



2011-2012 Participant Handbook

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About PULSE

This handbook gives you an overview of the PULSE program; both the philosophy and vision as well as the policies and procedures that govern your participation in the program.

PULSE (Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Service Experience) is an eleven month serving learning/leadership program in Pittsburgh. We mentor a new generation of urban leaders who understand and appreciate the importance of the city for the world's future. PULSE participants work in a Pittsburgh non-profit, live with other participants in intentional community and participate in ongoing training and development.

Mission Statement

PULSE cultivates a community of young servant leaders to transform Pittsburgh

Core Values:

We value:

- Engaging in the possibility of the city;
- The transformative power of serving;
- Building strong and enduring relationships;
- Celebrating the creative energy of young adults; and
- The exploration and development of faith.

Brief History:

PULSE was founded in 1994 by Rev. Dr. John Stahl-Wert who was, at that time, pastor of the Pittsburgh Mennonite Church. He envisioned a program that would place talented, recent college graduates into meaningful placements where they could apply their skills and passions. The participants would live in an intentional community where they could process their experiences and confront the challenges of urban living.

Over 100 participants have now gone through the program and have contributed in immeasurable ways to Pittsburgh and beyond. The Union Project, a community center located down the street from the PULSE house, is a pre-eminent example of how PULSE alumni have contributed to the improvement and re-vitalization of their adopted neighborhood.

Program Philosophy and Structure:

There are three primary, interdependent components to the PULSE program – intentional community, placement, and seminar. All three components are fundamental to the PULSE program and serve to reinforce one another in achieving our mission.

Intentional Community

Intentional community is a counter-cultural protest against the individualism and materialism that negatively impacts both individuals and communities. The community aspect of the program is designed to challenge the participants to reach beyond themselves within a supportive environment. It provides a sustainable approach to meeting basic human needs and creates an atmosphere where participants can work creatively together in the pursuit of common ends.

Intentional community forces individual participants to think of the community's needs before their own. While recognizing the need for individual perspectives and the temptation to sacrifice deeply held beliefs for community "peace", special attention must be made in decision-making to ensure that all perspectives are heard and considered. Thus, consensus decision-making, as opposed to a simple majority vote, should be considered as the preferred means of community decisions. While it may take longer, peacemaking is often not the most efficient short-term option, but it's far more just in the long run.

In the PULSE program structure, intentionality is achieved through a multi-faceted approach. With the bulk of the monthly financial allotment held in a common account, participants must practice effective community stewardship to meet the nutrition and transportation needs of all members. The orientation, retreat and seminar requirements are also designed to foster community through recreational, intellectual and cultural activities. While these requirements set a minimum standard for community engagement, the true mark of success within community is the personal investment of each participant into the other members of the community. Sharing personal resources, especially one's time, creates strong human relationships that can be transformative. Being aware of the many distractions that take the individual away from community is a key to intentional community.

Community should be a source of comfort and challenge. Living with other young adults who are experiencing similar challenges provides a network of support that can be an effective antidote for alienation. Because of the varied interests and passions of each community member, shared experiences provide exposure and engagement to activities beyond the normal purview of an individual member. Community also can be a source of challenge because it forces individuals to think beyond their own needs, a very counter-cultural idea. For example, accommodating vegetarian diets when one is a committed carnivore forces everyone to think through their assumptions and think of new ways to prepare food. It also challenges individualistic approaches to faith exploration and encourages dialogue on the important social issues confronting emerging leaders.

Intentional community is the wellspring from which the rest of the PULSE program flows. Without it, we lose the source of our strength and an important aspect of our program identity. While it is often the most challenging aspect of the PULSE program, investing in it will pay large future dividends as we strive to cultivate the next generation of urban leaders.

Placements:

Participants have answered the call to serve the community and placements are the primary means through which they respond to this call. Through the placement process, we match participants with hosting organizations that are in need of their unique skills and passions. By collaborating with PULSE, partner agencies build much-needed capacity within their organizations and give the PULSE participant a meaningful experience through which they can develop personally and professionally.

