

# VOLbreaks Learning Partner FAQs

Thank you for learning more about the Learning Partner (LP) position in UTK's VOLbreaks Program. It is our hope that the information below can give you some insight into the rewarding role of a Learning Partner.

## **Before we start, remind me what all the letters stand for?**

- **Participants** – Every trip is made up of 12 selected UT students, or trip participants. Participants are involved in pre-trip meetings and service in addition to bringing back the knowledge they learned on the trip to the community of Knoxville. Participants select a trip via a lottery system, usually about two months before the trips (The only exceptions are flying trips, which are application based.) More information about the lottery system can be found on our website. Learning partners are also encouraged to attend lottery to fully understand the process.
- **VOLbreak Leaders (VBLs)** – Undergraduate student leaders who are paired together to plan and lead the trips. Some have been on previous VOLbreak trips and some have not. The VBLs are trained throughout the semester on different topics such as civility, BreakAway's Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break Trip, diversity, simple living, and much more!
- **VOLbreak Student Directors (VBSD)** – This position is filled by a previous VBL and they work all year to enhance the program. They assist the graduate assistant over the VOLbreaks program with a variety of tasks such as training the VBLs, fundraising, social media, etc.
- **Learning Partners (LPs)** – That's (perhaps) you! LPs are UT faculty, staff, or graduate assistants who support the VBLs before, during and often after the trips. LPs serve in an advisory capacity to enhance the service and learning that happens on each trip. They participate in all service, reflection and FUN that happens on each trip. There is usually one LP per trip.

## **What are VOLbreaks?**

Since 1993, the mission of the VOLbreaks Program is, and has been, to engage students in meaningful and collaborative community service in an effort to increase awareness of social issues and strengthen the communities in which they serve as well as foster a strong sense of community among trip participants and to the university as a whole.

During VOLbreak trips, students travel in small groups (12 people total) to new areas where they collaborate with local service agencies to meet specific community needs. Each trip is centered around a service theme that helps students gain a well-rounded perspective of a specific social issue. Students will take steps toward becoming an active citizen by participating in pre-trip meetings and educational opportunities, meaningful reflections throughout the trip, connecting everything they've experienced to the Knoxville community by participating in a pre or post-trip service project, and a post-trip reorientation event. All trips are 'alcohol and other drug free' to all participants, no matter their age.

## **What is a Learning Partner?**

Learning Partners (LPs) have the opportunity to invest in student development and be a part of experiential learning. As an LP you are a full member of the team and will serve alongside students. LPs serve as a professional representative of the university, so responsibilities will include driving vans, and

being prepared for emergency response. However, LPs are also highly encouraged to use expertise from their field and personal life experience to increase student learning, personal growth, and leadership development while on the trip.

Learning partners are **not** required to plan trips. Each trip has 2 student trip leaders who coordinate the logistics, facilitate team activities and reflections, and serve as the main contact for community partners. LPs can help the trip leaders by serving as a resource and mentor for participants and trip leaders before, during, and after the break.

## **What can I expect leading up to the trip?**

The obligations of Learning Partners before the trip are minimal. LPs will meet with their 2 trip leaders to discuss roles and expectations. There is also a mandatory emergency response training to happen within the weeks before leaving for Spring Break. Further, there is 1-2 pre-trip meeting in the fall and 2-3 pre-trip meetings in the spring that LPs are invited, but not required, to attend. There will also be various fundraisers for our organization leading up to Spring Break that we would love for you to support!

## **What can I expect during the trip?**

Each trip looks a little different in terms of housing and meals for the week, but it is guaranteed for every trip. Housing may be on or off-site depending on what the trip leaders are able to find. Some trips will have beds to sleep on while others may be sleeping on air mattresses. Similarly, meals may be provided by the service site, but other trips will have to go grocery shopping upon arrival and make meals every day.

