated to supporting local service project pioneers with materials, guidelines, encouragement and recognition. Broadcasting success stories from these pioneer projects to all alumni will start a snowball effect, encouraging other alumni service entrepreneurs to step forward to organize projects in their own communities.

Maintaining the energy requires tenacious attention to several tasks.

- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Tell success stories about beneficiaries of your service projects, using photos and their words. Use email, letters, websites and social media to keep the messages alive.
- Energetically recognize alumni who have led or participated as volunteers in the projects with personal thank you notes and publication of their quotes and photos.
- Continuously improve your support materials and processes including service project registration tools, waiver forms, promotional materials, media templates, thank you letter templates, planning checklists for the organizers and event preparation checklists for the project coordinators and volunteers.

How do you find and develop local service projects? Where the density of alumni is low and the lack of critical mass seems to be an obstacle for the local alumni entrepreneur, it is essential to create a partnership with a local service organization such as a school, association, NGO or other experienced charitable organization.

- Service partners provide help: additional service ideas and volunteers to reinforce your alumni volunteers.
- Hold regular planning sessions, create a simple program plan and follow up on the planning tasks.
- FOCUS on 1 or 2 great service ideas that will be successful and rewarding for all.

How do you recruit volunteers for a Day of Service? You need three types of volunteers: a leading pioneer who will bring the idea to life in a specific region or country; a couple of people who are willing to serve on the core planning team; and volunteers for the actual day who will serve as project leaders and/or service agents.

- Attract interest through success stories and recognition of alumni in other regions who have stepped forward. Share the fun! People like to join successful, productive, humane projects.
- Make it easy to participate through a clear statement of what is expected in terms of time and effort, simple sign-up sites and a variety of support materials and guidelines.
- Perform contingency planning with local service partner(s) to ensure a back-up source of volunteers.
- Thank volunteers who commit early to serve and follow up with them to make sure they show up.
- Make all projects visible to all alumni worldwide so that they can participate in another region during a trip.

How much extra cost will be involved? The expense of a dedicated University coordinator is shared across many places and the whole effort. Besides the volunteers' time, there might be expenses for printed materials, t-shirts/hats, and a post-event social gathering amongst alumni. One Day of Service cost the local alumni club about 100 Euros.

How do you reinforce the team? Make the activity fun and rewarding in itself. In addition, there is a certain gratifying feeling that comes from making a difference in the lives of other people in your community.

- For the core team: arrange a couple of after-work meetings in a nice cafe to check on progress and socialize. Lasting relationships between alumni are built through this teamwork that focuses on a common goal. Weekend skype sessions combining personal catch-up and task follow-up have also worked well.
- Service project volunteers: for encouragement, provide regular communication about what will be expected of them, clear logistics information, and good project leadership.
- For all: give a heartfelt "thank you" to each volunteer and service partner. Recognize projects and teams in university communications.