



8.8 Outreach

8.8.1 Overview

Outreach is one of the important objectives of the ERCs, and is an integral part of the SLC mission. Active participation in outreach mutually benefits both the students who are volunteering and the community they are serving. This also enhances the leadership, communication, and networking skills of the students involved.

The planning for ERC outreach activities and the involvement of SLCs in those activities is generally overseen by the education director(s) of the ERC. Most SLCs also have an outreach student coordinator or a student committee who help and are involved in the planning and implementation of the activities. Outreach activities can be implemented that cater to students of different ages and specializations.

ERC outreach activities typically encompass some or all of the following:

- Summer internship for undergraduates – Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU)
- Summer internship for high school teachers – Research Experiences for Teachers (RET)
- Summer internship for high school students – Young Scholars Program (YS)
- Science club and science fair activities for middle school/high school students
- Volunteering at on-campus "ERC open house" days
- Volunteering at science museums to explain science and technology projects
- Participating in university-wide outreach activities
- Designing activity kits and in-class demonstrations for middle school/high school students.

8.8.2 Outreach Activities Planning

Planning the center's outreach activities at the beginning of the semester/academic year is one of the crucial steps to ensure successful outreach participation of the center and the SLC. During the planning, it is important to take into account the diversity and the variety of activities being considered. For instance, a student might be interested in volunteering to teach science to middle school students and a different student might be interested in designing an activity kit for middle school students. Although the above two activities are targeted to reach the same community, they are quite different in implementation and both may need additional student volunteers to help the primary organizer. Considering the above factors when planning the activities increases the student participation.

8.8.3 Best Practices

It is important for the SLC to be actively involved in outreach, as the center's student body is critical in supporting those activities. The benefits of volunteering for these activities, to both the students and the center, should be discussed and emphasized with the students. Benefits like broadening mentorship and leadership skills and the importance of these skills in advancing their career should be discussed.

[Beware of lagging interest](#)

One of the biggest problems in implementing outreach activities is gaining and maintaining the interest of the volunteering student. Most students get busy with their academic/research activities and do not find time to be involved with outreach activities. Also, in older centers, students might have a "been there, done that" sentiment which discourages them from participating further. This problem can be avoided by keeping the activities diverse and ensuring that fresh activities are added regularly.

[SLC outreach coordinator or committee](#)

This feature provides a focal point for the SLC to organize outreach activities and support the ERC's education outreach director. The SLC outreach coordinator can also work closely with the ERC student body and know their personal opinion about the outreach activities. This viewpoint could serve as a feedback mechanism during the design of new activities.



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[Recognize your participants](#)

Because SLCs rely heavily on volunteers for their outreach activities, it is critical to publicly recognize their involvement. Center wide email “thank-you’s”, certificates of recognition, or banquets are several suggestions. Incentives such as t-shirts, giveaway merchandise (like water bottles, etc), and free food may also be helpful.

[Keep activities in scope and distribute the leadership roles](#)

Many volunteer activities fail due to their sheer magnitude. Keep activities within a manageable size for the size of your student body. Distributing leadership roles for an outreach project beyond the SLC not only makes it more manageable, but also provides more opportunities to develop leadership skills while potentially helping with recruitment of more students into the SLC.

[Design a student expectation chart for the students of the center](#)

Designing a chart that lists the expectations of students working in a center will be helpful, to both the center and the students, in planning their activities ahead of time. This practice is not only limited to help with outreach involvement, but will also serve as a guide for the overall planning of the student. For example, the NASCENT ERC suggests that a student be involved for at least 6 hours of outreach per semester. Although this is still entirely voluntary, providing an expectation seems to increase the student involvement.

[Find effective communication channels](#)

Volunteers do not participate in outreach activities when they are not informed about an event in a timely fashion. Direct email, listservs, posting on an SLC Facebook page and/or an SLC page on the ERC's website are all communication mechanisms that can be used. Don't forget the effectiveness of one-on-one in-person communication.

[Encourage local schoolteacher involvement](#)

Many outreach activities involve secondary and primary school children. The effectiveness of these programs is dependent on the support received from their schoolteachers. Encourage teachers to involve themselves in the development of these outreach activities.

[Keep it local](#)

For maximum participation in an outreach activity, keep it local to the center students. SLCs in multi-university centers should facilitate the planning of outreach activities independently at each partner institution.

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