



UNITED WAY
Southeast Minnesota

United Way of Southeast Minnesota responds to the greatest needs in our region by inspiring people to get involved, give back, and take action. We envision a resilient region defined by care and collective action where residents are healthy, households are financially secure, and young people succeed in school and life.

We encourage students to perform their volunteer service in our community impact areas:

Healthy Communities

Youth Opportunity

Financial Security

Community Resiliency

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS MARCH 1, 2027

How to submit materials:

Email:

sonjas@uwsemn.org

Mail:

United Way of Southeast Minnesota
Attn: Sonja Sommerfeldt (VLCS)
903 W Center Street, Suite 100
Rochester, MN 55902

Questions?

Sonja Sommerfeldt

507-535-5509

sonjas@uwsemn.org



VARSITY LETTER IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

PROGRAM YEAR: March 1, 2026 - February 28, 2027

Eligibility

Applicants must meet the following basic qualifications:

- Be a student in grades 9-12
- Attend school in Olmsted, Dodge, Winona, or Fillmore Counties during the 2026-2027 school year.
 - Homeschooled students affiliated with a local school district are also eligible to apply
- Complete at least 100 hours of community service during the program year:
 - 60 hours must be completed locally in SE Minnesota
- Participate in at least one school-related volunteer opportunity
 - 40/100 hours must be non-school-related service
- Turn in the required materials by the application deadline

Application Requirements

To apply, submit the following materials:

1. A **'reflection piece'** that includes the following:
 - What you have learned about yourself during your volunteer experience over the program year
 - What you have discovered about your community through the experience
 - What you enjoyed most about the experience
 - How you feel this experience has shaped you and your worldview
2. A **volunteer hour tracker** that includes the following:
 - Dates of Volunteer Service
 - Name of Agency
 - Name of Volunteer Supervisor
 - Area of Impact (Financial Stability, Youth Opportunity, Healthy Communities, Community Resilience, Other)
 - Description of the Service Performed
 - # of Hours at each Volunteer Activity
3. A **verification** of volunteer service for each organization:
 - A photograph of the applicant performing the volunteer service *or*
 - Written verification from the volunteer supervisor
4. A **personal information and signature sheet** signed by the student and a parent/guardian.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: March 1, 2027

First and Last Name: _____ Pronunciation: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (____) _____ Email: _____

Grade: _____ Expected Graduation Year: _____ High School: _____

Please choose one of the following options:

- This will be my **1st** Varsity Letter in Community Service
- This will be my **2nd** Varsity Letter in Community Service
- This will be my **3rd** Varsity Letter in Community Service
- This will be my **4th** Varsity Letter in Community Service

How many hours did you volunteer?

- _____ Total number of hours served through school-related activities (at least 1 activity; no more than 60 hours)
- + _____ Total number of hours served through non-school related activities (at least 40 hours)
- = _____ **Total number of hours served between 3/1/26 and 2/28/27 (at least 100 hours)**

Student Demographics:

As a part of our ongoing efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within United Way and the communities we serve, we are requesting that all Varsity Letter in Community Service applicants share race and ethnicity demographics to help UWSEMNM better understand the racial and ethnic makeup of our community volunteers. ***You are not required to complete the following two questions, nor is it a condition of approval for the Varsity Letter in Community Service program.***

What best describes your race? (select all that apply)

- Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian
- Black, African, or African American
- Native American, American Indian, or Indigenous
- White or Caucasian
- Multi-Racial
- Another Race
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your ethnicity? (select one)

- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino/a
- Prefer not to disclose

Student Agreement:

I attest that I performed the documented hours of community service on my application as included in the volunteer hour tracker and on my verification forms, and that I have met all requirements and qualifications as outlined by United Way of Southeast Minnesota. To my knowledge, these hours are valid and should count toward my earning the Varsity Letter in Community Service.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

- Check this box if you **do not** permit United Way of Southeast Minnesota to use your application content on social media.

Parent/Guardian Agreement:

I hereby assign to United Way of Southeast Minnesota all rights to video and audio recordings and all photographs of my child made in connection with Varsity Letter in Community Service activities. I hereby authorize editing, duplication, reproduction, copyright, exhibition, broadcast and/or other use and distribution of such recordings or quotations for purposes deemed suitable by United Way of Southeast Minnesota. I also waive my right to approve or disapprove of finished products.

Printed Name (First and Last) of Parent/Guardian: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Submit this form along with your reflection piece, volunteer hour tracker, plus verification for each agency/organization you volunteered with during this program year.

