

STUDENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TOOLKIT



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PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide assists Federal agencies and educational institutions in designing, launching, and managing the Semester of Service Student Volunteer Program, an unpaid student volunteer program authorized under 5 U.S.C. § 3111¹ and 5 CFR Part 308².

It provides:

- Legal requirements and compliance guardrails.
- Roles and responsibilities for all participants.
- Best operational practices for program implementation.

The framework ensures the Program meets Federal standards while serving both agency mission needs and students' academic and career development goals.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Program enables eligible students to participate in structured, time-limited volunteer service with Federal agencies for applicable academic credit, experiential learning, civic engagement, or professional development.

Students are volunteers without Federal employee status and work on project-based assignments aligned with agency missions and priorities.

Key Considerations:

- Minimum 90-day volunteer service period aligned to an academic term.
- Defined scope of work with measurable deliverables.
- Educationally grounded and mission-aligned assignments.
- No compensation from Federal agencies.
- No promise or expectation of future Federal employment.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The Program adheres to the following statutory principles. All participants—students, academic institutions, and Federal supervisors—should understand these requirements before volunteer service begins:

- Participation must be performed with the permission of the educational institution in which the student is enrolled, as part of an agency program established for the purpose of providing educational experiences.
- Students serve as unpaid volunteers, not Federal employees.

¹ See [5 U.S.C. §3111](#).

² See [5 C.F.R. part 308](#).

- Volunteers may not displace any employee or be used to staff positions that are a normal part of the agency's workforce.
- Projects should provide educational benefits and align with agency missions.
- No promise, implication, or expectation of future Federal employment may be communicated.
- Agencies should provide appropriate supervision and ensure compliance with safety, ethics, and security standards.

Standard program parameters include:

- Duration: Minimum 90-day service project, aligned with academic term calendars.
- Time commitment: 8-20 hours per week (part-time), based on project scope and academic requirements.
- Work format: In-person, remote, or hybrid, as determined by project and agency needs.

Projects should be scoped to ensure completion within a single academic term and matched to student skill levels.

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To participate, students should:

- Be enrolled not less than half-time in a qualifying educational institution or career or technical education program.
- Be in good academic standing as defined by their institution.
- Commit to a minimum 90-day service period.
- Complete all required onboarding documentation assigned by the Federal agency and/or academic institution.

Participation may be integrated into:

- Academic credit
- Civic engagement
- Experiential or service learning
- Professional development programming

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING FRAMEWORK

All projects should meet educational and legal standards for unpaid volunteer service.

A. Required Project Characteristics

Agency approved projects will be:

- Time-bound (designed for a single term).
- Outcome-oriented with clear deliverables.
- Clearly scoped with defined tasks and expectations.
- Aligned with both agency mission and student learning objectives.

B. Prohibited Assignments

Projects may not:

- Closely mirror Federal employee positions.
- Consist primarily of clerical or administrative tasks.
- Involve inherently governmental functions.
- Involve sensitive personnel, procurement, or labor relations authority.
- Require independent decision-making authority.

C. Examples of Appropriate Projects

- Community engagement or public health initiatives.
- Data analysis or research support.
- Environmental monitoring or sustainability projects.
- Information technology, cybersecurity, or digital modernization support.
- Program evaluation or policy research.

ALIGNING PROJECTS WITH AGENCY NEEDS

Within the framework above, agencies should identify short-term, well-defined needs such as:

- Capacity gaps for priority initiatives.
- Community, stakeholder, or public engagement activities.
- Innovation, modernization, or process improvement efforts.
- Research, analysis, or pilot projects.

Best practices for project design:

- Define project needs before student placement.
- Design deliverables the agency can realistically use or implement.
- Match students based on skills, coursework, and interests.
- Scale projects to fit academic term calendars.

FEDERAL AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

Federal agencies host and supervise students under 5 U.S.C. § 3111 and are responsible for compliance, supervision, and project design.

A. Program Design and Compliance

Agencies should:

- Define project scope and deliverables before student placement.
- Confirm projects do not replicate Federal employee duties.
- Obtain and document the permission of the educational institution in which the student is enrolled, and execute any required volunteer service agreements with students and institutions.
- Clearly communicate the unpaid, non-employee status to all participants.
- Ensure compliance with safety, ethics, and security requirements.

B. Supervision & Mentorship

Agencies should provide:

- Regular check-ins between student volunteers and Federal supervisors.
- A midpoint progress review.
- A final deliverable presentation or evaluation.

C. Service Record Management

Agencies should document:

- Service start and end dates
- Total hours served
- Project description and deliverables completed
- Supervisor evaluation or performance assessment

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION RESPONSIBILITIES

Educational institutions are responsible for student preparation, academic oversight, and ensuring the educational value of all placements.

A. Program Coordination

Academic institutions should:

- Provide or document institutional permission for eligible students to participate, and execute any partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding required by the agency.

- Designate a faculty member or program coordinator as the primary point of contact.
- Ensure placement aligns with academic or experiential learning goals.
- Direct students to the [USAJOBS Semester of Service job search portal](#) to review available opportunities.

B. Student Preparation & Oversight

Academic institutions should:

- Verify student eligibility and academic standing.
- Provide pre-placement orientation covering:
 - Professional conduct and workplace expectations.
 - Ethics and confidentiality requirements.
 - Learning objectives and performance expectations.
- Monitor student progress throughout the semester.
- Address student concerns or performance issues promptly.

C. Academic Integration

Academic institutions should:

- Define credit, grading, or reflection requirements.
- Collect evaluations or feedback from agency supervisors, if applicable.
- Review placements to ensure work remains educational, not clerical or administrative.
- Facilitate student reflection on learning outcomes.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

A. Student Outcomes

- Enhanced career readiness and civic engagement.
- Exposure to Federal mission delivery and operations.
- Practical application of academic learning.
- Technical or analytical skill development.

B. Agency Outcomes

- Access to early-career technical talent.
- Completed, usable project deliverables.
- Increased capacity for short-term priority initiatives.

- Strengthened partnerships with academic institutions.

C. School Outcomes

- Alignment of academic programs with public service career pathways.
- Enhanced experiential learning opportunities for students.
- Measurable engagement indicators (skills acquisition, completion rates, satisfaction).
- Stronger Federal agency partnerships.

COMPLIANCE AND ETHICAL SAFEGUARDS

To maintain full legal and ethical compliance:

- All participants should understand that volunteer service is not creditable for leave accrual or other Federal employee benefits and does not confer entitlement to future Federal employment.
- Federal agencies may not provide compensation, stipends, or hiring preferences to student volunteers.
- No displacement of Federal employees is permitted.
- Volunteer roles should remain clearly distinct from Federal employee positions, ensuring no displacement.
- Volunteer status should be transparent throughout recruitment, placement, and service.

CONCLUSION

When implemented with structured supervision, well-defined deliverables, and strict adherence to statutory requirements, the Semester of Service Student Volunteer Program delivers measurable value to students, educational institutions, and Federal agencies. Through properly designed projects, agencies strengthen mission delivery while developing the next generation of public service talent through volunteer service.