VRC Community Partner Student Engagement Guide
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Welcome to the Volunteer Resource Center

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

– Margaret Mead

Welcome to the Volunteer Resource Center. We are so excited to be partnering with your Community Organization! Here at the VRC we work to identify your volunteer needs and goals, and then connect you to over 1,200 students that come through our office. We are also excited to announce that this year we will be working with approximately 800 more students through our recent collaboration with Boulder Municipal Courts. We are happy to start this relationship with the Boulder Courts, as well as help more students engage in the community and connect to quality organizations. We look for Community Partners that share our educational agenda of developing CU students in their understanding of social issues and role as engaged and active citizens in our community. We truly value the time and dedication that our Community Partners put towards their work, and we hope that by working together we can help strengthen campus and community relations. Thank you for taking the time to partner with us, we look forward to working with you!

Thanks,
Charlotte Thompson
VRC Intake Coordinator

The VRC Staff:
Director: Jen Ross
Assistant Director: Megan Frewaldt
Events Manager: Jennifer Coffin
Events: Megan Barrie & Taylor Schneider
Alternative Breaks: Max Roland & Katherine Quinn
Intake: Charlotte Thompson & Erin Bode
Communications: Rachael Kelley
Marketing: Steffanie Millert
Residence Life: Thao Ma

Connect with us!

Volunteer Resource Center
University Memorial Center 358
Volunteer@colorado.edu
Volunteer.colorado.edu

Follow us!

CU Boulder Volunteer Resource Center
CU Volunteer Center
cuvrc
About Volunteer Resource Center

Mission
The Volunteer Resource Center’s mission is to strengthen campus and community relations through student outreach, education, and community service.

Vision
Volunteer Resource Center’s vision is a society of active citizens: people who value the community as a priority when making life decisions. As part of a quality service experience, participants will become more educated and experienced in all sides of a social issue. They will be empowered to make more informed decisions and take meaningful action that supports a greater good. They will become contributing members of society and will weigh in on issues that impact their communities.

Overview
Founded in 1965 by Len Barron, a student of the University of Colorado, the Volunteer Resource Center exists as the on-campus center dedicated to community leadership. In order to accomplish bridging the gaps between campus to community and community to community, the Volunteer Resource Center offers many opportunities. We provide opportunities for students to build leadership, self-awareness, career experiences, and foster their passions through our programs, outreach, and annual events. We are here to connect you to meaningful volunteer opportunities that fit your interests, skills & goals.

“Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Programs

Alternative Breaks
The Alternative Breaks program gives students the opportunity to travel and work in an area they are passionate about. Check out our national and international trips online or email: altbreak@colorado.edu.

Volunteer Internship Program
The internship program provides first year students with an opportunity to learn about having an on campus job. Interns work directly with a staff mentor in an area of interest. They will learn how the VRC operates and gain leadership experience.

Outreach

Workshops
VRC workshops are one hour presentations in which VRC trained student staff facilitators review the importance of volunteering and best practices in engaging with community involvement from a service standpoint. Students sanctioned through Student Conduct or the Boulder Municipal Courts receive 1 hour of community service credit. Workshops are available for student groups and classes.

Intake
VRC has a handful of trained intake specialists who will help students, staff, and faculty find volunteer opportunities that fit their passions and interests. Intake specialists will sit down and talk to you one on one or help you over email. Students take advantage of our VRC database with over 250 community partners and find an organization locally, regionally, or nationally.

Annual Events

Day of Service
The University of Colorado’s Day of Service is a new initiative and program hosted through the Volunteer Resource Center. VRC is working closely in collaboration with Housing and Dining Services to secure a culture of volunteerism on campus. We’d like to see students who graduate from CU engaged in their communities and active as citizens of the world.

