



Student-Led Best Practices

Submitted by Bonner Congress Representatives

Name of Best Practice:

Berry College Potato Drop

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Background:

The Potato Drop is a gleaning project focused foremost on providing unrecognized and overlooked food resources to those in the Rome-Floyd area and then to outlying cities, communities, and organizations throughout much of Georgia and into Tennessee.

What is Unique:

The Potato Drop is perhaps Berry College's most popular and successful community service project – pairing approximately 300 eager students and 40,000 pounds of unused potatoes. The event helps promote broader community service involvement on campus and reach new students.

How it Works:

- 1. Preparation:** Several Bonner Scholars – typically those on our Leadership Team – wake early on Saturday morning (around 5am) and begin to get ready for the day ahead. Some of these students help to unload the potatoes while others work to get the volunteers fed (breakfast is provided by the Bonner Scholars Program). As the volunteers finish their breakfast, the entire group moves to the actual service part of the day.
- 2. Service:** The potatoes are bagged in ten pound increments (models are created ahead of time so that students have an idea of how many potatoes should be placed within a bag) and then set aside by the

hundreds. The potatoes are then distributed throughout the varying food storage facilities we have contacted.

Recommendations:

- **Type of Spuds:** We purchased sweet potatoes instead of the more popular spuds we had used in the past. The sweet potatoes seemed to be in considerably better condition than those previously used spuds; hence, substantially fewer potatoes were lost during the gleaning process and unfortunately we had to compost a couple thousand pounds of those potatoes. These are the types of details to keep this in mind in planning a project of this size.
- **Volunteers, Volunteers, Volunteers:** Given the substantial amount of potatoes to be sorted, it is best if this volunteer opportunity is a cooperative effort between the community, the entire student body, and the Bonner Scholars. Even with 80 Bonners, the needs of this project will exhaust these 80; work to publicize this event throughout your college – make it a *drive through service event*.
- **The *Drive through Service Event*** – Raise your participation by creating a service environment that work with the volunteer. Starting at 7:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning and doing 8 hours of manual labor isn't very persuasive. So make it so! Try to get school groups, clubs, and even athletes involved by having them sign up for a specific time (maybe two hours) so that the task doesn't seem too overwhelming. By doing this, you will create a *drive through service event*, where students drive up, do their work, and are then able to leave and do those other tasks that might otherwise prevent them from volunteering.
- **Keep it Exciting:** Since the job is hard, drawn-out, and monotonous, it is very important to keep those volunteers working the entire duration of the project focused and motivated. This is best accomplished by refocusing volunteers during off the actual project on interaction and fun; we recommend live music from a local band or even challenges, such as a *most unusual potato contest* or even a *who can bag the most contest*.
- **Get Help!!!** – Large-scale food organizations and banks have valuable resources that can and will aid you in your efforts. Such conveniences range from transportation for the potatoes (or other goods) to just a place to house these newly gleaned foods. Furthermore, they have

basic knowledge and tips that will make your gleaning project as efficient as possible. Just ask!