

# Application Record: Yiru\_Zhang

## Time

2026-01-17 10:10:47

## Checkbox

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided above.

## I want to choose this type of project:

Social Practice & Service Project

## Choose Project Title

【昆山苇城社区(Weicheng Community) - 社区营造 (Community Building)】【Individual Application】  
Students work with Weicheng Community to develop cultural activities and digital platforms that address the needs of an aging, high-educated population.

## Name

Yiru Zhang

## NetID

yz1099

## Class

2029

## Major

Haven't select

## Why are you interested in this project/field/industry?

My desire to join this project stems from a deep-seated belief that sustainable community transformation requires long-term commitment and a human-centered approach. My field observations in integrated care communities across Taiwan and mainland China revealed a critical insight: the most successful programs were those built on sustained relationships and adaptive co-creation, not short-term interventions. This project's extended timeline resonates precisely with that learning.||At Duke Kunshan, my outreach work taught me that genuine engagement means listening first—whether to prospective students from diverse backgrounds or elderly residents sharing life stories. The digital media campaigns I led, which garnered over 5,000 engagements, further showed me how sustained narrative-building fosters belonging. This project offers the rare opportunity to move beyond temporary involvement and contribute to a living ecosystem of change. I am drawn not just to ""do"" but to ""grow with""—to apply my skills in empathetic communication and visual storytelling across seasons of a community's life, helping to weave a tapestry of inclusion that lasts.|

**Describe the experience and skills that make you a good community leader.**

My experiences have equipped me with a unique blend of relational, observational, and creative skills essential for community leadership. Volunteering at senior care centers honed my ability to practice patience and empathy across generations—not as sympathy, but as active listening that validates each voice. This translates directly to inclusive leadership: creating spaces where diverse members feel heard and valued.||As a field researcher in cross-strait care communities, I learned to observe systemic interactions—how physical space, social programming, and emotional care intertwine. This systems-thinking allows me to see both the individual stories and the broader patterns, a crucial perspective for guiding community initiatives. Furthermore, my digital media work demonstrates an ability to communicate a shared vision compellingly. Leading isn't just about managing tasks; it's about fostering a shared identity. By combining empathetic bridge-building, strategic observation, and narrative-building skills, I can help unite members around a common purpose and navigate the complex, human dynamics at the heart of any community endeavor.

**(For long-term projects) Describe your plan for sustaining the long-term development of this project.**

For a project to thrive across years, it must evolve from being project-based to community-owned. My long-term sustainability plan focuses on three pillars: embedded legacy, adaptive learning, and distributed leadership.||First, I would prioritize embedding skills and roles within the community itself. Rather than centralizing tasks, I'd advocate for mentoring local members in coordination, documentation (using my media skills to create simple guides), and facilitation. This builds institutional memory that outlasts any single participant.||Second, I'd institute a lightweight, regular feedback loop—perhaps quarterly ""community reflection"" sessions—to collectively assess what's working and adapt. My field research taught me that models must locally fit; a rigid plan will fail. We must stay responsive to changing needs.||Finally, cultivating a rotating leadership bench is key. By inviting different members to co-lead smaller initiatives, we nurture a sense of shared investment and prepare natural successors. This approach ensures the project remains vibrant, responsive, and deeply rooted, transforming it from an external program into a self-sustaining community asset.

**Describe your plan for sustaining the long-term development of this project.**

My strength in collaborative partnership stems from a mindset of supportive followership. In university outreach, I successfully partnered with admissions leaders by proactively aligning my efforts with their strategic goals, communicating clearly, and anticipating needs—whether it was preparing materials for an event or debriefing insights from families. I believe in making my leader's work easier through reliability, initiative, and positive reinforcement.||Regarding leadership transition, my experience in various team settings has taught me that adaptability is rooted in respect for the project's continuity over any individual's role. When change occurs, I focus first on listening and learning the new leader's vision and working style. My interpersonal approach—being approachable, asking clarifying questions, and demonstrating consistent commitment to the project's core mission—helps build trust quickly. I see leadership changes not as disruptions, but as opportunities to integrate fresh perspectives, ensuring my support remains a constant, stabilizing force for the project's enduring success.

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