Volunteer Fairs
Over 60 non-profit agencies come to our fairs ready to inform students, staff, and faculty about their community programs and volunteer opportunities. No matter what your interests are, there is an organization for you. Students have the opportunity to get in direct contact with the organizations that are there and learn how to begin volunteering. (Fall and Spring Semesters)

Give-A-Day
Volunteer with other students on monthly service projects in Boulder and the surrounding areas. (September-March)
Nearly Naked Mile
The Nearly Naked Mile is more than the name implies. This event is about taking the clothes we no longer need off our backs and giving them to those in need in our community. The Nearly Naked Mile is fun and meaningful and is an event you sure do not want to miss! (October)

Eye Contact
Celebrate the winter season with the Volunteer Resource Center by purchasing your gifts from local and global organizations who are working to end the cycle of inequity. Stop by to browse unique gifts from Boulder and around the world, enjoy art, hot cocoa, and people who make a difference. Learn about local volunteer programs partnering with individuals, youth, and families facing poverty and homelessness. (December)

Food & Environmental Justice Week
The mission of Food and Environmental Justice Week is to promote education and involvement of the disproportionate distribution of environmental burdens and environmental benefits based on race, socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. (April)

Buffalo Can Challenge
Join the VRC, the Boulder campus, and the Environmental Center for a can food drive unlike any other. Groups will sign up and compete by collecting canned food and then take part in a sculpture contest using the collected cans.

Better Boulder Better World
Better Boulder Better World is a one day service event not to be missed. Students, staff, and faculty are invited to choose from a variety of projects that emphasize the environment, gardening, farming, youth, cross-cultural connections, poverty and more. Volunteer with the CU community, local organizations, and fascinating people making an impact in the Boulder/Denver area.
Service Philosophy

To work towards the vision of a society of active citizens, who view community as a priority when making life decisions, the Volunteer Resource Center organizes under a philosophy of service that believes education and reflection are essential components of service, focuses on strengths and reciprocal relationships, and commits to diversity and inclusivity.

The Active Citizen Continuum

The Active Citizen Continuum is absolutely the driving force behind the Volunteer Resource Center’s philosophy of service. As illustrated with this developmental model, service can become much more than memorable volunteer experience—it can be a powerful catalyst for a transformed world view and developing an identity and understanding of lifelong active citizenship, which is why it’s so important that service programs incorporate education and reflection. Thus, service becomes about two things: getting needed work done around social issues and changing the volunteer’s perspective of their place in society.
**Strengths-Based Service**

Influenced by the fields of Asset-Based Community Development and positive psychology, especially Strengths Quest, the VRC believes in a model of service focused on strengths and reciprocal relationships.

Strengths-based service is grounded in reciprocal relationships among service partners, based on the premise that each individual has innate gifts and talents, that when shared through service, contribute greatly to the overall wellbeing of our community.

**Diversity & Inclusion**

The vision of a society of active citizens is based in the value of each individual’s strengths and requires a commitment to diversity and inclusivity of all.

The Volunteer Resource Center is committed to embracing and valuing the diversity of the CU-Boulder and greater community. We recognize that our success is dependent upon how well we value, include, and engage the rich diversity of our service partners: students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. We believe that prejudice, oppression, and discrimination are detrimental to establishing authentic relationships, which is the foundation of service. We are committed to treating all with dignity and respect, and to working collectively in an ongoing manner to build and sustain a community that understands and celebrates diversity, while promoting inclusivity at all levels.
Components of Quality Service

Deeply impacted by the model of service used in the national Alternative Breaks Movement through Break Away, the Volunteer Resource Center believes education and reflection are essential components of quality service.

Education provides the service partners with the opportunity to engage with a full understanding of social and environmental issues, including the root causes. Without education, service can reinforce stereotypes, exploit communities, and become frustrating for all service partners.

Reflection offers the opportunity to integrate the often deeply impactful experience service and education provide. Time spent in both individual and group reflection promotes a community able to dialogue on complex and emotionally-provoking social justice issues. Without reflection, service partners are often left without community or an avenue of expression for the deep experiences that occur through direct service.

In addition to these components, the VRC also has the following important elements:

**Simple Living and Sustainability:** To lessen our impact on the communities with which we work, we seek to live simply and sustainably. We do this by spending as little as possible on housing and food. Additionally, we work to have as sustainable trips as possible by being mindful of the resources we use and the environmental impact we will have on the location we stay.

**Reciprocal Relationships with Community Partners:** We strive to build long-term relationships with communities, and partner with organizations in a way that benefits both the community and our participants. We seek to understand our community partner’s needs first and foremost, and view them as the experts of their situations and communities.

**Social Justice Focus:** Each of our trips concentrates on social and environmental justice issues and participates in direct service related to that issue with a focus on root causes. This is tied with the education piece, but it is important to emphasize the justice component that provides tools for participants to think critically about the issues on which they are working.
Benefits of Being a Community Partner

Volunteer Recruitment & Referral

• Your organization will be included in our database which we use in our referral process. Students looking for volunteer opportunities will be referred to your organization based on their interests, skills, goals, and availability. This connects our Community Partners to over 1,200 students that come through our office.

