



Student Guide to Community Engaged Learning



experience



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APPLY



Western



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WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING?

Western defines Community Engaged Learning (CEL) as students engage in a project, developed collaboratively with a community partner, that has mutually beneficial outcomes. For other forms of Experiential Learning refer to our [website](#).

The purpose of community engagement is to build partnerships wherein college and university knowledge and resources can be shared with those in the public and private sectors. These partnerships can contribute to (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching):

- enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity;
- enhance curriculum, teaching and academic learning;
- prepare students to serve as educated and engaged citizens;
- strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility;
- address critical societal issues; and,
- contribute to the public good.

HOW DOES CEL DIFFER FROM OTHER FORMS OF LEARNING?

Community Engaged Learning differs from traditional forms of learning because it brings course content to life by providing students opportunities to apply their course-based knowledge within real-world settings. CEL also endeavors to instill a sense of civic engagement and social responsibility in students. Through their CEL experience and reflection students learn “socially responsive knowledge” affording them the skills necessary to identify and provide solutions for social problems.

Community Engaged Learning is not about the addition of engagement to learning, but rather the integration of engagement with learning. In these settings, the students’ observations and experiences in the community are as integral to the students’ academic learning as class lectures and library research (Howard, 1998, p. 21). Through their engagement experiences and reflection, academic learning is informed and transformed, and the academic learning informs and transforms the engagement experience, creating a reciprocal relationship between service and learning (Howard, 1998, p. 21).

To be clear, community engaged learning is not an internship or a volunteer role. CEL students differs from both volunteer roles and internships in that their service engagement is completed in conjunction with their academic course as part of their grade, whereas volunteer work is not associated with academic work and internships are typically stand-alone learning experiences without a substantial class component.

HOW DOES PARTICIPATING IN CEL BENEFIT THE STUDENT?

CEL has the following benefits:

- Increased interest and understanding of course material and its application
- Promotes civic engagement and social awareness and responsibility
- Strengthens individual connection to their community
- Students recognize their own integral role in the growth of their community
- Gain hands-on experience in the nonprofit sector
- Develop personal, professional, and intellectual skills
- Enhance critical thinking and problem- solving skills
- Develop and fine-tune communication, collaboration, and leadership skills
- Learn more about social issues, their root causes, and potential solutions
- Opportunity to meet interesting people and expand networks
- Build connections that can potentially lead to future employment

In addition, an empirical study conducted at the University of California found the following 11 areas to be positively affected by students' involvement in CEL:

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	VALUES	SELF-EFFICACY	LEADERSHIP	GRADUATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » GPA » Writing skills » Critical thinking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Commitment to activism » Promoting racial understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Individuals reported higher self-efficacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Leadership activities » Self-rated leadership ability » Interpersonal skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » More likely to choose a service career » Plans to participate in service post-graduation

WHAT FORMS CAN COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING TAKE?

Community Engaged Learning can take two forms:

PLACEMENT-BASED CEL

Students spend between 2-6 hours a week over a course term working on site at the organization fulfilling a specified need(s) determined by community partner

This type of CEL involves the student going to work within the organization for a set amount of hours, and on a set weekly schedule. The intention of a placement is to have the student fully immersed in the day to day functions of a community partner organization. Students can be involved in any kind of work deemed suitable by the organization, with intention that students' involvement directly connect to the course content and learning objectives.

It is also possible for students to take on special, independent projects that meet an organization's need during their placement hours. It is our hope that students will become fully oriented within the organization such that they become familiar with the site location and all projects and endeavors undertaken by the organization.

PROJECT-BASED CEL

Students work in groups (approx. 3-10 students) to complete a project and deliver a specific outcome as determined by the community partner.

This type of CEL usually involves students working in groups of approximately 3-10 students to complete a project that fulfills a need for the partnering community organization. This format differs from a placement, as most of the work is completed independently and off-site from the organization. With these partnerships, community supervisors act as a resource to the student(s) and set the scope of the project being undertaken.

