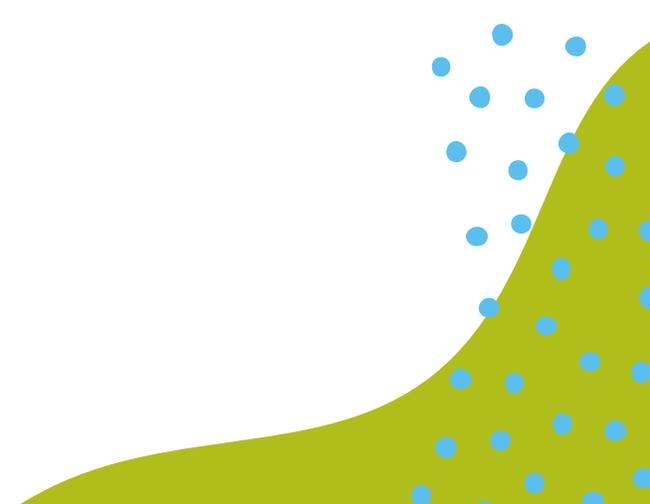


STEPS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

To be an antiracist volunteer, we must deeply understand the history that informs our current circumstance, the existing need, and the overall landscape of our community. As you consider volunteer service, please use this resource as a tool to reflect on your motivations for volunteerism and how to apply an antiracist lens to your service. These questions and the following information will help you chart your course.



STEPS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Define Your Purpose

Why is volunteering meaningful to me? What are my motivations to volunteer? Which pathway of public service is best for me?

A good volunteer is self aware. It is important to reflect on the preconceptions and biases that we may have about the community before we engage. If we possess a sense of our own strengths, weaknesses, and values, it will lead us to more intentional and beneficial engagement.

Educate Yourself

*Do I understand the complexity of the history, harm done, and level of resilience shown by the community that I seek to serve?
What institutions currently exist in the community that are tackling the issues I care about the most?*

Systemic inequity and racial identity play a critical role in how different populations of people experience Minnesota. It's important to consider well-known, painful examples of harm perpetrated by institutions and how they have impacted the community's viewpoint and subsequent relationships with those institutions.

While you may be passionate about helping our communities and believe that you have the solution to a pressing community issue, it is important that you engage in research to understand the nuance and complexity of the issues. It is also important to know what existing organizations are in place that have the infrastructure, network, and connections within the community. Supporting existing organizations and networks is the best way to engage without duplicating efforts.



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STEPS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Don't Exploit Communities

Am I going into the community with a savior mindset? Am I working with the community in collaborative and equitable ways? Do I understand what their needs and issues are as they see them?

It is important not to make assumptions or inhabit preconceived ideas about disparities in communities. We should not think that we have the answers to fix challenges without first consulting with community members. It is also important that we do not exploit community members for optics so that we can “feel good”. Do not engage in voluntourism by participating in acts that are not about helping the community, but are rather rooted in experiencing an emotional experience that validates privilege. We should enter communities with humility and see community members and partners as collaborators versus someone we are serving.

Don't Center Yourself

Why am I engaging in this opportunity? Who am I centering and actually serving in my service, myself or the community?

It is essential that we think about our own motivations for engaging in community before we begin. Even the most well-intentioned community engagement can cause harm, especially when that engagement is rooted in ideas of superiority, charity, or personal benefit. We must be aware of power and privilege dynamics--at individual and institutional levels--as they impact interpersonal relationships.

Volunteers must recognize that there are multiple ways of knowing and ways in which members of the community experience reality. We must be open to understanding those other ways and also foster co-learning.

You don't always know best.



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STEPS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Continue Learning, Engage Deeper

Where do I go from here?

Continue to engage and dig deeper to understand the community and the bigger picture by constantly seeking out information (reading, research, conversations). Sometimes learning requires us to be uncomfortable, it is through that discomfort that we become open to new ideas and experience changes within. Communities also bear no responsibility in teaching you about their culture.

Practice Accountability & Consistency

How am I choosing to show up not only today but for the long term? How do I stay involved when I am no longer a part of the service?

To address the issues in our communities requires time and commitment. Cultivating authentic and strong relationships requires trust and accountability, that is built over time. Take your service beyond that one project and find avenues to deepen your impact and commitment.



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