• We will promote your upcoming events and activities that you need volunteers for to our web calendar on our website. This allows students to see upcoming one-time opportunities that fit their interests, as well as gets the word out about your event. (http://volunteer.colorado.edu/volunteer-opportunities/upcoming-volunteer-opportunities)

• We also send out an email bi-monthly promoting upcoming events that you need volunteers for. This is another great way to spread the word about an event or volunteer need that you may have to interested students.

• Community Partners are invited to attend our Volunteer Fair, an event happening twice a year (fall and spring), which allows students and community organizations to connect face to face. You will be able to speak directly to student about the way that they will be able to contribute as a volunteer to your organization, as well as allow you the chance to connect to other community organizations in the area (booths cost $33, scholarships are available). http://volunteer.colorado.edu/events/volunteer-fair

• Community Partners can collaborate with the VRC to be involved in our events, such as Give-a-Days, Eye Contact, and Better Boulder Better World. Visit our Events Webpage (http://volunteer.colorado.edu/events) to find more information.

• Community Partners are invited to attend our Volunteer Appreciation Event in the spring. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the on-goings of the VRC, as well as recognize all of the hard work and dedication that our volunteers and Community Organizations have done throughout the year.
Community Partner Expectations:

*Based on our service philosophy and past experiences, these are a few things that we expect from you during our collaboration:*

- Provide a volunteer orientation for new student-volunteers. This allows them to become more familiar with your organization as well as eases them into volunteering in a new setting. This also helps them to understand the value of their service.

- Allow time and space for reflection during group service days (following the quality components of service). Site Leaders within each group will facilitate reflection, but community members are welcome to join the dialogue.

- All VRC Community Partners are expected to abide by our Diversity and Inclusion Statement.

- All VRC Community Partners must abide by the University of Colorado Discrimination and Harassment Policy: All contractors and their subcontractors will be required to comply with all University laws and policies, including but not limited to, the campus “Discrimination and Harassment Policy”.

- **POLICY STATEMENT**
  - The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). 1 CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes, or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy,2 age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression,3 or veteran status.
  - This Policy: (1) provides a definition of discrimination and harassment based upon Protected Classes and related retaliation; (2) prohibits discrimination and harassment based upon Protected Classes and related retaliation; and (3) sets out procedures to follow when a member of the CU-Boulder community believes a violation of the Policy has occurred. The University of Colorado policy prohibiting sexual harassment is set forth in the Administrative Policy Statement entitled, "Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures."
  - Robust discussion and debate are fundamental to the life of the University. Consequently, this Policy shall be interpreted in a manner that is consistent with academic freedom as defined in Regent Law, Article 5D, amended 10/10/02.
Engaging Student Volunteers

As students, many of us are in a unique point in our lives where we have a chance to develop an abundance of skills and be excited for new discoveries, all while having the ambition and ability to fulfill high energy roles. This section is really breaking it down and highlighting some big things students, ages 18-24, are looking for in volunteerism. We hope that the following info, done by the Institute of volunteering research (1997), will help you in your role as an organization leader, volunteer coordinator, campaign manager, or a student volunteer.

Flexible is given top priority by young in people in respect of flexible work and times for volunteering. Youth have many pressures and demands and find it hard to make the time and commitment, especially with many other outlets also competing for their time. Many youth are controlled by others, making it important for them to have a choice.

Legitimacy is a widespread need. Better education from an early age about the full range of voluntary work and its significance, and more positive images, would make volunteering seem ‘normal’ and ‘cool’ to young people. Their view of volunteers is basically favorable but negative stereotypes persist. Peer pressure prevents many young people from getting involved for fear of being taunted.

Ease of access is a requirement is still a barrier. Most of the young people do not know how to find out about volunteer opportunities. A major reason for not volunteering was simply that they didn’t know how to go about it. More info and easy access would help break down entry barriers.

Experience is high on young people’s wish-list for volunteering. They want relevant and interesting experiences which will stand them in good stead in their personal and career development. Volunteering needs to offer opportunities to learn new skills, to take on challenges, to explore different careers, and get work experience.

