

## **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 ServeUTK, usually about 1 month before the trip departs.
- **VOLbreak Leaders (VBLs)** – Undergraduate student leaders who are paired together to plan and lead the trips. VBLs are trained throughout the semester on different topics such as civility, BreakAway's 9 Components of Quality Community Engagement, 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, participant recruitment, planning program events, 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 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 groups (15 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 typical day like on the trip?**

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-10 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!*

## **How many people make up a VB trip?**

A typical AB trip consists of 12 UT students (first year to graduate students), two VOLbreak Leaders (VBLs) and 1 faculty/staff/graduate assistant Learning Partner (LP) for a maximum of 15 people per trip.

## **What will I be eating?**

VBLs meal plan and oversee 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 \$6.75 per day (\$1.25 for breakfast, \$2.25 for lunch and \$3.25 for dinner) in the VOLbreak food budget. For example, one VOLbreak dinner can cost \$48.75 max to prepare (\$3.25 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 the Jones Center for Leadership & Service at [leadserve@utk.edu](mailto:leadserve@utk.edu), 865-974-1039, or in Student Union 193.**

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

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