VARSITY LETTER IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Volunteering

The requirements state that I must have at least one school related volunteer activity.

What is considered a 'school related activity'?

There is NO hour requirement for school-related activities. Sometimes, work done through a school group can be counted as school related *OR* non-school related work. *For example, if the work was done with an outside organization (e.g. Participating in Relay for Life as a Key Club member), you may count the hours where you need them.* The following is a non-exhaustive list of activities that can be done in school:

- Community service projects through school clubs (i.e. National Honor Society, Key Club)
- Assisting a teacher before, during, or after school, or during the summer
- Assisting at sporting events, concerts, theater productions (if not required for a class)
- School tutoring programs (If tutoring hours are performed, please list the school volunteer supervisor as the contact, not the tutee or the tutee's parent/guardian).
- Hosting a collection drive for a school's resource room or the like.

I must complete at least 40 hours in a 'non-school activity'.

What type of volunteer service counts as a 'non-school activity'?

Volunteer service is intended to support local non-profit organizations. Listed on the Volunteer Resource form are just a few ideas, but there are **many** ways to volunteer in your community! If you have further questions or need ideas, please visit Get Connected at: <http://volunteer.uwsemn.org/> or reach out to the Program Coordinator.

I must complete at least 60 hours 'locally'. What does 'locally' mean...?

Locally in SE MN. United Way of Olmsted County now serves Dodge, Fillmore, Olmsted, and Winona Counties, and we encourage applicants to volunteer in our service area for the benefit of the communities in which we live, work and play!

I volunteered as a camp counselor (unpaid); Can I count those hours?

The Varsity Letter in Community Service program aims to support volunteer efforts locally in or near one of the four counties we serve. If you volunteer as a camp counselor and were not paid for your time, the hours are calculated as follows:

- Up to 10 hours per day
- No more than 40 total hours outside SE MN

Can I count my time helping with yard work or housework?

Any yard work or housework performed with a qualified non-profit (such as Family Service Rochester's Neighbors Helping Neighbors program) CAN be counted for this award.

- In cases where you are assisting an individual on your own (not related to you or living in the same household) please photograph the experience and communicate with the Program Coordinator about including them as your Volunteer Supervisor for that activity.

I volunteered with a local company but wasn't paid. Can I count these hours?

Only non-profit volunteer hours are eligible for this award. Unfortunately, we cannot count any hours volunteered with for-profit organizations. This includes many childcare facilities that are for-profit organizations. Be sure to check with the organization you are volunteering with ahead of time to ensure they meet the guidelines.

Who can I contact for clarification about volunteering for the Varsity Letter in Community Service program?

If you are uncertain if an activity counts, please reach out to the Program Coordinator, Sonja Sommerfeldt [email sonjas@uwsemn.org; phone 507-535-5509] to verify before you start.

VARSITY LETTER IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Applications

What counts as a 'reflection piece'?

This could be a short essay, a presentation, a poster, a video, a poem, a painting, drawing, other piece of artwork, or a recording of a speech, a spoken poetry piece, a rap or a song, or even an interpretative dance... *something* you feel represents what you're taking away from the 100+ hours of experience volunteering and serving in the community that includes:

- what you have learned about yourself during the experience
- what you have discovered about your community through the experience
- what you enjoyed most about the experience
- how you feel this experience has shaped you and your worldview

What counts as a 'form of verification'?

- A photograph (or selfie) of the Varsity Letter in Community Service applicant volunteering during one of the activities with each agency,
- A video of the applicant participating in one of the volunteer activities with each agency,
- An email, video recording, recommendation letter, or signed letterhead from the volunteer supervisor verifying the volunteer experience with each agency.

Do I have to use the 'volunteer hour tracker' provided by United Way?

No. You are required to turn in a tracker and are welcome to use the one we have created or make your own. It must include all of the necessary information:

- Dates of Service
- Name of Agency/Organization
- Name of Volunteer Supervisor
- Type of Activity
- Community Impact Area (financial stability, health, education, community resiliency, or other)
- A Brief Description of the Volunteer Work you performed or the activities you participated in
- The # of Volunteer Hours

Who should I list as my 'volunteer supervisor'?

Your volunteer supervisor should be the adult supervisor, mentor, or advisor that supervised your volunteer work and can verify that you volunteered with their group or organization. You MAY NOT list a student, peer, or family member as your contact supervisor.

Who can I contact for more information about the Varsity Letter in Community Service application?

Sonja Sommerfeldt, *Impact Program Coordinator at United Way of Southeast Minnesota*

Email: sonjas@uwsemn.org Phone: 507-535-5509