Incentives are important because of the competition for young people’s time and attention. Incentive may be needed to help tip them into involvement, and once there, certain rewards would sustain them. Most prominent is the incentive of tangible outcomes in the form of a reference or a qualification, to validate their experience and demonstrate their achievement to employers and others.

Variety in types of work, issues, and structures would accommodate the huge range of individual interests, goals, and preferences among youth. Variations should exist in the amount of commitment, level of responsibility, and type of activity in order to attract the largest range of youth.

Organization of the volunteering needs to be efficient but informal, providing a relaxed environment in which young people feel welcomed and valued. They do not want to be over-organized and heavily supervised but to have people there who can support them when they need it, and help them progress when they are ready.

Laughs need to exist. Volunteering should be enjoyable, satisfying, and fun. Much competition for youth’s time is from attraction of a good time. Same goes with volunteering. Youth may not volunteer for the social side, but they are more likely to continue if they are enjoying themselves.
VRC Learning Outcomes for Volunteers

**Skilled Workers** which emphasizes the career and workforce preparation role for colleges to help students identify their options and learn successful work related skills

1. Students will understand how to navigate complex systems and work within organizational structures to achieve shared objectives
2. Students will value organizational sustainability and shared leadership

**Democratic Citizens** a goal that affirms the role of civic engagement in public life and contributions needed to further society

3. Students will value civic participation and social justice.
4. Students will identify the ways in which they want to participate (or further participate) in civic/community life and social justice.

**Self-Aware and Interpersonally Sensitive Individuals**
who are needed to interact in today's diverse society, recognizing that a personal identity and culture affect everything someone does in relation to others

5. Students will understand privilege and oppression in society and as it relates to their lives.
6. Students will be aware of the diversity within communities.

**Life Skills Managers** able to construct and manage functions that promote their quality of life

7. Students will develop effective and empathic communication skills
What is Community Development?

Good Community Development is action that helps people to recognize and develop their ability and potential and organize themselves to respond to problems and needs which they share. It supports the establishment of strong communities that control and use assets to promote social justice and help improve the quality of community life. It also enables community and public agencies to work together to improve the quality of government.

Effective Community Development should be:

- A long-term endeavor
- Well planned
- Inclusive and equitable
- Holistic and integrated into the bigger picture
- Initiated and supported by community members
- Of benefit to the community
- Grounded in experience that leads to best practices

Community Development is a grassroots process by which communities:

- Become more responsible
- Organize and plan together
- Develop healthy lifestyle options
- Empower themselves
- Reduce poverty and suffering
- Create employment and economic opportunities
- Achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental goals
Sample Education & Reflection Ideas

(This is included in the Volunteer Guide we provide for our student-volunteers)

Education

Education should include the historical, political, social, and cultural context of the social problems you will be working with during service. Effective education provides faces and opinions from all perspectives on the issue, including ways that your personal life choices are connected to them. The organization you will be working with may be able to provide resources for education.

Here are a couple good articles on service in general to get you started.

The Starfish Story

There was a man who lived along the ocean. One morning, at about 5:00 am, when he could sleep no longer, he decided to take a walk along the beach. It was a foggy morning, and the first rays of the sun were slipping above the horizon. The man enjoyed the walk; it was as if the beach belonged to him. He glanced down on the beach and saw a figure that seemed to be dancing. He wondered why anyone would be on the beach so early; his curiosity caused him to quicken his pace.

As he drew nearer, he realized that the figure was that of a young man, and he wasn't dancing... he was throwing something into the water. As he drew very close, he realized that the young man was picking starfish off the beach and was tossing them back into the water. "Why are you throwing starfish into the water?" he asked. As the young man continued on with his task he replied, "The tide is going out, the sun is rising, and the starfish that are left on the beach will surely die."

"I understand," the man replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. It seems such a waste of time and energy! You can't possibly get to all of them. There are simply too many and there are miles and miles of beach with starfish all along it. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The young man thought for a moment. He reached down to pick up another starfish, and as he gently threw it back into the sea he said, "It makes a difference... to this one."

