

Alabama Postsecondary Alliance for Community Engagement (PACE) Statewide Recommendations for Community Engagement

July 25, 2020

Mission Statement

The Alabama Postsecondary Alliance for Community Engagement (PACE) is a consortium of community engagement professionals representing institutions of higher education across the state. PACE enhances campus-based engagement strategies, initiatives and programs that positively impact key stakeholders around the state by providing a collaborative forum for faculty and administrators responsible for civic engagement and service-learning at their respective post-secondary institutions. PACE was founded in 2018 in order to provide consistency and foster a collaborative effort in our combined service to the State of Alabama.

Member Institutions

Alabama A&M University
Alabama State University
Auburn University
Birmingham-Southern College
Jefferson State Community College
Miles College
Samford University
Spring Hill College
Troy University
Tuskegee University
University of Alabama
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Alabama at Huntsville
University of Montevallo
University of South Alabama

An ad hoc sub-committee of the larger consortium developed the guidelines articulated in this document. For a list of sub-committee members, see appendix.

Rationale

As of July 2020, the state of Alabama's Postsecondary Alliance for Community Engagement (PACE) recommends that colleges and universities consider and implement the following strategies articulated in this document as they deem best and are able in their respective institutional setting. Crafted collaboratively by higher education civic engagement faculty and staff, the recommendations aim to ensure as much consistency as possible in community engagement programming throughout the state in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By working collaboratively to create comprehensive and innovative strategies and solutions to these new challenges, we hope this collective voice will not only strengthen Alabama institutions acting in an uncertain landscape, but also minimize risk to the communities and students we serve.

Postsecondary institution recommendations can and should be reconsidered as circumstances may change in relation to the pandemic and as advised by local authorities. All recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) were considered when crafting this document. These recommendations will remain in place until the risk of COVID-19 is reasonably mitigated.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions provided to promote a better understanding of the community engagement recommendations presented in this document.

ADPH: The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) is the primary state health agency for the state of Alabama.

CDC: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) forms the nation's health protection agency. The CDC saves lives and protects people from health, safety, and security threats.

Community Engagement: The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. [Community engagement] is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions to mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices (Centers for Disease Control, 1997).

Although certain community-based clinical and experiential placements may be explicitly required by specific professional programs, community partners and postsecondary institutions should work together to mitigate risk, maximize training of all participants, and follow procedures developed by the Centers for Disease Control, the Alabama Department of Public Health and local authorities. These assurances should be well-articulated in Memoranda of Understanding for these community-based placement programs.

MOU: A Memorandum of Understanding is an agreement between post-secondary institutions and community partners.

PPE: Personal protective equipment, commonly referred to as "PPE", is equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious injuries and illnesses.

Vulnerable Populations: Vulnerable populations and people who are at higher risk of severe illness should take extra precautions to avoid illness. Click the link below for more information from the Centers for Disease Control regarding who is considered vulnerable:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-increased-risk.html>

Direct Contact Service: This is service in which there is face to face interactions between participants and the clients/consumers of the community partner.

This type of service includes but is not limited to:

- Mentoring at local elementary schools
- Adult literacy programs
- Serving Meals at Community Soup Bowls
- Art Memory Classes with seniors

Low Contact Service: This is service in which there is only limited interaction between participants and the employees of the community partner. There is no direct face to face contact with clients.

This type of service can include but is not limited to:

- Preparing meal boxes for distribution at food bank
- Voter registration
- Beautification efforts outside of local schools or community centers
- Working in local community gardens
- Roadway and river cleanups
- Work with local animal rescue

No Contact Service: This is a service in which there is no face to face interaction between participants and other human clients or community partners. All instructions and interactions will occur virtually.

This type of service can include but is not limited to:

- All virtual service opportunities
- Awareness Campaigns
- Advocacy Campaigns
- Philanthropy

Community Engagement Recommendations Until Full or Reasonable Mitigation of COVID-19 Risk in Alabama

I. Types of Volunteer Contact

- A. It is recommended that community engagement opportunities for students and employees include low or no contact service. This is acceptable interaction when the employees at the community partner are following the ADPH, CDC and local authority guidelines for operating in a safe, healthy environment.
 1. Examples of service recommended with appropriate PPE and social distancing
 - a) Working outdoors in a local community garden
 - b) Voter registration initiatives
 - c) Drive thru or doorstep food distribution programs