Projects should have tangible outcomes for both the student and the organization. It is our hope that students will become acquainted with the organization through a volunteer orientation and site tour, and understand and participate in some of the ongoing projects and endeavors undertaken by the organization.

WHAT KIND OF THINGS WILL I BE INVOLVED WITH AT AN ORGANIZATION?

Project Deliverables for Virtual Community Engaged Learning

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- Content creation
- Program plans/outlines
- Strategic planning

RESEARCH, ASSESSMENT, AND/OR EVALUATION OF A PROGRAM

- Focus groups
- Virtual interviews

VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

- Webinars
- Infographics
- Streaming a presentation
- Streaming a performance

INFORMATION SHARING PRODUCTS

- Digital media
- Communication plans
- Social media content

OFFERING SERVICES VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING PLATFORMS

- Community member interviews
- Fundraising
- Mentorship
- Tutoring

RESEARCH PAPERS

- Literature reviews
- Executive summaries
- Position/response papers
- Annotated bibliographies
- Case studies

COVID RECOVERY PROJECTS

- Assisting with your organization's shift online
- Researching and providing a list of online tools
 - Films
 - Vodcasts and Podcasts
 - Awareness campaign
 - How-to videos

CREATING POLICY MATERIALS

- Policy briefs
- Letters to MPs

DATA ANALYSIS

- Analyzing donor behaviours
- Tracking communication strategy metrics
- Assessing volunteer engagement

MARKETING RESOURCES

- Website content
- Videos
- Social media campaigns
- Mobile content

EVENT COORDINATION

- Evaluating event cost strategies
- Creating an event and executing an online event
- Creating an accessibility plan for an annual event
- Developing post-event surveys

FUNDRAISING

- Grant writing
- Campaign outreach materials
- Online fundraising event

Consult [Defining Deliverables for Community Engaged Learning](#) for more information.

HOW MUCH TIME CAN I EXPECT TO DEDICATE TO AN ORGANIZATION?

Placement-based CEL students are typically required to devote a minimum of 2 hours per week for 8-10 weeks during an academic term; however, the number of hours and duration of time spent in the placement varies from course to course. For project based CEL, each student is expected to dedicate a minimum of 2 hours per week for approximately 8-10 weeks toward their work on the designated project. Students are not generally expected to be engaged in CEL service hours in the months of December and April as they are in exams at this time.

HOW WILL I BE EVALUATED?

Students can be evaluated based on the CEL involvement in many different ways. It is up to the discretion of the instructor to determine assessment and evaluation methods that align with students' CEL endeavors and course objectives. Many assessment strategies have been developed and adapted specifically for CEL (*Gelmon et al., 2001; Howard, 2001*) to ensure academic rigor. Methods for evaluating students include but are not limited to:

- Reflective essays or papers
- Reflective journals
- In-class discussion
- Executive summaries or reports
- Individual or group presentations
- ePortfolio presentations
- Quizzes
- Online discussions
- Response papers
- Debriefing meetings
- Project notebooks
- Final synthesis of learning
- Research proposal
- Newspaper article
- Posters

WHAT EXPECTATIONS ARE PLACED ON ME AS A CEL STUDENT?

The work you are doing is very important and requires a real commitment to the people with whom you are partnering with and with whom you are serving.

The university, your instructor, your peers, and most importantly the community partners and clients you serve are counting on you. As such, you are expected to act in a professional manner by:

- Being punctual and reliable (e.g., be on time and meet scheduled deadlines).
- Consulting with your community partner supervisor about acceptable attire within their organization.
- Participating in all activities that prepare you for your CEL role (e.g., understanding theory, site visits, risk management, planning, meeting with supervisors and groupmates, developing goals, organization volunteer orientation, etc.).
- Communicating professionally (see Appendix B for Tips on Professional Communication).
- Appointing a liaison between student group and community partner to ensure effective, organized, and efficient communication with community partner (for project based CEL).
- Employing effective teamwork and problem - solving skills (see Appendix C for Tips on Group-work).
- Embodying the dual role of learner and service provider.
- Being prepared for phone, video call, or face to face meetings and service hours.
- Respecting diversity.
- Graciously accepting supervision and feedback.
- Respecting rules of confidentiality when dealing with sensitive or private information.
- Actively engaging in your service experience.
- Being proactive and flexible with your service and educational expectations.
- Engaging in regular and efficient communication with your community partner
- Producing high-quality work.
- Reflecting on the meaning of the experience to you personally, intellectually, and with respect to citizenship.
- Participating in respectful relationship building.
- Identifying possibilities for your future through the opportunities, experiences, and issues you have been exposed to.
- Asking questions – you are not expected to know everything! Make sure you have a clear understanding about the organization and particularly your role within it.

HOW WILL MY CEL COMMUNITY PARTNER BE DETERMINED?

Before the commencement of any CEL course, a selection of community partners has already been recruited. Typically, the CEL coordinator will share information with each class about engaged community partners, and then subsequent matches will be determined based on students' expressions of interest and learning motivations. Other methods for matching students with partners include interviews with your instructor or professional "speed dating". It is important to note that the process for matching students (or groups) with community partners is at the discretion of the instructor and/or CEL coordinator and varies depending on the course. Please review Appendix D for questions to consider when choosing a community partner.

WILL I NEED A POLICE CHECK?

Police checks are at the discretion of the community partner. Organizations may require students to complete a Police Vulnerable Sector Check (PVSC) for Employment or Volunteer Purposes. As such, students enrolled in a CEL course are encouraged to visit London Police Services at 601 Dundas St. to request a PVSC prior to the commencement of the course. This is at a cost of \$45 to the student. Please visit the London Police Services website at <http://www.police.london.ca> for more information on the PVSC process and to download an application form to fill out prior to the visit to London Police Services.



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APPENDIX A

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BOARD

Those persons whose responsibility is to provide leadership and direction to the organization and govern the affairs of the organization on behalf of its members. “Board” usually refers to a board of directors, members of an executive, board of governors, or a board of trustees, administrators, leaders, coordinators, officials, participants, or anyone else involved in the governance or decision making of the organization.

CAPACITY

Human and financial resources, technology, skills, knowledge, and understanding required for organizations to do their work and fulfill what is expected of them by stakeholders.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A process of involving citizens in both problem-solving and the development of local goals. The process is important because it not only allows people to learn more about the current state of their community, but also feel like they have a voice in shaping its future.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (ED)

The most senior staff person in the organization. The executive director is responsible for the entire organization and reports directly to the board. The ED’s role is to support the governance of the board while ensuring that programs and operations of the organization are delivered.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.

SOCIAL ENTRENEURSHIP/SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Use of entrepreneurial principles to organize, create, and manage a venture to address a social issue and/or make social change. A social enterprise does not measure performance in profit and return, but in social capital.

This does not mean that social enterprise is incompatible with profit; however, social entrepreneurship is most commonly associated with the voluntary and nonprofit sector, and the focus of social enterprise is to further social goals, rather than accumulate profit.

VOLUNTEER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Practice and profession of leading teams of individuals (volunteers) to support and enhance core programs and services of an organization.

APPENDIX B

TIPS FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION ETIQUETTE

Developing positive first and lasting impressions is an important skill for your CEL course and for future personal and professional endeavors. As such, students are expected to demonstrate professional communication skills when interacting with their community partner and CEL faculty and coordinators. Students should be able to express their ideas, and any questions or concerns they have both clearly and articulately to ensure a successful CEL experience. With that being said, communicating with a community partner or faculty member for the first time can be challenging for some students. Below are some helpful strategies and examples for effective communication:

Before initiating contact with your community partner, do your groundwork:

- Learn about your community partner organization.
- What is their mission? Values? What programs and services do they provide? What population do they typically serve?
- Knowing about your organization prior to contact shows your interest and that you can take initiative.
- Be acutely aware of your schedule – know the dates and times when you can serve, and when and by what means (e.g., phone, text, email) that is best to contact you.