Starfish Hurling and Community Service

by Keith Morton

http://steans.depaul.edu/faculty/docs/starfishHurlingAndCommunityService.pdf

One of the most popular stories in community service events is that of the starfish: a (fill in your description, usually young) person is running, hurling starfish deposited on the beach by a storm back into the sea. “What are you doing,” asks a (fill in your description, usually old) person, “You can’t possibly throw all the starfish back. Your effort makes no difference.” “It makes a difference to this one,” replies the first person, who continues off down the beach. The usual conclusions drawn from this hackneyed tale are about the importance of making a difference where you can, one person or problem at a time; about not being put off by skepticism or criticism or cynicism.
The story acknowledges the relief that comes when we find a way to relieve suffering. A somewhat deeper reading is that there is merit in jumping into a situation and finding a way to act - the first step in determining what possibilities for action might exist. But the tale is, ultimately, mis-educative and I wish people would stop using it. First, it is about a problem - starfish cast up by a storm - that is apolitical (unless you stretch for the connection between pollution and El Nino that might have precipitated the storm). There is seldom any hesitancy or moral complexity in responding to a crisis caused by natural disaster. It is the one circumstance in which charity can be an unmitigated good. The story suggests that all problems are similarly simple - that there is a path of action, which is right and can avoid the traps of politics, context, or complex and contradictory human relationships.

Second, the story is about helping starfish and not about helping people. It avoids, therefore, the shadow side of the service, the sticky problem of who deserves our help. The starfish are passive; they have no voice; they cannot have an opinion about their circumstances, at least not that we can hear. This one is much like that one. Their silence coincides with the fact that they can have done nothing (the story suggests) to deserve their fate. In most of the situations where this story is told, service is about people working with people: people with histories, voices, opinions, judgment, more or less power.

Third, the story avoids the possible complexity of ecology: it might be that the starfish are part of a food chain that is being interrupted as they are thrown back - birds might go hungry at a critical time of year, for example; or it might be that the starfish have been released by a storm from the ocean bottom because they have outgrown their habitat. It is never smart to intervene in an ecosystem without understanding how all of its parts are interrelated.

Fourth, the tale suggests that we should work from emotional response and not our heads, even though the problem is, in this case, a knowable one. As “overwhelming” as the miles of beach seem, the dilemma of the starfish is finite and knowable - this many starfish on this stretch of beach; a bit of advance organizing could result in enough volunteers to return all the starfish to the sea.

Fifth, the story privileges random, individual acts of kindness. It avoids questions of community (and we claim “community service” as our ground after all). It avoids questions of working with others. It polarizes the relationship of the two actors: how different would the story be if the second person joined in with the first? In short, the story does nothing to teach us about community or service. This in itself is not necessarily a problem; it could be an entertaining tale, and that could be enough. What makes it a problem, however, is that the tale of the starfish pretends to teach us something about community service, even as it misdirects our sympathies, our intellects and our sense of purpose.

Don’t go charging out to help. Talk, listen, build relationships, know your self, your environment; work with others where they and the situation itself can teach you how to act with more and more knowledge and effectiveness. Stop hurling starfish.
“7 worst international aid ideas”

by RICHARD STUPART on FEBRUARY 20, 2012 For Matador Network

http://matadornetwork.com/change/7-worst-international-aid-ideas/

Maybe their hearts were in the right place. Maybe not. Either way, these are solid contenders for the title of “worst attempts at helping others since colonialism.”

1. One million t-shirts for Africa

Aid circles employ the cynical acronym SWEDOW (stuff we don’t want) to describe initiatives like Jason Sadler’s 1 Million T-Shirts project. Sadler had admittedly never been to Africa, and had never worked in an aid or development environment before. But he cared a great deal, and came up with the idea to send a million free shirts to Africa in order to help the people there.

Like some sort of lightning rod for the combined venom of the humanitarian aid world, Jason found himself pilloried across the web in a matter of weeks. Everyone from armchair bloggers to senior economists spat fire on his dream until it eventually ground to a halt. In July 2010, Jason threw in the towel and abandoned his scheme. And somewhere in Africa, an economy sighed in relief.

Why was the idea so bad?

Firstly, it’s debatable whether there is actually a need for T-shirts in Africa. There is practically nowhere that people who want shirts are unable to afford them. Wanting to donate them is a classic case of having something you want to donate and assuming it is needed. Just because you have a really large hammer does not mean that everything in the world is a nail. Secondly, dumping a million free shirts is inefficient. What it would cost to pack them, ship them, and transport them overland to wherever it is that they are meant to go would cost close to the manufacturing cost of the shirts in the first place. That’s just incredibly wasteful. If you wanted to get people shirts, it would be far more cost effective to simply commission their manufacture locally, creating a stimulus to the local textile economy in the process.