Placements become the laboratory in which participants learn from their colleagues, try new ideas and serve the community through their organization's mission-based activities. PULSE encourages its participants to communicate regularly with their site supervisors on what they are learning and how they can make a greater impact in their placement. To this end, a mid-year evaluation and final evaluation are conducted by the site supervisor and discussed with program staff.

It is critical to maintain the proper perspective when it comes to placements. It is unrealistic to believe that 100% of your placement experience will be direct, mission-based work. Many of our placement partners are small organizations where every staff member pitches in on larger tasks that may not fall directly in their area of responsibility. For example, while your primary work will be helping at an after-school tutoring program, you may be asked to enter donation data. Whether it's direct or indirect service, your primary role at your placement is to help them achieve their mission and this will invariably require flexibility on your end. However, you are contracted for 35 hours per week and this gives you adequate time to explore other opportunities during your PULSE experience.

Seminar:

During the weekly seminar on most Wednesday afternoons (1:00-5:00 pm), participants and staff explore and discuss issues related to Pittsburgh culture and history, urban living, and social justice. Typical seminars feature guest speakers, field trips, cultural activities, service projects and the opportunity for theological reflection.. In other words, seminar is designed to help the participants grow personally and professionally as individuals and develops another means of community-building. It also encourages participants to embrace Pittsburgh's urban living and find a niche in which they belong.

While there are many seminars activities that occur every year, the seminar schedule includes a great deal of flexibility so it can be responsive to the needs and interests of the current participants. Participants are encouraged throughout the year to provide suggestions to staff regarding seminar. Participants will organize and lead seminars (one each) on an agreed upon topic throughout the year.

Expectations for Intentional Community Living

Community Covenant

During the September 14th Seminar, you and your housemates will have time to meet together and discuss such matters as:

- ★ general expectations for the program, house, and themselves;
- ★ policies for food, cleaning, dishes, yard work, etc.;
- ★ if necessary, potentially contentious lifestyle issues;
- ★ the extent to which the house will engage in group activities, including meals;
- ★ use of technology (television, computers, etc.);
- ★ and the frequency/scope of house meetings.

Staff will provide a general framework to structure the covenant. The house will submit a draft to staff, which will be returned and finalized by the house.

PULSE will provide times of regular check-in concerning how the covenant is being lived out over the course of the year. Staff reserves the right to intervene to ensure the wellness of the community.

Community Bank Account

At the beginning of each month, PUSLE will transfer a lump sum from the office bank account to the house bank account, which participants are responsible for managing. This monthly sum covers individual expenses for personal stipends , transportation costs, food costs, and other miscellaneous community expenses. Each

participant is entitled to an **\$80 personal stipend** each month that are withdrawn and distributed as cash payments by the house accountant. Into the community account, **\$185 per person will be deposited for community expenses** (food, transportation, miscellaneous expenses). These funds are pooled within the community bank account and are to be used according to the community's priorities. These community funds should not be thought of as an individual allotment. For example, transportation expenses vary widely between participants, mainly due to placement locations. Some community members may exceed the \$85 allocation but others may use far less, so it is up to the community to balance the needs of all members.

While the amount is determined by program staff according to food and transportation needs, there is no requirement that these expenses must match the funding calculation of \$85/month per person for transportation and \$100/month per person for food. For example, if community members decide to ride their bikes to work to save on transportation expenses, they will have more funds available to spend on food. **NOTE:** The total amount of money dispersed may change due to the number of individuals needing bus passes (based on placement site location and number of vehicles brought by participants).

House members typically take turns preparing meals and the community is encouraged to eat meals together. This saves a lot of money when compared to individual meals and builds the bonds of community. One final note regarding house funds—while regulating the consumption of alcohol is up to the house, the PULSE house account funds can not be used for the purchase of alcohol.

