

Community Project: University Students

Who is the community partner?

The **Centre for Global and Community Engagement** at the University of Ottawa (CGCE) which in turn is connected to various national networks including the U15 (Canada's research intensive universities) and the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning (CACSL). The CGCE was established at the University of Ottawa to promote community engagement and social responsibility. The Centre offers a matching service to the community by helping match students to on- and off- campus volunteer positions. The Centre also has its own programs, organizes group projects in the National capital region and abroad. The Centre operates on a large campus of 43,000 post-secondary students, offering various opportunities to develop and test innovative approaches to effectively engaging students with their communities.

Why are the partners working on this project?

From the CSGVP and other data sources, we know that formal volunteering and direct helping in the community by students and youth is frequent, but quite variable. Some high school programs include volunteering requirements; but there is often a significant drop in rates of engagement as students transition from high school into post-secondary situations, despite the potential large benefits both to themselves and to their communities by remaining engaged through volunteering and direct helping. Across Canadian university campuses, offering of community service opportunities are growing but student participation is not always matching the efforts put into developing these opportunities, or requires heavy promotional investment in bringing these to the attention of students. These programs or services are fueled by a variety of interests: to connect to communities, to improve the student experience, to address community needs, to carry out specific research, for academic learning and success, for building skills and resumes, or for student retention. The scale and number of activities vary from one institution to another, as does the infrastructure available to support these. Determining how to match and promote opportunities to meet the needs of specific sub-groups of students is of high priority, particularly within a continuum of involvement ranging from short-term one-off projects to more structured skill development opportunities. This project focuses on using findings from the CSGVP data related to barriers and motivations identified by different groups of youth/students to develop, tailor and test specific interventions for initiating community engagement activities among students.

What are the project's main activities?

Various project activities have taken place or are underway with two specific initiatives being tested. Following the analysis of the results from the CSGVP for different sub-groups of youth, an initiative entitled Days of Service was developed to provide a (very) short-term volunteer opportunity allowing students to "dip their toe in the water" and explore volunteering. Days of Service are social volunteering activities designed to be fun, engaging and a direct response to a community need. The second initiative, the Living Learning Community, builds on the CSGVP findings as applied to the student residential experience. This initiative provides an opportunity for students living in residences to collectively take part in community service projects, an interactive way to meet other students and get involved in the community. Evaluations of these initiatives combined with lessons learned and best practices on adapting and using national level data on volunteering and participation for program improvement and development will be disseminated through the partner networks via presentations, webinars and postings.

What are the anticipated results or outcomes from this project?

While the project focuses on University of Ottawa, within the context of the broader E=MC2 Project, it will link with the league of U-15 and we anticipate that the results will be relevant and useful for many other Canadian colleges and universities. In the short and medium term, the partners are aiming to learn about: how students improve skills through even short-term community service involvement, how these experiences can contribute to subsequent community involvement, how matching initiatives with students' needs and motivations increase their levels of participation, and identification of community benefits from increased student involvement. The long-term goal of the current project is to contribute to the development of students' life-long commitment and interest in volunteering, and actively participating in positive community development, in view of the sustainability of community engagement.