Which brings us to the third critique of free stuff. When people in the target community already have an economy functioning in part on the sale and repair of the stuff you want to donate (shirts in this instance), then dumping a million of them free is the economic equivalent of an atom bomb. Why buy a shirt anymore when you can get a five-year supply for free? Why get yours repaired when you can simply toss it and get another? And in the process everyone who once sold shirts or practiced tailoring finds themselves unemployed and unable to provide money for themselves or their families to buy anything.

Except shirts. Because those are now free.
And before you think dumping free shirts is the sin of an uneducated maverick, Jason's poor logic was subsequently repeated by World Vision, in accepting 100,000 NFL shirts to dump on some poor, shirtless village in Africa.

2. TOMS Buy-One-Give-One

Bearing in mind all of the criticisms above, TOMS shoe brand has built a brand on the premise that buying one pair of their shoes automatically includes the provision of another pair of shoes to an underprivileged child in a developing nation somewhere. Three months after Jason abandoned sending a million shirts to Africa, TOMS celebrated sending a million pairs of shoes to the underprivileged. It continues to do so.

While there are possibly more people in the world who need shoes than might need shirts (though this is debatable), TOMS can be (and has been) broadly criticised for the same kinds of unintended consequences of dumping shoes in places where people might otherwise be employed to make them.

while donating a pair of shoes helps shoelessness, it does not help poverty.

Further, though, the TOMS campaign — like the million shirts — misses the fundamental point that not having a pair of shoes (or a shirt, christmas toy, etc.) is not a problem about not having shoes. It's a problem of poverty. Shoelessness, such as it is, is a symptom of a much bigger and more complex problem. And while donating a pair of shoes helps shoelessness, it does not help poverty.

Things like jobs help poverty. Jobs making things like shoes, for example. But TOMS doesn't make its shoes in Africa, it makes them in China where it's presumably cheaper to make two pairs of shoes and give one away than it is to get people in a needier community to make one pair of shoes.

The result of this setup, as Zizek explains most succinctly, is that on a big-picture level, TOMS (and other buy-my-product-and-donate companies) are busy building the exploitative global structure that produces economic inequality, while on the other hand pretending that supporting them actually does something to fix it.

It doesn't. It just gives people shoes.

3. Machine gun preacher

The criticisms of TOMS, Jason, and other purveyors of SWEDOW tend to be intellectual, economic concerns. Problems with Sam Childers, the machine gun preacher, are so much more straightforward.

It’s dangerous and insane.

After a misspent youth in the United States and a few years spent behind bars, Childers headed to Sudan on a missionary project to repair huts devastated in the war. There he would be commanded by God to build an orphanage for local children and, incidentally, take up arms against the Lord’s Resistance Army, who was terrorizing the region. With an AK-47 and a bible, Sam would spread the wrath of the Lord and rescue abducted children for the next few years.

Imagine John Rambo with a biker’s beard hunting rebels in the savannah and you pretty much get the idea.
No matter how much you care to help the women/children/villages/gorillas in a particular warzone, trying to solve what is in effect a problem of armed insecurity through establishing another minor armed militia is never a good idea. However entertaining the film turns out to be, it’s the security studies equivalent of pouring gasoline on a forest fire. Peace — and a long-term future for those affected by violence in what is now South Sudan — can only be guaranteed through a diplomatic agreement between the groups that command the thousands of men with guns. Playing Rambo in the bush would not be tolerated back home, and it shouldn’t be here in Africa.

Childers is not the first person to get the crazy idea of solving violent situations by running in with guns. Hussein Mohammed Farah Aidid is an ex-Marine, and the son of Gen. Mohammed Farah Aidid (of Black Hawk Down fame), who returned to Somalia in 1996 to lead the powerful Habr Gedir clan in the country’s civil war. That hasn’t worked out so well either.

4. 50 Cent ransoming children in Somalia

Just this month, rapper 50 Cent visited Dolow in Somalia at the request of the World Food Programme. The trip was presumably intended to raise awareness of the issues in the way that Angelina Jolie and George Clooney did for Sudan and Oprah did for South Africa. There are quite a few examples of celebrities connecting with Africa actually. There is even a map to keep track of who has “dibs” on what region.

