

Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break Program

Strong Direct Service

Programs should provide an opportunity for participants to engage in direct or “hands on” projects and activities that address unmet social needs, as determined by the host community. Community interaction during service projects and social activities is highly encouraged during the break.

Alcohol and Other Drug-Free

Issues of legality, liability, personal safety and group cohesion are of concern when alcohol and other drugs are consumed on an alternative break. Programs should provide education and training on alcohol and other drug related issues, in addition to developing and communicating a written policy on how these issues will be dealt with on an alternative break.

Diversity

Strong alternative break programs include participants representing the range of students present in the campus community. Coordinators should recruit for, design, implement and evaluate their program with this end in mind.

Orientation

Prior to departure, participants should be oriented to the mission and objectives of Break Away, the campus break program, and the host agency or organization(s) with which they will be working.

Education

Programs should include educational sessions that participants attend prior to and perhaps during their alternative break. These sessions should provide participants with a sense of the history of both the region they will be working in and of the problems they will be working with during the break. Effective education provides facts and opinions from all perspectives on the social issues, including ways that the participants’ personal life choices are connected to them.

Training

Participants should be provided with adequate training in skills necessary to carry out tasks and projects during the trip. Ideally this training should take place prior to departure, although in some instances it may occur once participants have reached their site. Examples of training include teaching basic construction skills, learning how to work with physically challenged persons, or learning to test ground water for impurities.

Reflection

During the trip, participants should be encouraged to reflect upon the experience they are having, synthesizing the direct service, education, and community interaction components. Time should be set aside for this activity to take place both individually and as a group.

Reorientation

Upon return to campus, programs should have reorientation activities for all participants where they can share their break experiences and translate these experiences into a lifelong commitment to active citizenship. Through these activities, participants can learn about volunteer opportunities in their local area, summer internships, political avenues for continued community involvement, resources for continued education on social issues, tips for making personal decisions that benefit the entire community, and similar means for continued community involvement.