BEFORE YOU VOLUNTEER

Before volunteering checklist

☐ **PEOPLE BEFORE STUDENTS**: Remember first and foremost that the youth you are working with are people before they are students. It is easy to become captivated by our roles as volunteers, teachers, mentors, etc., but it is crucial that you focus on your shared human experiences as people first. This will help you establish a comfortable, trusting, and meaningful relationship with the youth.

☐ **SMILE**: Authentic smiles can help break down barriers by helping to show that you care, removing fear, and creating a more comfortable atmosphere between you and the student.

☐ **CARE**: Although a number of personal goals may be tied to why you are a volunteer, make a choice to care about the postsecondary achievement of the K–12 students you work with. Many at-risk students have never thought about college as an option or may not be familiar with college at all. You have an opportunity to authentically influence college dreams. Be careful to not seem overbearing or pushy as this could distance students from you.

☐ **BE CULTURALLY SENSITIVE**: A student’s community may be different than your home community; be sensitive to those differences. Do not impose your cultural views on the students but rather attempt to understand the student’s perspectives in order to better understand how to connect college within their lives. (Review “Understanding All Students” on page 2)

☐ **BE EMPATHETIC**: Try to understand the manner in which students view the world and try to be empathetic to their experiences and respectful of their opinions.

☐ **BE READY TO LEARN**: Be ready to learn about yourself and others throughout and as a result of your volunteering experience. Remember that you must be open to learning in order to maximize your learning experience. As you work with the students, they will learn from you while at the same time, you will have an opportunity to learn many things from them.

☐ **WEAR YOUR COLLEGE GEAR**: This is a simple but effective way to promote college. This not only demonstrates school pride, but it also sparks conversation about college. However, be aware that certain colors carry strong meaning in some schools and communities. Certain colors may represent a specific gang or group affiliation. Wearing the wrong colors may negatively impact your connection and work with students. If you are unsure which colors are inappropriate, select neutral clothing colors (grey, white, tan, etc.) that highlight your schools’ name or mascot or ask an administrator or teacher at the school prior to your participation.

☐ **BE PREPARED**: You are more likely to be successful if you prepare.
  - Print off necessary activities and materials from the CPV website: [www.floridacompact.org](http://www.floridacompact.org) with Florida specific resources or [www.thecompactaccess2success.org](http://www.thecompactaccess2success.org).
  - Know about your college and be able to talk about it by filling out “Talking Points about Your College” on page 16.
  - Feel better prepared to answer students’ questions by reviewing “Frequently Asked Questions” on page 8 and “We Don’t Know What We Don’t Know” on page 12.

☐ **BE SUPPORTIVE**: Encourage students to do well in school, to pursue their dreams, and to attend postsecondary education, by responding with “yes, you can”, not “maybe you can’t.” Positive encouragement is crucial for first generation college-interested students. Remind students that it is never too late to improve grades and strive to learn more. College can be an option for any student with determination and effort!
BEFORE YOU VOLUNTEER

Before volunteering checklist

☑ HAVE A MUTUAL GOAL: Each time you engage with a student, have a personal and mutual goal for the session. This goal can be something stated with the youth, or it can be a goal you have in mind to achieve during the interaction.

☑ BE INTROSPECTIVE: Be aware that sometimes you will respond to a moment, the context, or the K–12 students based on the things that have shaped you, not what actually is or has occurred. Often times, ideas will be born from your interaction with the student if you are willing to listen and allow them to arise.

☑ LISTEN: Effective listening will help you develop appropriate CPV strategies for the students. Listen intently when students speak to you as you may potentially be the only person they have that is willing to listen to what they have to say.

☑ BE FLEXIBLE: Things may not go as planned, but that does not mean you have been unsuccessful. Flexibility fosters an environment inclusive to all students’ unique needs and characteristics. Do not be afraid to adjust your plans or activities when interacting with students. Don’t take it personally if you experience negative interactions with or behaviors from students.

☑ AVOID JUDGEMENT: Many factors contribute to an individual’s life history. Take care not to judge the backgrounds, socioeconomic level, aspirations, parents/guardians, etc. of the K–12 student(s). Remember that the lives of many students may look very different than what you might expect or what you may have experienced.

☑ BE INNOVATIVE: Utilize the provided suggestions from the CPV manual, but modify them to fit the youth you work with. Create discussion points and use tactics that will be relevant to the youth. Be willing to try ideas/activities that the student suggests.

☑ BE CONSISTENT: If you say you will be somewhere, show up. Nothing says “I don’t care” like not being there.

☑ BE PROFESSIONAL: When volunteering, you represent that organization and your institution.

☑ BE REAL: Authentically share your personal stories based on your experiences. Being “real” will help to build trust and connections with the youth. Don’t try to be someone you are not based on fears of the student accepting you or making assumptions.

☑ BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL: As a role model, you should also be aware of how your actions outside of your volunteer experience may impact your presence at the community site.

☑ EXERCISE CAUTION: The youth are looking at you as a role model, but they may also look at you in ways you are unaware of. Try to avoid and discourage inappropriate emotions or actions. Stay positive and do your best to never react negatively to interactions with or information revealed by the student.

☑ AIM HIGH BUT HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: A crucial role of a CPV is to have the expectation that all students are capable of entering and completing postsecondary education. Aim high but have realistic expectations about your influence on a student to avoid leaving both of you feeling frustrated and defeated.

☑ FOLLOW UP: Don’t make promises to the K–12 youth that you cannot keep or do not intend to keep.