The main financial responsibility of the participants is the maintenance of the PULSE house checkbook and account. One person in each house will assume the job of checkbook maintenance. This job entails a monthly reconciliation of the checkbook with the monthly bank statement, using computer accounting software. Program staff will train this person in the dynamics of the job. Keeping up on the checkbook will avoid overdraft and budget problems. **ALWAYS record checks, debit purchases, and any ATM withdrawals.** (Note about ATM withdrawals—Cash purchases **MUST BE RECORDED** and **RECEIPTS MUST BE KEPT**.) Good practices are essential for the purposes of the annual audit.

PULSE covers all utilities, serious maintenance, a subscription to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and seminar-related expenses (mileage, admission, food) from its operations budget. If the house account is used to cover any of these expenses, it will be reimbursed in a timely manner by program staff working with the house accountant.

Transportation

PULSE has consistently affirmed the value of public transportation and encouraged its participants to thoughtfully consider their transportation choices. In addition to the economic and environmental benefits of public transportation, there are also significant social considerations. The house community is strengthened through shared trips, conversations, and conservation planning. Social capital is built through conversations at bus stops. On the bus, participants also get to learn the perspectives of others in their neighborhood and community (compared to driving their own vehicle). Taking public transportation helps the organization better fulfill its mission values of sustainability, justice, peacemaking and stewardship.

Refer to the Transportation Policy in Appendix 1 and the Trip Log in Appendix 2 for further information regarding acceptable transportation expenses and relevant reimbursement procedures.

Property Upkeep

PULSE encourages participants to respect and maintain the property during their stay. In terms of the house, participants are responsible for: cleaning, repairing what they break, damage, or mark, participating in occasional (2-3 times a year) workdays to improve the structure and appearance of the house, and yard care. In terms of yard work, participants should keep the grass at a reasonable length, clear the sidewalks during the winter, maintain the compost pile, pull weeds, and pick up trash as necessary. Someone from the house will be named as a go-to person for house maintenance to ensure that what needs to be done gets done. This person will not be

responsible for all maintenance, but should be a reference for staff and other participants. Staff will remind participants of any of the above tasks if property upkeep has been badly neglected or abused. The front and back doors should be locked at all times to ensure the safety of participants and property. Participants may not lend keys without express permission of PULSE staff.

Your \$100 room deposit acts serves as your first gesture of goodwill to care for and maintain the PULSE property—your home for the year. If the house is clean and in good, working order at the end of the program, your deposit will be returned to you.

Technology

The PULSE house computer, located in the dining room, is available for all participants. There is wireless Internet for those with laptops (The WEP Key for the Wireless Network is ****). Similar to other property upkeep matters, PULSE will take care of serious maintenance of the computer, but incidental costs associated with the computer use (such as paper, printer ink, etc.) are the responsibility of participants.

There is a VOIP phone in the house that participants can use for phone calls. There is one phone line in the house. PULSE pays phone and Internet fees and all local and long distance calls are included in this fee. International calls will be billed to the community and individuals will pay accordingly.

Note - Be aware of how technology influences community living, both positively and negatively. For example, if most people retire to their rooms each evening to surf the net and/or watch DVDs, what impact does that have on the community?

Roof Access

Participants are forbidden from accessing the roof except in the event of an emergency requiring a roof escape. If caught violating this policy, a meeting will be scheduled between the participant and program staff to discuss appropriate disciplinary action

Participant Communication and Fundraising

PULSE requires participants to invite others to journey with them over the course of the year. This is not just about financial support, rather it is about deepening relationship with your friends, family, home church, etc through ongoing communication about the work of PULSE and your role in it. We take our mission value of stewardship very seriously and always seek ways to economize in order to maximize the impact of each dollar.

Participants will be asked to send letters inviting their friends and family to support the work of PULSE. There are no individual minimums, but the community goal is \$1,000/participant. Some will raise more, some less, but we hope to raise at least \$1,000/participant (about 5% of the costs and benefits associated with having a participant in the program).

Personal Development Opportunities

Seminar

Pattern of Meetings

Seminars are held each Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., and can take little or all of the blocked time. If a seminar will fall outside of that time, staff will let participants know ahead of time to plan appropriately.

