

Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break

Strong Direct Service

Programs provide opportunities for participants to engage directly with community members through hands on projects and activities. Programs should develop projects informed by community identified assets and needs and in conjunction with their community partner/s.

Full Engagement

Alternative breaks provide participants with an opportunity to live in line with community, program, or trip specific values. Programs should create opportunities for individuals to consider ways of aligning values and actions with regard to choices about the alternative break experience. Examples include: accommodations, food, team selection, technology, transportation, packing, and spending money. One clear example of Full Engagement is the Alcohol & Drug-Free component inherent within alternative breaks. Strong programs develop and communicate philosophies and corresponding practices around how participants will approach these topics during an alternative break.

Diversity and Social Justice

Alternative break programs include participants representing the range of students present in the campus community. Leaders recruit for, design, implement, and evaluate their program with this end in mind. Strong programs engage participants in dialogue that furthers understanding of how systems of power, privilege, and oppression relate to social issues and service work in communities. This deepened awareness enables students to do more responsible, sustainable, and impactful community work.

Orientation

Before, during, and after the alternative break experience, participants learn about the communities, organization/s, and projects with which they are working.

Education

Effective education provides a framework of intersecting perspectives developed to help participants understand the root causes and effects of social issues. Powerful education should also include information to connect participants' personal life choices and experiences to the topic.

Training

Throughout the entire alternative break experience, participants are provided with adequate training necessary to carry out tasks and activities related to the service project. Ideally, participants gain life-long skills that provide them with opportunities to engage in their community upon return from the trip.

Reflection

Anytime participants engage in community work, they are strongly encouraged to reflect upon the experience - synthesizing service, education, and community immersion components. Time is set aside for this to take place individually and as a group and should occur both organically and through structured activities.

Reorientation

Upon return from the alternative break experience, individuals transfer lessons learned by engaging in continued education, service, advocacy, and/or philanthropy. Participants join or organize small groups to take action around issues on campus, in their neighborhoods, within the local community, and more broadly.