



Strategies for Working in Out-of-School Time:

A Tool for Senior Corps Volunteers



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I. Introduction

More and more Senior Corps volunteers are serving in out-of-school (OST) sites. In many ways, your service at an OST project is similar to other education-focused placements—you are a caring adult in the life of a child or young person and provide support for improving academic skills, attitude toward school, and self-esteem. Nevertheless, OST settings vary from in-school service in important ways — there may be no classroom teacher at hand to guide your activities, for example, and you will likely be working with students in groups rather than one-on-one. Out-of-school time can be a dynamic, exciting context to work in, and this brief guide is designed to help you make the most of your service.

II. Out-of-School isn't School

It may sound obvious, but the most important distinction about working in out-of-school time is out-of-school is not just more school at the end of the day. Children and youth come to OST programs with a variety of expectations, academic support and homework help among them. But after a long school day, participants also need recreation, a snack, social time with their peers, and the opportunity to experience learning differently than they do during the school day. In addition to providing a safe, positive place for children and youth, OST programs allow them to expand on their learning with hands-on, experiential activities. As a Senior Corps volunteer in an OST setting, you can support learning and help kids unwind and have fun as well.

Read on for tips and resources.

III. Connecting with Program and School-Day Staff

Senior Corps volunteers who serve in schools are often assigned to a specific classroom, where they work under supervision of the teacher and receive structured guidance about their activities with children. Although you may not work as closely with a classroom teacher in out-of-school time, there are still many sources of guidance and support.

Program staff. As at any volunteer station, OST program staff should orient you to the site and provide initial and ongoing training. Staff can familiarize you with the activities offered and your role in supporting them. You may be asked to provide tutoring or homework help or assist with pre-planned activities or classes, or you may be invited to create your own activities. Either way, program staff can point you toward the resources and materials you need to carry out your duties effectively. If you are a tutor, find out if there are curriculum specialists on staff who can help you plan sessions and connect them to the school-day curriculum.

School-day staff. Some OST programs operate in schools, while others take place in community centers, places of worship, or other neighborhood facilities. Typically, OST participants come to the program from one or more feeder schools and systems should be in place for linking program activities and curriculum to what children are doing in those schools.



Many OST tutoring programs have created their own forms for school-day teachers that let tutors know what to work on with individual students. Teachers can specify general skills to practice, specific texts to read, and activities to engage in. Other common teacher communication systems include a folder that is passed back and forth between teacher and tutor or e-mail correspondence—containing key information about student needs and tutoring activities. Sometimes, the site supervisor communicates with teachers and/or school staff and passes appropriate information to volunteers. As a volunteer, your responsibility is to work within the established system at your site, not to reach out to teachers on your own. If it's not apparent what system is in place, ask your site supervisor for clarification.

IV. Working with Groups

As a volunteer in out-of-school time, you are more likely to be working with groups of students than you would be in school settings. While some OST programs incorporate a one-on-tutoring rotation (see above), most activities are group-oriented. This time is often less structured than tutoring time, and kids may be reluctant to sit still after a long school day. Group work can be creative and rewarding, but is often challenging, as well. A brief discussion of some of these challenges follows. For a more detailed discussion of these and other strategies related to group work, visit www.nwrel.org/learns//tutor/sum2002/sum2002.html

The learning environment. In out-of-school time, you may not have a quiet, enclosed classroom or other suitable space in which to work with your small group. This may well be out of your control, but you can arrange your group interaction for optimal results. Circular seating allows everyone to see and hear each other and helps turn children's focus in toward the group and away from surrounding activities that may compete for their attention. Circles also encourage students to direct remarks to each other, rather than just to you.

