

UrbanPlan Volunteer FAQ

1. What is UrbanPlan (UP)?

UrbanPlan is a realistic, engaging, and academically demanding classroom-based curriculum. It helps students learn about the fundamental forces that drive development under our economic and political system. It provides a concrete example of how our market economy clashes and collaborates with our representative democracy to create the built environment. Concepts such as risk vs. reward, markets, capital, interest groups, politics, regulation and trade-offs, are all explored in depth. This understanding provides the foundation for all meaningful land use conversations, enabling a more civil and sophisticated dialogue among stakeholders at the local level—where the real land use decisions are made.

UP is taught in Economics and Government classes for high school juniors and seniors and in graduate programs that teach disciplines related to land use (e.g., MBA with Real Estate emphasis, Architecture, Planning, etc.).

2. Why does ULI have a program like UP? (Mission)

Education is a big component of ULI's mission to provide leadership in responsible land use and the creation of thriving, sustainable communities worldwide. This mission goes hand in hand with UP's commitment to developing a citizenry more educated about the challenges and complexities of land use decisions so that together we can create better communities.

3. Why should I volunteer? (What do volunteers gain from participating in UP?)

- Educate tomorrow's voters, community leaders, public officials, and land use professionals.
- Be an agent of change.
- Meet other land use professionals.
- It's fun and rewarding!

4. Who can participate?

Land use professionals with several years of experience in the field who have attended a one-day training session from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM and who have the scheduling flexibility to commit to volunteer twice per year.

5. What qualifications are recommended to become a UP volunteer?

Among the experiences needed from volunteers are:

- Extensive development project experience.
- The patience to question rather than advice or coach.
- The time and willingness to learn the details of the UP "case."
- Familiarity with city council and/or planning commission meetings, etc.
- The ability to assume and maintain the "city council member" role and not to lapse into "academic advisor," "kindly adult," "design charrette jury" behavior.
- The ability to consistently draw students into the discussion based on the UP case.
- The ability to avoid real estate/technical jargon.

6. How do I become a volunteer?

If you are land use professional who wants to volunteer and have the experience necessary to participate in the classroom, you need to be referred by a current UP-trained volunteer to participate in a training session. If you do not know a current UP-trained volunteer, you can contact the UP Program Director (see #18 below). Once you are trained, you can volunteer.

7. What is the purpose of the training sessions?

- To ensure familiarity with the problem set.
- To feel the dynamics of UP in a simulation.
- To gain perspective on the student's viewpoint.
- To understand the teacher's role & objectives.
- To learn to be an effective "facilitator" and "city council member."
- To learn the details of the case (due diligence).

8. How long are the training sessions?

The volunteer training sessions are conducted from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM on a week day.

9. How much time does it take to prepare for the training session?

About 5 hours of preparation. You need to go through the UP handbook and answer the same homework questions the students need to answer.

10. What roles do volunteers have in the classroom?

As "Facilitators": Through Socratic interaction, volunteers challenge the students to think more critically about the UrbanPlan issues and the specific responsibilities of their "roles" (financial analyst, marketing director, site planner, city liaison, and neighborhood liaison).

As "Guest Speakers": UP volunteers engage in interactive discussions with students about their own work projects or specific professional challenges. Through thoughtful questioning, the presenter helps students relate these issues and decisions to struggles the students are experiencing in UrbanPlan.

As "City Council": UP volunteers hear student presentations, challenge the students proposals as would happen in an actual city council hearing, and award the development contract to the winning development team.

11. Do volunteers need to prepare before going to a classroom?

Volunteers need to refresh their knowledge of UP before going to the classroom. They can do this by watching a refresher video and by reviewing the materials emailed to them before their scheduled time in the classroom.

12. How much time does a volunteer need to spend in a classroom?

As little as one class period (50 to 90 minutes) if you volunteer as a facilitator or a guest speaker and two to five hours if you participate as a city council member during the students' presentations.

13. How do I choose a school in which to volunteer?

It is best to volunteer in a school that is close to either your home or your work, but that decision is up to the volunteer.

14. What are the benefits for students who participate in the UP Program?

- UP provides students with a sophisticated, real life understanding of core content issues in economics and government.
- UP provides tomorrow's voters, neighbors, community leaders, public officials, and land use professionals with the insights and language to become engaged and informed problem-solvers.
- UP teaches students to read, acquire, and use information.
- UP asks students to take all the complexities of the real world, integrate them into the facts of the case, and create a clear vision and presentation of information.
- UP encourages students to explore:
 - Critical thinking
 - Problem solving
 - Conflict resolution
 - Communication – oral presentations
 - Interpersonal skills and team building
 - Quantitative analysis
 - Technology skills – Excel financial model & interactive website
 - Time management and organizational skills
 - Opportunities for varied type of learners to succeed

15. How many weeks does UP take to implement in a classroom?

UP usually takes four weeks to be implemented. Volunteers participate in three windows of time. The first facilitation occurs during the second week of the program, the second facilitation during the third week, and the city council presentations on the fourth week when the project ends. The teacher has the flexibility to decide when to have a guest speaker.

16. How are teachers chosen?

UP teachers deal with complex concepts, so it is important that they are interested and qualified to teach an economic and civic curriculum. ULI undertakes a thorough process to vet each teacher and school. The person in charge of UP for a District Council needs to spend time providing and collecting essential information from the potential teacher. A personal meeting with the teacher is scheduled. This meeting needs to be thought of as exploratory, much like a "sales call" and a "qualifying call."

17. Where can I find out more about UP?

You can email program Manager, Margit Nahra at Margit.Nahra@uli.org 240-605-8735