When making contact with your community partner:

- It is a good idea introduce yourself via email or phone prior to your first scheduled meeting, unless instructed otherwise.

When calling or emailing:

- Identify yourself as “a Western University student from _____ CEL course who is contacting you about _____.”
- If you reach voicemail, leave a professional message indicating your name and contact information and the information listed above.
- If you are emailing, use professional email etiquette (see below).
- BE PROACTIVE – if you don’t hear back from the community partner after your first attempt to contact, then try again or ask for assistance from your instructor or the CEL coordinator. DO NOT let time pass and delay your service hours.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE

It is important to remain professional at all times even when communicating via email. Throughout your CEL experience and in any future professional email communication you should employ the following strategies:

- Use formal introductions and salutations (e.g., Dear, Dear Dr., Dear Mr. or Ms., Hi, Hello).
- Always use proper spelling and punctuation.
- Avoid spelling shortcuts commonly used in text messages (e.g., type out “you” and “are” instead of using “u” or “r”).
- End the email positively (e.g., Best, Take care, Regards, etc.).
- Include a signature line that provides your contact information (i.e., Name, University affiliation, candidate for BA/BSC, email, and phone number).

Adapted from the Service Learning Best Practices: Advice for Serving with Community-Based Organizations for Students in Direct Service Learning and Hybrid Courses from the Center of Community Service at Northeastern University <http://www.northeastern.edu/serviCELearning/involvement-2012-edition>

APPENDIX C

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE GROUP WORK

1. Listen, and not just hear:

- Actively listen to what your group members have to say.
- Avoid interrupting.
- Clarifying your understanding by paraphrasing and summarizing others ideas.
- Ask group members to encourage all voices to be heard.

2. Establish a common goal:

- Brainstorm to determine a shared outcome.
- Ensure all members understand and share the same overarching goal and/or vision.

3. Outline your outcomes:

- Outline and make clear what you hope and plan to accomplish.
- Define short- and long- term outcomes and goals.

4. Assign roles:

- Every group member possessed unique strength and weaknesses – share yours with your group, learn about theirs, and assigns roles that are a best-fit.
- Some roles in a group are leader, organizer, editor(s), researcher(s), writer(s), trouble-shooter/brainstormer, and presenter(s).

5. Create a timeline/schedule:

- Establish a timeline for meetings, events, and deadlines.
- Be specific about dates and times.
- Be clear about who is expected to do what and when.

6. Divide to conquer:

- Break project into smaller, manageable tasks.
- Assign separate tasks to individuals or sub-groups.

7. Avoid “groupthink”:

- Working in groups does not mean conforming to groups.
- If you disagree with a decision or direction the group is going – speak up.

8. Exchange contact information:

- Generate a list of phone numbers and emails.
- Determine and share with each other the best modes and times to contact.

9. Resolve conflicts effectively:

- Conflict is a natural and healthy part of group work when managed effectively.
- Avoid having “winners” and “losers” in conflict – practice compromise.
- Resolve conflicts immediately to ensure they don’t impact productivity and group morale.

APPENDIX D

CHOOSING THE RIGHT COMMUNITY PARTNER

Finding a good fit with a community partner can greatly impact your CEL experience. It is important that you carefully consider the following questions before determining your placement:

- What are my intended learning outcomes? What do I hope to gain from this CEL experience?
- What issues or causes really concern you?
- What time restrictions do you have (e.g., particular days/evenings)?
- What transportation arrangements can you make (e.g., bus, car, carpool)?
- What are your strengths, skills, and abilities? Weaknesses?
- What skills would you like to develop?
- What type of environment do you prefer to work in (e.g., indoor/outdoor; structured/unstructured; independent/group)?
- What type of commitment would you prefer (e.g., once a week; independent work; intense several days event)?
- Do you prefer to work with any particular age group?
- Are there particular populations you are interested in working with? Conversely, are there populations you would not be comfortable working with?
- Do you prefer working independently, one-on-one, or in a group setting?

Adapted from the Community Service Learning Student Guidebook at the University of Alberta (www.CEL.ualberta.ca)