Participants are expected to attend all afternoon seminars, with a maximum of four absences during the year. Participants must inform staff beforehand about absences (24 hour notice minimum). Each absence beyond the four excused absences will result in a \$20 deduction from your personal stipend. With few exceptions, a staff or

board member will attend each seminar. Seminar is not scheduled on holidays.

For some seminars, there will be preparatory work that will enhance the seminar time. This will generally include some background reading, but may also include some paperwork and written reflection. It is the responsibility of each participant to come prepared to each seminar.

PULSE staff and board will plan and implement seminars. Each participant will be responsible to prepare at least one seminar for the group (to be scheduled with Executive Director) Ideas for seminars should be discussed with staff first, at least two weeks prior to the scheduled seminar.

Participant-Led Seminar Criteria

The criteria for participant-led seminars are as follows: that they be designed to share your learning gained in the course of your work placement, your exposure to a supervisor, your readings, etc., to the others in the program; that they include formal input, presenting a project from your work placement, conducting a training exercise or leading a field learning trip (advance readings may also be assigned); that a time for questions and dialogue be built into the seminar. A participant-lead Seminar guide will be shared with participants during the first month.

AmeriCorps Education Awards

Through our partnership with CNVS, we are currently able to offer Segal Education awards that can be used to retire existing student loans or future qualified educational expenses. Participation in this program is optional and it does entail some additional ongoing responsibilities.

Due to the nature of certain placement sites, not all placements may qualify to be an AmeriCorps site. For the 2010-11 program year, we were offered a total of 8 slots. We are not guaranteed a certain number of slots at this time, but hope to have a same number of slots as participants available for the 2011-2012 year.

Retreats

PULSE has two **mandatory** weekend retreats: one in the fall (October 14-16, 2011), and one in the spring (May 4-6, 2012) These retreats are times of community building, individual reflection and recreation. Participant input is always appreciated.

Cultural Funds

Each participant also receives \$100 in cultural funds per year that can support evening classes, play tickets, personal projects, etc. Participants are also encouraged to design and undertake personal projects, which in past years have ranged from short story writing to visual art and design work. Support for these projects can come from the cultural fund, or can be negotiated with staff on a case-by-case basis. Many participants find that they have more time on their hands than during their years at school; participants are encouraged to take advantage of the extra time that the PULSE structure provides. Often, participants can get discounted rates on classes or use student rates for entry to cultural events if they use their status as volunteers. Staff are available if needed to provide proof of income. Receipts should be turned into the Executive Director labeled "Cultural Funds"

Health Care Provisions

Insurance Options

In light of the new healthcare reform package passed which allows for the continuation of coverage under a parent's plan for any young adult under 26 who was not offered coverage by an employer, PULSE strongly encourages participants to stay on their parent's plan whenever this is a feasible and economical option. In assessing this, please consider all relevant factors, including in-network vs. out-of-network costs if the young adult lives in a different geographic area than the parent's current plan covers.

In the event that staying insured under your parents plan is not a reasonable option, PULSE gives the following options for the time the participant is active in the program to the maximum time of 11 months, beginning September 1st to July 31st.

Option #1

Participant has their own private insurance. PULSE will pay up to \$130.00/ month towards the premium and up to \$500.00 deductible per PULSE year, not calendar year. Must provide receipt

Option # 2

Participant has insurance with US Healthgroup (Freedom Life Insurance), Blue Cross/Blue Shield or other insurance providers that PULSE has worked with previously.. PULSE will pay up to \$130.00/month premium and the \$ 500.00 deductible per PULSE year, not calendar year.

Note: After the participant has completed their time with PULSE they can continue this insurance on their own.

Any and all additional expenses will be the responsibility of the participant.

Physical

- PULSE participants have been granted free primary care visits at East Liberty Family Health Care Center in years' past. (may change but currently in place)
- Prescriptions are paid for by PULSE until the \$500 deductible limit is reached. After that, the participant is responsible for the cost of prescriptions not covered by health insurance.
- If the house is interested in a gym membership, this may be discussed with staff. On a less expensive note, Pittsburgh has a wide array of parks and bike trails. Yoga classes are available at low cost at the Nuin Center in Highland Park and at the Union Project.