If the trip was nothing more than Fifty touring hard-hit areas in order to bring the world’s lazy media along, then it would have been useful at best, and benign at worst. But there is more. If you Like the Facebook page for his Street King energy drink, he will provide a meal for a child in need. If the page received a million Likes before Sunday, he would donate an additional million meals.

So let’s break that down.

If you Like Fifty’s Facebook page — without even buying the drink — a child, presumably in Somalia, gets fed. We can infer that there is a pot of dollars somewhere earmarked for feeding needy children. Two million meals worth of feeding if you count the million Like-meals plus the potential million bonus. Those meals, while they could be donated, and have presumably been budgeted for, will not be, except to the extent that you give Street King props online. That, ladies and gentlemen, is called extortion. Dramatically photographed, concealed-as-humanitarian-activism, extortion. I can feed so very many meals to these starving children, but I won’t unless you give me something.

The benefit of involving celebrities in aid work is often that it works to focus the attention of their fans and the media machine more generally on understanding, for however brief a moment, something that is happening somewhere in the world. Out of that can come the kind of empathy and activism that makes things like the Save Darfur campaign possible.

The celebrity’s contribution, though, hinges on whether they can successfully translate attention on them into attention to the issues. When a humanitarian issue becomes a platform for pushing an energy drink on the back of people’s suffering, we should be ashamed.
5. Donor fund restrictions

Not so much an organisation or a specific event, this a policy constraint that isn’t as widely known as it should be. When many governments donate aid money to countries that have been wracked by disasters, or which require long-term assistance, it often comes with a giant asterisk in the fine print:

*A significant portion of the cash provided for such assistance must be spent on goods and services provided by suppliers from the donating country.*

Not only inefficient, this policy prescription can lead to outright ridiculous results. In the case of the Mozambique floods in 2000, I met a medical volunteer who explained how the only US-made bikes that they could find to get around the country on short notice were Harley Davidsons. And so three of them ended up running between medical stations like some breed of medical Hell’s Angel. Fascinating to behold, but utterly wasteful.

Far more troublesome, as is often the case, are the economics of this sort of donate-and-bill-back activity. Where the donor aid money is tied to spending on donor-country products and services, far less of the amount spent in aid actually ends up benefitting the recipient country. Few local people are employed, and few local organisations see any new opportunities to bid for and provide aid-goods.

This has two effects: firstly, what could have been a large financial boost arriving with the aid is effectively neutered — shunted into a much smaller economy-within-the-economy; secondly, without the opportunity for competitive pricing on local goods, the money is spent on buying comparatively expensive imported products and staff. Harley Davidsons, rather than dirtbikes, for a tenth of the price.

6. Making food aid the same colour as cluster munitions.

Probably the most devastating screw-up in the history of helping was the decisions that lead to cluster munitions and daily food ration packets both being coloured canary yellow.
Left is delicious. Right will kill you.
You try tell the difference if you can’t read English and live out in the steppes.

Each yellow BLU-97 bomblet is the size of a soda can and is capable of killing anyone within a 50 meter radius and severely injuring anyone within 100 meters from the detonation. A Humanitarian Daily Rations (HDR) package contains a 2,000 calorie meal.

It was inevitable that Afghans coming across the yellow packages in the field would confuse the two. Children in particular — with no English and little idea of what a BLU-97 is even if they did — would investigate the yellow containers and try to pick them up, with devastating consequences that an Air Force general described as “unfortunate.”

7. Making USAID a foreign policy tool

In 1990, on the eve of the first Gulf War, Yemeni Ambassador Abdullah Saleh al-Ashtal voted no to using force against Iraq in a security council session. US Ambassador Thomas Pickering walked to the Yemeni Ambassador’s seat and retorted, “That was the most expensive No vote you ever cast.” Immediately afterwards, USAID ceased operations and funding in Yemen.

USAID, despite its appearances as a benign, well-intentioned member of the humanitarian aid community, is deeply compromised in being beholden to the whims of US foreign policy. Unlike organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières which strictly guard their neutrality, USAID’s ability to hand out food aid and other assistance is subject to the political agenda of groups like Congress and the US Military.

