UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GUIDELINES FOR TRACKING VOLUNTEER/COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS

The University of South Alabama Office of Community Engagement (OCE) supports USA students, faculty, and staff in meeting the volunteer needs of the community at large. The OCE manages the SOUTH SERVES website as a tool to support volunteerism and service learning, to provide a one-stop location for communication about opportunities to serve, to allow users to build a volunteer resume, and to allow faculty and staff to partner with community agencies to provide community engagement and service learning academic opportunities. The OCE collaborates with departments across the USA main campus, USA Health, and organizations throughout the greater South Alabama region. The Office of Greek Life, the Office of Student Affairs, and other USA Offices have contributed to the language in this document in order to provide clear understanding about volunteerism for all of the USA-Jaguar community.

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERISM?

Volunteer hours *(sometimes called community service hours)* are non-compensated activities that are organized in partnership with a nonprofit organization, USA department, other educational institution and/or place of worship, and *directly* benefit the larger public or external community. Volunteer Hours can be tracked in South Serves in one of the following ways:

- In response to an active need in SOUTH SERVES
- In response to an ongoing need in SOUTH SERVES
- In response to a private need in SOUTH SERVES
    - Private needs may be created by an agency, a course instructor, or a user group leader
- As an individual volunteer experience with an agency in SOUTH SERVES
- As an individual volunteer experience with an agency outside of SOUTH SERVES
    - NOTE: In all cases where a volunteer is tracking individual hours the volunteer must include the name of the agency/organization, a description of the volunteer work, and a contact from the agency/organization who can verify the service. It is preferred that the verifying contact should not be a family member.

While we encourage and value all types of service and volunteerism, only certain types of activities can be tracked through SOUTH SERVES. The most important factor in determining an activity's qualification is whether it serves an unmet need in the community, preferably one identified by a community partner organization and posted in the system. The goal of these guidelines is not to exclude any meaningful or well-intentioned service,

but rather to provide a very basic framework for understanding volunteerism. If you have any questions, please contact us at communityengagement@southalabama.edu.

WHAT COUNTS AS VOLUNTEERISM / COMMUNITY SERVICE *AND CAN BE TRACKED IN SOUTH SERVES*?

- All needs listed on SOUTH SERVES, which could include:
  - Organizationally sponsored tutoring and mentoring (i.e., Big Brothers Big Sisters, Mobile Area Education Foundation, programs through a local public school, etc.)
  - Volunteering at a hospital, animal shelter, free afterschool and child care facility, or other educational and nonprofit agencies
  - Indirect service activities organized by or in collaboration with a nonprofit organization that is completed off site, including the coordination of supply drives, packing or stuffing projects, etc.
  - Providing pro-bono, or free, professional services such as legal advice or medical assistance
- Community organizing:
  - Bipartisan political activities such as working a voter registration drive, but *not* working with a specific campaign or partisan agenda
  - Community building (i.e., community gardens, recycling and Keep Mobile Beautiful initiatives, Coastal Cleanup, MLK Celebration activities)
- Community-Engaged/Service-Learning Course activities that take place outside of the classroom (direct-service hours only)
- Religious education (i.e., teaching Sunday School or Hebrew School) or volunteering at your place of worship
- Volunteer-related break trips:
  - Only the hours spent directly engaged in service should be tracked, and trip/project itineraries need to be sent to communityengagement@southalabama.edu after service hours are entered in SOUTH SERVES.
  - Time for travel to and from a service site or time sleeping overnight, eating, or socializing at a service site does not earn volunteer credit.
  - Some organizations/groups may have geographic requirements for service, so students need to verify these with their faculty/staff advisor(s).
- Direct philanthropy and fundraising activities for the purpose of charitable giving:
  - Planning a fundraising event, including pre-event coordination and promotion (part of the planning process should include working with the benefitting

agency/organization to ensure the event showcases their mission and programs, and that event activities help reflect the values of the agency)
    - Working a fundraising event, helping with check-in, participant management and assistance, set-up, tear-down, etc.
- Directly participating with the population served by the organization, such as time spent with families and children during Special Olympics
- Activities completed for the benefit of a University department that is an agency on SOUTH SERVES or has posted a specific need (i.e., tabling, being a student organization officer or departmental ambassador, peer mentoring, career fairs, study abroad fairs, etc.)
- Giving blood (maximum of 45 minutes)

Due to the nature of some activities or circumstances, some service hours may be subject to evaluation by Greek Life, the Office of Community Engagement, and the Office of Student Affairs, including:

- Community trainings/workshops with a civic engagement focus, which should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Office of Community Engagement

WHAT DOES NOT COUNT AS VOLUNTEERISM / COMMUNITY SERVICE *AND CANNOT BE TRACKED IN SOUTH SERVES*?

