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# **Assessing High-Quality Education Placement Sites:**

**A Checklist for Senior Corps  
Project Directors & Staff**



Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

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## I. Introduction

Senior Corps volunteers support children and youth in a wide variety of learning activities. As a project director, one of your tasks is to assess volunteer stations for suitability as placement sites for volunteers. The following guidelines can help you hone in on what to look for when you visit or talk to potential sites. We have included general guidelines—applicable to all education placement sites—as well as specific considerations for volunteers engaged in tutoring or out-of-school time.

For more information on making high-quality education placements, contact the LEARNS partners or your CNCS state office. Contact LEARNS at: (800) 361-7890 or (800) 930-5664 or find your state contact information at: [www.nationalservice.org/about/family/state\\_offices\\_pick.html](http://www.nationalservice.org/about/family/state_offices_pick.html).

## II. General Guidelines

Whether Senior Corps volunteers are reading aloud to elementary school children, tutoring students in reading and other academic subjects, or providing homework help in an out-of-school time program, high-quality sites exhibit the following elements:

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### Volunteer Training and Support

#### ❖ Why it's important:

Ongoing volunteer training and support are standard expectations for high-quality education placements. Training should take place both before and during service to ensure that volunteers can support student learning. RSVP directors may provide pre-service orientation, but volunteer stations are expected to train volunteers onsite. FGP directors provide pre-service orientation as well as monthly in-service training. In either case, ensure that volunteers are trained—both before and during service—for the actual activities they will undertake.

#### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- What types of ongoing training and support will the station provide?
- Will station staff or school reading experts assist with pre-service orientation for volunteers?
- Will volunteers have structured opportunities for reflection and team support?
- Will volunteers regularly be able to call on appropriate staff to address questions and challenges?

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## Outcomes and Performance Measurement

### ❖ Why it's important:

Performance measurement is the process of identifying, measuring, and reporting outcomes that are the direct result of the volunteers. Effective projects are designed around the results they hope to achieve. Performance measures allow you to communicate the impacts of your project to the Corporation and other key stakeholders clearly and objectively. High-quality sites will have well articulated outcomes and systems in place to measure progress toward those outcomes.



### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- What student and/or program outcomes have been established?
- How will the success of volunteers' work with children be measured?
- What data may be useful for assessing the benefits of volunteers' work with children?
- How is the site currently collecting data about student accomplishments? Can the site share this data with you?
- What other ways can relevant data be collected (e.g., teacher surveys, student surveys)?
- If your project will use its own instruments, can the station assist in collecting data?

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## Positive, Caring Relationships among Participants

### ❖ Why it's important:

**Foster Grandparents** and **RSVP** volunteers have a long history of providing children with positive, caring relationships. Research shows that mentoring relationships strengthen assets in children and youth that lead to improved skills. Strong projects foster positive relationships that help motivate students to learn. Similarly, a culture of caring among professional staff and volunteers promotes teamwork and volunteer satisfaction. When volunteers are placed in teams, they can debrief and discuss their work, make activities and games together, and share materials and strategies. Look for climates that value and make time for these positive relationships.

❖ **What to ask/look for:**

- How will the station foster relationship-building among staff, students, and volunteers?
- Will/can volunteers work in teams?
- Will volunteers work with the same children over time?
- Will more experienced volunteers or staff mentor new volunteers?
- Will volunteers be recognized and celebrated for their contributions?

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## **Family Involvement**

❖ **Why it's important:**

The Corporation for National and Community Service strongly supports parents in their efforts to be their child's first teacher(s) and to extend learning activities at home. High quality placement sites provide appropriate opportunities for parents or guardians and families to get involved.

❖ **What to ask/look for:**

- What opportunities exist for family involvement?
- Are family members be encouraged to volunteer?
- How are program activities communicated to families?



## **III. Tutoring Placements**

Reading tutoring is defined as a one-to-one intervention that takes place at least twice a week, is targeted toward specific student needs, and includes assessment and measurement of student progress. If your volunteers engage in reading tutoring, additional elements come into play. Research and practice have shown that effective tutoring programs share certain key elements; to ensure that your volunteers are placed in high-quality tutoring stations, look for the following:

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### **A Plan and Structure for Tutoring Sessions**

❖ **Why it's important:**

Children learn best from well-planned, structured tutoring sessions. Effective volunteers have at-hand a variety of materials and strategies to meet children's interests, abilities, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds.

❖ **What to ask/look for:**

- Who will plan tutoring sessions?
- How will session plans be communicated to volunteers?
- Will volunteers have access to a variety of materials to use in sessions?