In the case of the army, USAID in Afghanistan has repeatedly had to participate in administering humanitarian relief in cooperation with army elements engaged in the “hearts and minds” strategy of manipulating assistance in order to win over civilian populations. The unfortunate side effect of this relationship is that USAID’s
Operations come to be seen by opposing forces as complicit in the enemy war effort and thus legitimate targets. An even more unfortunate side effect is that other humanitarian groups with far more benevolent agendas may find themselves tarred with the same political brush and unwittingly targeted for attacks and abductions too.

Sometimes bad aid is just the consequence of someone caring too much, but knowing too little. Other times it's people who should have known better not being diligent in considering the consequences of their actions. And sometimes politicians and unscrupulous businessmen are simply manipulating the suffering of others for their own ends. When it's benign or thwarted, it's easy enough to laugh it off. But when a bad idea is carried through, the results can be diabolical.
Reflection

*SINCERITY is the most important element when answering reflection questions.*

Service partners should reflect upon the experiences they are having - synthesizing the direct service, education, and community interaction components. You should set aside time for reflection to take place after each session in direct service.

Here is a great guide for reflection: [http://www1.aucegypt.edu/maan/pdf/Reflection%20Toolkit%201.pdf](http://www1.aucegypt.edu/maan/pdf/Reflection%20Toolkit%201.pdf)

**Consider After Your Service**

**What?**
— What happened?
— What did you observe?
— What issue is being addressed or population is being served?

**So What?**
— Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest?
— Did you hear, smell, or feel anything that surprised you?
— How is your experience different from what you expected?
— What impacts the way you view the situation/experience? (What lens are you viewing from?)
— What did you like/dislike about the experience?
— What did you learn about the people/community?
— What are some of the pressing needs/issues in the community?
— How does this project address those needs?

**Now What?**
— What seem to be the root causes of the issue addressed?
— What other work is currently happening to address the issue?
— What learning occurred for you in this experience?
— What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue?
— What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties?
— What information can you share with your peers or the community?
— If you could do the project again, what would you do differently?

**Sample Reflection Questions**

- What were your initial expectations? Have these expectations changed? How? Why?
- What about your community involvement has been an eye-opening experience?
- How do you motivate yourself to go to your site when you don’t feel like it?
- What specific skills have you used at your community site?
- Describe a person you've encountered in the community who made a strong impression on you, positive or negative.
- Do you see benefits of doing community work? Why or why not?
- Has your view of the population with whom you have been working changed? How?
- How has the environment and social conditions affected the people at your site?
- What institutional structures are in place at your site or in the community? How do they affect the people you work with?
- Has the experience affected your worldview? How?
Why does the organization you are working for exist?
Did anything about your community involvement surprise you? If so, what?
What did you do that seemed to be effective or ineffective in the community?
How does your understanding of the community change as a result of your participation in this project?
How can you continue your involvement with this group or social issue?
How can you educate others or raise awareness about this group or social issue?
What are the most difficult or satisfying parts of your work? Why?
Talk about any disappointments or successes of your project. What did you learn from it?
During your community work experience, have you dealt with being an "outsider" at your site? How does being an "outsider" differ from being an "insider"?
How are your values expressed through your community work?
What sorts of things make you feel uncomfortable when you are working in the community? Why?
Complete this sentence: Because of my service-learning, I am....

Ideas for Reflection
There are a wide range of meaningful reflective practices and strategies that can be incorporated into service-learning, including the frequently used approaches listed below.

- **Journals**: Writing in journals is widely used by service-learning programs to promote reflection. They're most meaningful when instructors pose key questions for analysis. *(See bottom of page for sample reflection questions.)*
- **Community Presentations**: Students create a video or photo documentary on the community experience.
- **Presentations to Community Organizations**: Students present work to community organization staff, board members, and participants.
- **Speakers**: Invite community members or organization staff to present in class on their issue area.
- **Community Events**: Identify community events that students can attend to learn more about issues.
- **Mapping**: Create a visual map that shows how the service-learning experience connects to larger issues at the state/national/global level.
- **Videos**: View a video or documentary to elicit discussion about critical issues that relate to their service experiences.
- **Letters-to-the Editor**: Students write a letter-to-the-editor or to government officials that address issues important to the community organizations where they are working.
- **Creative Projects**: Students make a collage or write a poem or song to express an experience.
- **Blog**: Create a course blog where students can post comments on their experiences.
- **Reflective Reading**: Find articles, poems, stories or songs that relate to the service students are doing and that create discussion questions.