- 2. Examples of virtual or digital service include
 - a) Online socialization with older adults
 - b) Creating marketing or social media content for a local nonprofit
 - c) Online voter engagement and registration
- B. It is recommended that all community engagement programs and interactions avoid regular direct service interactions, e.g. face to face contact.
 - 1. Examples of service that should be avoided
 - a) One on one health literacy screenings with clients at community health centers
 - b) Serving meals at local community centers or shelters
 - c) Reading partners or tutoring in K-12 local schools
- C. It is recommended that all parties are aware that low contact service will be subject to review and can be suspended or converted to no contact service if circumstances change based on COVID-19.
- D. It is also recommended that all post-secondary institutions stay abreast of guidelines offered by ADPH and local authorities to monitor changing circumstances and safety risks due to COVID-19.
- E. It is recommended post-secondary community engagement professionals develop a communications plan to alert their stakeholders of any suspended programs or changes needed when transitioning from low contact to no contact service or virtual engagement.

II. Populations Served

- A. It is recommended that populations considered the most vulnerable as determined by the CDC not engage in direct contact service with students. These populations include but are not limited to: the elderly, those experiencing homelessness, children fighting pediatric illness, and immuno-compromised individuals.
- B. For more information regarding these populations, see [link here](#) and embedded above.

III. Community Partner Selection

- A. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions continue to support, enhance and foster existing relationships with community partners through current programming. This is preferable to planning and implementing programming with new community agencies.
- B. New programming should give priority to community partners with unique COVID-19 related needs if possible.
- C. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions assess both existing partners' needs and virtual service opportunities, as well as their organizational capacity to minimize risk to all parties involved, e.g. students, clients, community residents, employees, guests, etc.
- D. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions assess community partners' updated guidelines and procedures for illness prevention strategies and behaviors including standards for social distance, PPE, and the sanitizing

procedures for facilities, commonly used spaces, and needed supplies. This assessment should be evaluated based upon each respective institutions' specifications and recommendations for safe operations.

- E. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions provide orientation and training for participating community partners and students. These components are intended to provide community partners and student volunteers with resources and information to maximize health and safety in this ever-changing environment.
 1. Training should include all of the following but not limited to:
 - a) Training unique to the pandemic, including guidelines for illness prevention strategies and behaviors including standards for social distance, PPE and cleanliness
 - b) Training should define and reiterate the importance of maintaining low and/or no contact while serving
 - c) Training regarding university community engagement policies and volunteer service documentation
 - d) Training on the importance of maintaining a healthy environment for all community and student participants
 2. In an abundance of caution, training should also address program transitions from low contact service work to virtual engagements only. Virtual service program training for partners and students should include the following:
 - a) How to utilize technology in order to create meaningful service opportunities
 - b) How to train, engage, and manage volunteers virtually
 - c) Risk Management in a virtual engagement model

Institutions may consider including language or an “important note” on their civic engagement web pages to help potential employee or student volunteers understand their responsibility in researching, choosing and protecting themselves should they decide to pursue a low contact or direct service option during the pandemic.

*Please note that the Center for Civic Engagement & Learning alerts students to a range of community-based opportunities—posted opportunities are a sampling of options, not endorsements. Students should independently research opportunities carefully to make sure the program is a good match for their interests. Additionally, posting of opportunities and events does not constitute an endorsement by [name of institution] of a particular political issue, candidate, political campaign, or election. **During the COVID-19 pandemic, [institutions' center or division supporting the community engagement function] supports all measures to protect yourself and others by following local, state and national guidelines and restrictions. You can view CDC information and resources [here](#).***

IV. Transportation to Off-campus Community Partner Sites

- a. It is recommended that group transportation of students to community partner sites not be offered by post-secondary institutions at the current time.
- b. Although the expectation that students provide their own transportation may present hardship to some, mitigating the risks of infection that close contact presents in vans, etc. is vital.

V. Volunteer Documentation

- a. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions be aware of the volunteer documentation procedures of all community partners.
 - i. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions that work with community partners without volunteer documentation procedures work with that partner to either create an appropriate process or reconsider the viability of the partnership.
 - ii. Volunteer documentation should include:
 1. Participant Name
 2. Participant Contact Information
 3. Date and Time of Service
 4. All participants that served during each time frame or volunteer shift
- b. It is recommended that community partners who work with post-secondary institutions with community engagement management platforms utilize those tools to document interactions for safety purposes.
 - i. GivePulse is the platform recommended by many post-secondary institutions in the State of Alabama, however not all schools have access to this digital platform.

V. Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

- A. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions draft MOUs unique to the pandemic, including guidelines for: illness prevention strategies and behaviors, standards for social distance, PPE and cleanliness dependent on their institution's standards.
- B. It is recommended that revised, drafted MOUs are shared with post-secondary institutions' risk management officials and/or general counsel for review.
- C. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions keep language used in the MOU consistent with language used by the institution to promote a healthy, safe campus environment.
- D. It is recommended that expectations and adherence to expectations for both post-secondary institutions and community partners be clearly defined within the MOU. It is also important to clearly define the procedures for lack of adherence and consequences when this occurs to set guidelines.
- E. It is recommended that expectations for communication, management and documentation of volunteers are included in the MOU.

- F. It is recommended this document include language that allows for any needed future modifications given the ever-changing public health environment.

VI. PPE Policies

- A. It is recommended that participants practice healthy living by washing their hands, covering their faces when coughing or sneezing, and utilizing hand sanitizer as recommended by the CDC and ADPH.
- B. It is recommended that community partners provide hand sanitizer on site for the use of all participants.
- C. It is recommended that all participants wear a face covering at all times when participating in low contact service. Masks must be provided by the student and/or community member participating in the service opportunity.
- D. It is also important to acknowledge that community partners may also have additional PPE requirements that student participants should adhere to at time of service.

VII. Updated Waivers

- A. Each institution should update its risk management waiver with language regarding COVID19 risks to participation in off campus civic engagement as well as explicit explanation regarding adherence to ADPH and CDC guidelines put in place by all partners involved.

VIII. Communication Plans

- a. It is recommended post-secondary community engagement professionals prepare and implement a communication plan to communicate with stakeholders in an effective and efficient manner.
- b. Communication plans include messaging for all stakeholders, potentially including but not limited to:
 - i. Community partners
 - ii. Students
 - iii. Faculty and staff
 - iv. Institutional administrative and/or Board of Trustees
- c. Communication plans should include the following:
 - i. Identification of the primary and secondary communication outlet/platform used to announce urgent updates and changes to service expectations and recommendations based on the changing COVID-19 landscape and circumstances
 - ii. Identification of staff member(s) responsible for content development of a variety of potential updates, including but not limited to:
 - 1. Transition from low contact to no contact service if COVID-19 escalates
 - 2. Evolving local PPE or social distancing requirements
 - 3. Institutional revisions to in-person instruction and operations
 - iii. Identification of staff member responsible for alerting each stakeholder to updates and service expectations

- iv. Strategies for promoting virtual training experiences for students and community partners to further educate them on ways to implement no contact service
- v. Strategies for heightened oversight of the agreed upon safety standards as stated in the institution's MOU, including but not limited to:
 - 1. Process for emphasizing those expectations to partners and volunteers
 - 2. Process for volunteers to report lack of adherence to standards of safety
 - 3. Process for community agencies to share concerns regarding a volunteer's adherence to safety guidelines and expectations
 - 4. Designating a staff member responsible for following up on any reported concerns by either agency or volunteer

IX. Training of Volunteers on Updated Guidelines

- A. It is recommended that updated training for all community engagement participants be conducted either virtually or in-person under appropriate social distancing guidelines.
- B. It is recommended that training provided by the institution include all but not limited to the following:
 - 1. Training unique to the pandemic, including guidelines for illness prevention strategies and behaviors including standards for social distance, PPE and cleanliness
 - 2. Training should define and reiterate the importance of maintaining low and/or no contact while serving
 - 3. Training regarding university community engagement policies and volunteer service documentation
 - 4. Training on the importance of maintaining a healthy environment for all community and student participants
- C. It is recommended that training be provided by the community partner specific to the partner with whom student service will take place, including guidelines for illness prevention strategies and behaviors including standards for social distance, PPE and cleanliness.

X. Oversight for Adherence to Guidelines

- a. It is recommended that community engagement professionals at post-secondary institutions practice even greater oversight of engagement with community partners.
- b. Oversight should be determined by each institution and take into consideration the following:
 - i. Organizational and institutional capacity
 - ii. Other Resources
 - iii. Institutional standards
- c. It is recommended that the agreed upon level of oversight and communication regarding oversight be outlined in the MOU.

XI. Consequences for Lack of Adherence

- A. It is recommended that post secondary institutions outline and clarify the consequences for lack of adherence to MOUs and institutional guidelines for all participants, community partners, and any organization where service occurs.
- B. Termination of MOUs due to the lack of adherence is per the discretion of each institution.

Appendix

Alabama Postsecondary Alliance for Community Engagement Ad Hoc Subcommittee Members

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