The Executive Director can be contacted with any questions or concerns that a participant and their family have while assessing which option is the best for them. Feel free to email, pulsepittsburgh@gmail.com or call 412-361-0124.

Drugs

PULSE prohibits the use, sale, purchase, transfer, or possession of any and all illegal drugs on the premises of the PULSE residence or any PULSE property. See drug usage policy in Appendix 3. The PULSE house is smoke free.

Placement Expectations

When seeking out potential placements, we try to partner with organizations whose mission is aligned with PULSE (sustainability, justice, stewardship and peacemaking) While our partners may not be actively pursuing all four mission values, these values provide a compatible benchmark. We also consider the quality of past partnerships, the quality of supervision and mentoring and their commitment to minimize any safety concerns.

Staff Role with Work Placements

Staff will assist participants in order to ensure the highest quality of work placement experience. Occasionally, such assistance results in staff communication with work placement supervisors. Participants are responsible to seek as much or little staff involvement with work placement matters as they desire. Participants should consult the PULSE staff before undertaking any significant changes in their work placement arrangements.

Evaluations

PULSE participants complete mid-term and year-end evaluations concerning work placements, seminars, community living, and staffing. Staff members also conduct on-site mid-year and year-end work placement evaluations with participants' supervisors.

Vacation/Holidays

Work placements agree to provide full-time (35 hours/week) participants with two weeks (10 business days) of vacation during the year. This is in addition to holidays and other days when the work placement organization is closed. Participants may negotiate with placements for comp-time arrangements and for special vacation arrangements, the latter within reason. Any vacation or other work placement arrangement that entails more than a two-week absence from the program should certainly be cleared by staff well ahead of time.

Outside Employment

See employment policy in Appendix 4

Terms of Service

The PULSE year runs from August 28, 2011 to July 27th, 2012. Move-in will occur between 1:00 and 5:00 pm on August 28th, 2011.

Other Key Dates:

- **28 August - 4 September** - Orientation
- **6 September** - First day at placement
- **11 September** - Day of Service
- **14-16 October** - Fall Retreat
- **Mid-January** - Mid-Year Evaluation Process
- **Mid-April** - PULSEations - Annual Open House/Fundraiser
- **4-6 May** - Spring Retreat
- **27 July** - Last day at placement

General Commitments

Participants will take part in weekly seminars, two retreats, and house meetings as agreed upon by the house community. Likewise, participants are expected to satisfy the general expectations of their work placements.

Special Events

PULSE is currently planning severally special events, some of which will take place in the PULSE House. Adequate advance notification of events will be given. These may take the form of House Concerts, Point of Entry Events for Donors, Alumni gatherings, etc. Participants will be invited and encouraged to attend.

Early Termination

PULSE fully expects that each participant will complete his or her full year. Participants have made a contractual commitment to PULSE, their work placements, and their house community. In the rare and regrettable event that a participant decides to leave the PULSE program, he or she will relinquish all fiscal and other benefits derived from PULSE, and will be asked to leave the PULSE house within a reasonable time period.

End of Term

PULSE work placements run through July 27th, and participants are asked to leave the property by 5:00p.m. on July 31st. Each participant must clean her room and make necessary repairs, clean and repair public spaces, return her key and provide a forwarding address, and will then receive appropriate reimbursement of the room deposit

after a staff inspection.

If participants wish to stay at the PULSE house later than August 1st, they must talk with staff about their request. Staff reserves the right to deny any request due to the scheduling of other uses for the property during the month of August. If a request is accepted, both parties will sign a new contract that reflects a more conventional landlord/tenant relationship. This agreement includes a per-day/week fee.

Appendix 1 -Transportation Policy

Adopted May 21, 2008

Replaces PULSE Vehicle Policy (August, 2005)

Philosophy: PULSE has consistently affirmed the value of public transportation and encouraged its participants to thoughtfully consider their transportation choices. In addition to the economic and environmental benefits of public transportation, there are also significant social considerations. The house community is strengthened through shared trips, conversations, and conservation planning. Social capital is built through conversations at bus stops and on the bus and participants also get a vastly different perspective on urban living as compared to when they drive a personal vehicle. Thus, this is a prophetic witness and helps the organization better fulfill its mission values of sustainability, justice, peacemaking and stewardship.