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## **Frequent and Regular Sessions**

❖ **Why it's important:**

Because tutoring is about building relationships, children benefit from regular sessions with tutors that occur at the same time, day, and place from week to week. Volunteers who tutor the same children regularly build caring, trusting relationships and can plan more effectively for the learning needs of the child. This consistency is an expected feature of **Foster Grandparent** projects. **RSVP** directors may consider screening volunteers for their availability to tutor consistently.

❖ **What to ask/look for:**

- Will volunteers meet regularly with the same children over time?
- How often will volunteers and students meet together?
- How long is a typical tutoring session?
- Will there be a designated space for tutoring?

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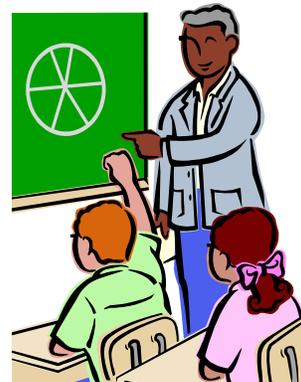
## **Coordination with Classroom Instruction**

❖ **Why it's important:**

Senior Corps has always recognized that schools and community-based education stations have valuable knowledge and resources to share with volunteers. When education professionals help volunteers coordinate activities with the instructional program, children receive consistent messages about reading and can practice the skills most relevant to their schoolwork.

❖ **What to ask/look for:**

- Will a reading specialist, Title I teacher, or classroom teacher be available to support volunteers?
- What systems are in place for volunteers to communicate regularly with and learn from classroom teachers?



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## Research-Based Methods

### ❖ Why it's important:

To become good readers, children must have multiple and diverse experiences with print. Effective one-on-one literacy tutoring sessions incorporate a variety of authentic reading and writing activities. The National Reading Panel report *Teaching Children to Read* recommends that reading instruction also include explicit and systematic instruction in the following skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension.

### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- Will tutoring activities support development of the National Reading Panel's five skills?
- Will tutors receive ongoing support from a teacher or specialist with reading instruction expertise?
- Will the tutoring curriculum align with and support the school's reading curriculum?



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## Student Outcomes and Assessment of Student Progress

### ❖ Why it's important:

Assessment of student progress is useful to everyone in a tutoring program; tutors use assessment to adjust session activities, students to better understand their progress, and teachers to gain a fuller picture of students' work with tutors. When **Foster Grandparents** and **RSVP** volunteers are tutors, the best way for them to assess children's progress is by using the tools and protocols developed by education professionals. Examples of positive student outcomes include improved reading scores, improved attitude(s) toward school, or increased homework completion.

### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- Are tutors required to keep written records of their work with students and their observations about student progress?
- How does the program assess student progress?
- How can existing assessments be used by volunteers and the **RSVP/FGP** project?
- If the program uses a particular assessment tool, what training do volunteers receive in its use?

## IV. Out-of-School Time Placements

More and more Senior Corps volunteers are being placed in out-of-school time (OST) sites. OST sites are those that operate outside of the traditional school day, usually after school, on weekends, and/or during school vacations. OST programs provide a safe environment in which children and youth can play, explore, create, relax, and extend their learning. Strong OST programs have the following characteristics:

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### Activities that Blend Play and Academics

#### ❖ Why it's important:

Out-of-school time is not school, and it shouldn't look or feel like school. Many activities, such as service learning, project-based learning, and theme-based learning teach and reinforce important academic and life skills while allowing children to have fun at the same time. Quality programs rotate a range of activities for a balanced approach to learning and play.



#### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- Is a specific amount of time in the OST schedule set aside for homework and homework help and tutoring? Is a special area designated for these activities?
- Will volunteers engaged in homework help and tutoring receive training or guidance from teachers or school staff? Will an academic specialist be on hand to answer questions and support volunteers?
- Will volunteers and students engage in service learning, project-based learning, or theme-based activities?
- Does the OST program offer children and youth a balance of academic skill-building, recreation, and social time?

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## Connection to the School-Day Curriculum

### ❖ Why it's important:

OST programs with strong ties to the school-day program have unique advantages. These include consistent messages about schoolwork, enhanced learning opportunities for children, and increased engagement and buy-in from school staff.

### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- What linkages exist between the OST program and the school-day curriculum?
- Do teachers provide curriculum guidance for OST activities?
- Is the program (at least partially) staffed by teachers and/or school staff? Are these staff available to guide and support volunteers?

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## Consistent Programming and Attendance

### ❖ Why it's important:

Quality OST programs make students want to attend. This element can be measured through consistency of student attendance and program operations. Programs that operate at least three to four days a week have a greater impact than programs that operate less frequently. Likewise, when students attend on a regular basis, rather than sporadically, their opportunities for learning increase.

### ❖ What to ask/look for:

- Does the program operate at least three to four days a week?
- Does the program track student attendance? How is attendance encouraged?
- Does the program measure student retention? If so, what is the rate of retention?