Calvin University  
Service-Learning Center  
Strategic Plan, 2021-2026  
Serving to Learn – Learning to Serve

Mission

The Service-Learning Center equips Calvin University students, staff, and faculty to
learn reflectively,
serve lovingly,
and engage wholeheartedly
with our neighbors in the pursuit of justice, vibrancy, and shalom in Grand Rapids and the world.

Vision

The Service-Learning Center will equip Calvin University students, staff, and faculty in the pursuit of shalom in the world through meaningful engagement and service-learning in the local and global community. The Service-Learning Center will be a place of thoughtful discussion, learning, and engagement with justice issues experienced by our neighbors. Known for our reliability, integrity, and hospitality, the Service-Learning Center will seek to amplify the voices of our neighbors and be a bridge between Calvin University and the broader Grand Rapids community.

Core Values

1. We value becoming a community that welcomes and honors people with a diverse range of backgrounds, perspectives, and identities, recognizing the dignity and worth of each person as made in the image of God.

2. We value active engagement in justice work at Calvin, our local community, and the world.

3. We value reciprocal relationships between Calvin students and local community partners where both serving and learning occur.

4. We value intentional service and thoughtful self-reflection.

5. We value the place where we live: the care of people, the care of creation, and the care of our community.

6. We value continual reflection on how history has shaped who we are, who Calvin is, and who our neighbors are.

7. We value our diverse perspectives on faith and the way that these perspectives shape and motivate our work.
Current S-LC Programs

**Academic-Based Service-Learning** — ABL involves Calvin University staff and faculty collaborating with local community partners (often social service nonprofits and organizations) to arrange service-learning requirements and opportunities for the students in their classes designed to help achieve course learning goals.

**International Service-Learning** — ISL occurs while students are studying abroad, helping students learn more about their community abroad. Its goal is to further community engagement and care for the place the students are currently living in, and allows them to think more deeply about their place back in the US.

**Student-Based Service-Learning** — SBSL is a type of service-learning where students seek out service-learning opportunities with local and partner communities outside of a class requirement. This generally, though not always, caters to students who are motivated by doing good or caring for their communities.

**Spring Break Trips** — Participants complete roughly 40 hours of service-learning while visiting, learning from, and serving community partners in several different locations in the US over spring break. Students provide needed construction, clean-up, or programming assistance, and strong efforts are given to provide students with cultural and reflective learning opportunities during the week.

**Special Olympics** — The S-LC helps support and Special Olympics’ Southwest Michigan Regional Games where athletes are able to compete and achieve their goals with the support of caring volunteers. Calvin chaperones spend the day with the athletes, making sure they get to the right places at the right time and cheering them on as they compete.

**Blood Drives** — S-LC recruits students, staff, faculty, and community members to donate blood for blood drives on Calvin’s campus four times annually during the academic year in partnership with Versiti.

**Interfaith** — The S-LC works with the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, Calvin Interfaith Alliance, and various religious groups around Grand Rapids to coordinate and promote interfaith events and engagement.

**Office Operations** — Operations keeps our office running smoothly, from communication with outside individuals to keeping our office space clean and orderly. We host an email communication with students to update them on new service-learning opportunities, a blog to share reflections from various S-LC staff, and social media to promote opportunities and events going on in our office.

**Transportation** — Two vehicles and a team of Transportation Assistants drive students in S-LC vehicles to service-learning placements and facilitate reflection on the drives to and from campus. We also distribute WAVE cards, discount cards for Grand Rapids’ bus service.

**StreetFest** — StreetFest is an annual event that takes place during new student orientation, taking students off campus into the surrounding community to both serve and learn with over 50 organizations in Grand Rapids’ many neighborhoods. We hope that StreetFest introduces students to the city of Grand Rapids while motivating them to engage in service-learning opportunities and the local community through their time at Calvin.
Aspirational S-LC Programs

**Student Activism/Community Engagement/Social Justice** — This program would focus on advocacy from students, including advertising and participating in local events (e.g., protests, movements, grassroots campaigns, community organizing) to familiarize students with longer term issues that affect Grand Rapids. This program could take the form of an offshoot of the partnerships work, becoming a position that brings a lot of awareness to the S-LC.

**Service-Learning Evaluation Program** — This program would focus on evaluating the effectiveness and impact of Calvin service-learning on community partners and the Grand Rapids community as a whole. We would evaluate our programs, asking questions about how we can improve and how we can further integrate evidence-based service-learning practices.

**Improving Current Programs**

**ABSL** — We hope to have ABSL function better than it currently is. We aim to evaluate current service-learning to determine how to create a more meaningful service and learning experience, and work to involve more faculty and staff into including service-learning into their classes.

**Spring Break Trips** — As participation for traditional spring break trips falls, different models for these trips are being discussed. We could focus on shorter day trips year-round instead of week-long trips, and support or sponsor individual student groups who want to go on spring break trips together, connecting these groups with a partner organization and helping plan details once a group is interested rather than recruiting students ourselves. We also would support other campus offices and organizations like the Perkins Fellows, TRIO Student Support Service, and Ready for Life who sponsor their own spring break trips.

**Office Operations** — We would like to increase the presence of the S-LC on Calvin’s campus, spreading the word about our services and events more thoroughly and involving more of the student population in the work we do. Increasing our advertising and social media is a concrete way we can begin to achieve that goal.

**Goals**

1. **Deepen our connection with students at Calvin.**
   
   a. Increase our name recognition and visibility among students.
   
   b. Find ways to make service-learning more accessible for students both in terms of transportation and preparation for a new placement.
   
   c. Set clear expectations for service-learning and help students reflect on the work they are doing.

2. **Deepen our connection with community partners and the city of Grand Rapids.**
   
   a. Create a sense of trust and understanding between us and our community partners.
   
   b. Be aware of the needs of our community partners and how the students we send are impacting their work.
c. Grow in understanding of the work our community partners are doing along with the strengths and weaknesses of their approach.

d. As an office, stay informed of the major events, festivities and actions going on in Grand Rapids and encourage staff to participate in the life of the city.

3. **Deepen our connection with staff, faculty, and administration at Calvin.**

   a. Increase general visibility and understanding among staff, faculty, and administration of the importance of service-learning.
   
   b. Encourage and equip more faculty to incorporate service-learning into their courses.
   
   c. Advocate for increased integration of community engagement and service-learning into the Calvin Core.

4. **Reflect on our work.**

   a. Critically evaluate the effectiveness and impacts of the programs that we facilitate.
   
   b. Examine our office culture and make sure we maintain a professional and welcoming work environment.