You should note that every day will be a little different, but the timeline of a 'typical' day on a VOLbreak trip is as follows. All participants (students, VBLs and LPs) participate in all events listed:

- 7 AM Wake-up/ eat breakfast and pack lunch
- 8 AM Depart for service
- 9 AM-12 PM Morning Service
- 12 PM-1 PM lunch (either in transit to the next service site or at the same site, if service is to continue at the same site after lunch)
- 1 PM-5 PM Afternoon Service
- 5 PM-6 PM Trip to Wal-Mart (perhaps) and back to housing site
- 6 PM-9 PM Dinner is cooked by a team of participants, some participants may shower now, dinner is eaten by the group and cleaned up by the 'clean-up' crew
- 9 PM Reflection (participated in by all on trip)
- 10 PM-? Group will play games, continue to have conversations about the day's service, etc.

*\*\*In summary- the days are long, and full of strong direct service, but make the trips so worthwhile!*

## What is my role during the trip?

- Role model the behavioral expectations through timeliness and complete engagement in group activities, engaging in discussions with partners and community members, and upholding all of the community standards
- Help student leaders execute the week itinerary
- Monitor group dynamics, intervene when necessary
- Risk management, crisis response, emergency point of contact
- Support the VOLbreaks leaders as they handle various financial responsibilities utilizing university funds,
  - LPs are encouraged to help the VBLs keep all receipts and give them back to them at the end of the trip, as they will have to reconcile upon return within 2 weeks
- Potentially drive large SUV/van with students

## What will I be eating?

VBLs meal plan and are in charge of shopping for the group (LPs often help with the food shopping). Breakfast and lunch are 'on your own' in the sense that participants can help themselves to bagels, cereals, fruit, etc. for breakfast and sandwich meat, bread, peanut butter, granola bars etc. for lunch. Participants are responsible for packing their own lunches from this purchased food. Dinners are planned for the group but are usually cooked by a 'dinner crew' (half of the participants) while the other half cleans up.

The concept of 'simple living' is an important factor of VOLbreak meal planning. Each participant is allotted \$6 per day (\$1 for breakfast, \$2 for lunch and \$3 for dinner) in the VOLbreak food budget. For example, one VOLbreak dinner can cost \$45 max to prepare (\$3 x 15 participants). Meals must stay low-cost because of our adherence to 'simple living'. Food preferences/intolerances are definitely important to the VOLbreak leadership, but if those restrictions require higher-cost items, the participant may be asked to supplement some items due to our low food budget. You are more than welcome to bring your own snacks on a VOLbreak trip.

## Where will I be sleeping?

Just like you don't sign up for an VOLbreak trip for the filet mignon (see above FAQ), you don't sign up for the 5 star sleeping quarters either! Just like we adhere to 'simple living' concept for meal planning, we obtain free housing 99% of the time to keep our costs low and to live similarly to those we are serving. This means we sleep on church floors, multi-purpose rooms of Salvation Army's, shower at YMCAs, etc. You should plan on bringing your own sleeping bag and are welcome to bring an air mattress, if you prefer.

## Will I have free time available for talking with family/doing work/etc.? Also, what if I know someone in my city?

There's not a lot of free time on an VOLbreaks trip! However, you are welcome to talk on the phone, catch up on emails, etc. after reflection when the group usually plays games and settles down for the night. We just ask that you stay **present** (both mentally and physically) for the VOLbreaks experience. If you know someone in your city, the expectation is they find a non-invasive time to come to you, and that you shouldn't leave the group. This is an 'immersion experience' and for some of the same reasons the

experiences are alcohol and drug free, we want the group to stay together to have an immersive experience in this experience.

### **What do I *really* get out of this experience?**

Learning Partners experience personal development through participation in an extended service experience. There is also a professional development component as LPs use their position and expertise to interact with and mentor a small group of students from different years, majors, and interests. Additionally, trip expenses for LPs are covered, including transportation, housing, meals, etc.

**Have questions that are still unanswered? Please feel to direct them to María Martinez, VOLbreaks Coordinator, at [maria@utk.edu](mailto:maria@utk.edu)**

**Our website is also a great source of info:**

<https://leadserve.utk.edu/volbreaks/>