

The Service-Learning Writing Project at Michigan State University: Suggestions for Participating Agencies

1. Student writers assigned to your agency are responsible for arranging an initial meeting with a contact person. The Service-Learning Writing Project (SLWP) provides each student team with a set of forms designed to clarify and expedite their agency writing projects.

***Project Proposal:* Filled out and signed during the initial meeting, this form helps students and contact persons lay out the strategic details of writing assignments.**

***Service-Learning Writing Project Agreement:* A formal agreement for services to your agency filled out by students, and signed by students, faculty, and agency representative.**

***Progress Update:* Submitted mid-way through the project term, this form helps all parties—agency contact persons, students, faculty, project staff—to identify and rectify any problems.**

***Agency Follow-Up Report:* Completed by contact persons, this short report form helps faculty and Service-Learning Center staff review and improve community-based writing projects sponsored by the SLWP.**

2. Take advantage of your first meeting with the student writers to lay the groundwork. You will probably want to clarify such matters as these:

What kind of document do you want the students to write? Who will read it? How will it be used? How long should it be? (If possible, supply the students with a model or a sample from your agency files.)

How are the students to find the information they need? You may want them to do research in the MSU library or elsewhere; feel free to make that request. Or perhaps you'll supply them with the names and phone numbers of some people to contact for an interview.

When do you want to see a draft of the document? Can you take time to give valuable feedback and suggestions for revision? When will a final copy be required? (It is important

"I am pleased with the fine piece produced by Joan and Lindsay for the MLI newsletter. This is the first time we have ever published anything that could be construed as an opinion piece, and I hope it will incite others to comment on relevant issues in the future. Their article is also especially fitting for this issue focusing on literacy and women."

–Donna M. Audette, Executive Director
Michigan Literacy, Inc.

"Three students in the project worked on updating and revising our 'Guide to Employment.' This 42 page guide is used individually and with groups of 16 to 21 year olds we are helping attain employment.... It is important that the book be geared to the reading level of most of our clients. Each client gets a workbook to use and keep for further help.... The students ... worked well independently and required what I expected as far as supervision.... We were pleased in how they used classmates to test some of their ideas and the research they did to provide new insights. They did an excellent job and ... [s]taff only made changes which were minor...."

–John Tucker, Executive Director
Youth Development Corporation

"I also enjoyed working with the students on the ... article ... published in the UCP of Michigan newsletter.... [They] produced an excellent article requiring very minor changes or correction. It was a pleasure working with [the students]."

–Judy Widder, Director of Programs and Services
United Cerebral Palsy Association of Michigan, Inc.

"The students worked very well.... They were faced with many new people to contact and a very busy time in the agency for all program directors.... The two brochures ... completed by the students were well done. Their writing skills were great and they developed the material in the way that I asked them to.... I was very happy with the way the assignment was finished. I now have two brochures that can be duplicated for two of my child welfare programs and they contain all the information that the program directors asked for."

—Nancy K. Zaleski, Associate Development Director
Catholic Social Services/St. Vincent Home for Children

"This was an outstanding opportunity for freshmen students to practice skills that are so essential in the workplace. I watched the students assigned to our agency develop a team, learn how to negotiate with one another, develop an action plan for the project, and give and receive constructive feedback.

"The communication skills that were practiced in my student group far exceeded the initial writing assignment. In order to complete the project, the students needed to make calls, conduct interviews, research a variety of topics, and produce a product as a team. This was an excellent opportunity for the students and a great assistance to our agency....

"The students were very invested in producing quality articles for our newsletter. In working with them I was able to hear them talk about assignments they had in other classes: their focus was always the due date. In this project they focused on the quality of their product and the agency's needs.... It is so neat to see student[s] 'catch fire' as they explore a topic or idea that they have never considered before. This type of experience makes learning exciting and meaningful while promoting citizenship and societal awareness."

—Georgia Davidson, Assistant Director
Service-Learning Center

for students to have clear deadlines that fall before the end of the semester.)

3. Consider how you can best inform students about your organization. The students will have seen the one-page "Position Description" prepared by the Service-Learning Center at MSU describing your agency and its writing needs. That's all students know about you. You may want to supply more information about your agency's mission, constituency, and history.

4. Students find this assignment satisfying because it gives them a chance to do some meaningful writing that serves not only themselves but someone else in a community on or off campus. Students like knowing that their work matters. Please be explicit about how you will use their work, and explain its value to your organization.

5. While exact class schedules vary with each instructor, students usually work most intensively on their agency projects for 3-5 weeks during the last third of the semester. Student writers are working, then, within a fairly tight timeframe. It is their responsibility, however, to keep on top of the work. We stress that students must be reliable and professional when representing the SLWP and MSU to the community. Still, they may need some nudging from you. You might, for example, ask them to call you on a regular basis to give you progress reports and to raise any questions they've encountered, or simply to ask for help.

6. Feel free to call the students' instructor. We welcome your concerns.

7. If the students' work appears in print, please send copies to the writers (and a few extra copies for their instructor). We'd appreciate a copy too. Mail it to:

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