- Donations of any type, including but not limited to money, supplies, clothing, food, etc.
- Indirect philanthropy and fundraising activities:
    - Attending a fundraising activity, but not engaging in direct service, or the staffing/implementation of the activity
    - Greek philanthropic events, such as percentage or profit-share nights or working a phone bank or other event, to raise money for the national Greek organization
- Projects completed with any for-profit organization/business, even if the work was unpaid (any substantial activities of this kind should be pursued as an internship)
- Unless connected with a Service Learning course, internships, clinicals, practicums, or field experience work in hospitals, clinics, or similar organizations, including time spent job shadowing and observing
- Self-directed "projects" without the oversight of a supporting community organization such as trash pick-up or recycling, tutoring for free, helping elderly neighbor with yard work, baby-sitting/pet-sitting for free for private individuals, disaster relief, etc.
- Participation in self-improvement workshops, clinics, conferences, or conventions

- Conducting the regular business of a student organization (i.e., member recruitment, membership meetings, etc.)
- Participating in a research project either as a participant (i.e., focus group) or a researcher (i.e., lab assistant)

ARE THERE OTHER GUIDELINES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN TRACKING VOLUNTEER / COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS?

To help facilitate and ensure timely approval of service hours, students, faculty, and staff are asked to add hours to SOUTH SERVES within 30 days of participating in the volunteer/community service activity. Hours submitted after 30 days may not be approved.

Hours approval is the responsibility of the benefitting agency/organization or the Office of Community Engagement in conjunction with the agency/organization. In cases where the benefitting agency/organization cannot verify the service hours, the agency/organization may be asked to confirm the project/activity and while student leaders approve the service hours in SOUTH SERVES. For student groups in these cases, the Presidents or Community Service Chairs are asked to be responsible for verifying and approving hours.

Some service hours, including those not verified by the benefitting agency/organization, are subject to standardization, including the following:

- 2 hours for coordinating a supply or other donation drive
- Up to 20 hours for student organization officer(s)/service chair(s) for coordinating/planning fundraising events such as Relay for Life, etc.
- Up to 10 hours for student organization assistant(s)/committee member(s) for coordinating/planning fundraising events such as Relay for Life, etc.
- 1 hour for participating in a 5K run, walk, or cycle for charity event
- 3 hours for participating in a 10K run, walk, or cycle for charity event
- For multi-day run, walk, or cycle events, where some aspects of the event include direct service, students groups/volunteers should consult their advisor, community service chair, etc. about the number of permissible hours

Due to the nature of some activities or circumstances, some standardized service hours may be subject to evaluation on a case-by-case basis. If volunteers have questions or want to request review of any standardized hours, please contact the Office of Community Engagement by e-mailing communityengagement@southalabama.edu.

When planning any direct philanthropy and fundraising activities for the purpose of charitable

giving, the planning process should include working with the benefitting agency/organization to ensure the event showcases their mission and programs, and that event activities help reflect the values of the agency. Also, the event or activities should be reviewed and approved by the faculty/staff advisor(s) for the hosting student organization and/or the Office of Student Affairs.

Given that the University is located in an area occasionally impacted by natural disasters, volunteers looking to participate in local disaster relief efforts need to have the oversight of a supporting community organization when doing this work if they want credit for their service hours in SOUTH SERVES. For help connecting with a disaster relief organization, check https://southserves.southalabama.edu/ or e-mail communityengagement@southalabama.edu.

ARE YOU IN NEED OF TRAINING on SOUTH SERVES?

Individual and Group training and support on the use of SOUTH SERVES, to learn more about volunteerism, to develop partnerships, or to plan activities can be requested through the Office of Community Engagement by calling the office at 251-460-6116 or e-mailing communityengagement@southalabama.edu.