Logistical Procedures:

Transportation Options for PULSE Participants:

- ★ **Public Transportation** - Participants are encouraged to use public transportation whenever possible recognizing that it takes some advanced planning and scheduling. Routes to and from downtown are more regular and cross-town routes are more challenges.
- ★ **ZipCar** - PULSE has an organizational membership with ZipCar, a car sharing service. For an hourly fee, participants can use this for running local errands not served by public transportation. The community will be charged appropriately for these expenses (See Section III)
- ★ **Bicycle** - Participants can bring their own bicycles and take advantage of the savings and health benefits associated with bicycle riding.
- ★ **Personal Vehicles** - While participants are encouraged to use the other forms of transportation outlined above, they are free to bring their personal cars to Pittsburgh. All costs of vehicle ownership, including regular maintenance and insurance, are the participant's responsibility. Because of liability concerns, car owners are discouraged from lending their vehicles to other members of the community, but are free to negotiate with them.

Definition of PULSE Activities

- ★ A PULSE activity is one that is fundamentally part of the PULSE program. This includes placement-related trips, seminars, community shopping trips, and any activity approved by program staff. Questions should be directed to program staff. Efforts to conserve resources should be made through shared trips and activities.
- ★ A personal activity is one that is not defined in “the above paragraph”. Examples of such activities are trips to and from the airport, personal shopping/dining trips, and work commutes where public transportation would serve.

Reimbursement of Transportation Expenses

- ★ A portion of the monthly house allowance is designated for transportation expenses. These funds should be allocated for all PULSE activities as defined in “Definition of PULSE Activities”, exclusive of seminar activities. These funds can be used to purchase bus fare, ZipCar fees, and bicycle supplies and maintenance expenses.
- ★ Seminar transportation expenses should be turned into the house account and will be reimbursed to the community account on a monthly basis as a portion of the monthly allocation.
- ★ In the event a personal vehicle is used for a PULSE activity as defined in “Definition of PULSE Activities”, mileage will be reimbursed at the current IRS rate. The driver is responsible for recording the driving activity in a log (see Appendix 2) provided by program staff. Reimbursements will be made by the house accountant.
- ★ Use of the ZipCar for personal purposes will be billed directly to the participant on a monthly basis. Staff will monitor ZipCar trips and conduct appropriate follow-up to determine reimbursement eligibility.

Appendix 3 – PULSE Drug Usage Policy

Drafted January 17, 1997
Revised February 25, 2008

PULSE prohibits the use, sale, purchase, transfer, or possession of any and all illegal drugs on the premises of the PULSE residence or any PULSE property.

Any participant found under the influence of, or in possession of, illegal drugs will be expelled from the program.

Appendix 4 - PULSE Employment Policy

PULSE does not encourage participants to pursue substantial employment beyond their work placement sites. “Substantial employment” can be defined as evening jobs or weekend jobs that last for a lengthy period of time (e.g., working at a coffee shop, bookstore, or factory). In general, we do not want participants to be contractually bound to an outside employer. This policy aims to protect adequate time and energy for engagement in community life, commitment to work placements, exploration of the city, personal growth, and an encouragement to live simply and within the means of the program. **Work placements must always take first priority if a scheduling conflict arises with outside employment.**

This policy is deliberately flexible. Obvious exceptions include temporary, more informal jobs, such as: weekly housecleaning; babysitting; lawn mowing; maintenance work; theater productions; and other, sporadic, short-term work (such as working at the Three Rivers Arts Festival). Ideally, these jobs would not take up more than, say, one weeknight and a Saturday morning.

If an employment opportunity falls within the gray area of this policy, it is always best to ask staff about it beforehand.

Acceptance

I, _____, have read and understood this document and its contents. I will adhere to all policies set forth in this document.

(Signature)

(Date)