



Guidelines for an Effective Partnership

Partnerships between faculty and community organizations are formal, long-term relationships founded on the clear articulation of needs, capacities, responsibilities, and expectations. Regular communication, evaluation, and equal say in the design and implementation of projects are its defining features. Partnerships entail making a commitment to the agency, relinquishing control over aspects of the program, and accepting new responsibilities. The following is a list of guiding principles¹ for creating and sustaining a mutually beneficial partnership:

- Partners agree on the mission, values, goals, and measurable outcomes for the partnership.
- The relationship between partners is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment.
- The partnership builds on identified strengths and assets, but also addresses areas that need improvement.
- The partnership balances power among partners and assures that resources among partners be shared.
- There is clear, open, regular, and accessible communication between partners. Listening to each need, developing a common language, and validating/clarifying the meaning of terms are ongoing priorities.

- Roles, responsibilities, and procedures for the partnership are established with the input and agreement of all partners.
- All stakeholders in the partnership provide regular feedback, with the goal of continuously improving the partnership and its outcomes.
- Partners share the credit for the partnership's accomplishments.
- Partnerships take time to develop and evolve.

A sustainable partnership requires working on common interests while maintaining a quality service-learning experience for everyone.

¹ Kopek, Tamar. *Rethinking Tradition: Integrating Service with Academic Study on College Campuses. Campus Compact.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1993. p 113.

Benefits and Risks in Partnership Building

Creating a partnership is not an easy task. Both the community organization and the faculty member experience remarkable benefits from the relationship, but also may also face risks in doing so due to lack of planning. On the next page is a listing² of both parties and how partnership building can be of benefit or of cost.

	Benefits	Risks
Community Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further advancement of community organization’s mission • New perspectives and insights sparked by interaction with students, faculty members, and other campus partners • Access to knowledge and research on campus and from campus partners • Expanded resource base • Grant opportunities • Credibility for their own efforts among the other benefits of affiliating with an institution of higher education • Exposure to the possibility of higher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time it takes to create work, supervise students, or participate in research • The opportunity cost of not doing funded or billable work using the same staff resources • Time lost that could be spent working with other constituencies (a board, donors, or other partners) • The “irritation factor” when organizational staff members are not treated as experts and peers by campus partners and students, and when parity is not demonstrated in the way things are planned and decisions are made
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances student learning • Increases relevance of academic content • Research opportunities that integrate their academic expertise and their desire for community empowerment • Increases faculty’s awareness and involvement in the community • Grant opportunities for community revitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The great amount of additional time it takes to coordinate a service-learning course • The lack of appropriate funding to finance service-learning activities • Utilization of time and service that may not be valued in one’s academic department • Relinquishing some course control

How can these risks be mitigated?

Truly reciprocal service-learning experiences grow from the collaborative planning efforts of community partners, faculty and students. Highly effective partnerships are designed to meet the academic needs of the students while also addressing a community issue as defined by the partner agencies.

As in all partnerships, each entity is responsible for its share of the work and for its commitment to contributing to the overall relationship.

² *Leiderman, S., Furco, A., Zapf, Jennifer, and Goss, M. Building Partnerships with College Campuses: Community Perspectives. The Council of Independent Colleges. Washington DC: 2002.*

The role of the community partner is extremely vital in the creation and success of service-learning endeavors. Beyond functioning as the setting of experiential learning, community organizations, comprised of staff and residents, share their expertise and knowledge with the student service-learners and the faculty partner. Below are things one can do to for a successful service-learning experience³:

Be Mindful that Service-Learners and Volunteers are not the Same

Even though they are both students, community representatives should remember that service-learning students want to collaborate in agency initiatives while they use the experience as the basis for understanding their college course. Service-learners are receiving academic credit for learning through their service efforts. Volunteers are choosing to serve for a variety of reasons, including professional development, personal growth, or altruism. Regardless of their classification, all students need encouragement, guidance and appreciation from agency staff. Please help them to think about what the experience means to them within the context of the organization, its challenges, and its role in addressing community issues.

Plan Ahead

Work in conjunction with your faculty member to outline the service-learning experience. Planning will assist both of you in choosing what activities best suit the needs of the course and the community. You will also be more prepared when the students start their “service” aspect.

Be Realistic

Be realistic with time commitment and expectations. Think in terms of 10-week quarters and the academic year. Check in with students regularly about their schedules and plans for holiday breaks, examination crunch times, etc. Understand that a faculty member is also pressed for time and must cover certain curriculum requirements within the short timeframe.

Be Involved

Throughout the experience, community partners should help students interpret the experience and the relationship between what they are doing and the work of the organization. Community partners should view themselves as co-educators and a vital part of the students’ education.

³ *Adapted from California State Northridge’s Community Partner Handbook.*

Faculty serve the instrumental role of connecting the academic content with the service. To productively accomplish this, faculty can follow the tips listed below to assist in partnership development.

Listen

The best thing a faculty member can do when initiating a partnership with a community organization is to listen. Create an equitable relationship from the start. Learn about the community organization and ask questions.

Communicate

It is of extreme importance that faculty members remain in constant communication with their community partner before, during, and after the service-learning experience. Decide together what the best way to do this is. Constant interaction throughout the experience will enable a community partner to share what is going right and what is going wrong with the project. Communication is also key with students as they can share how the experience is going as well.

Plan, Plan and Plan

Give yourself some time to plan with your community partner. Don't organize a service-learning course a week before the quarter you plan to teach it begins. Work in conjunction with your community partner on how students will be oriented, how course work will relate to the service experience, and how students will be afforded the opportunity to reflect. The more time you give yourself to plan with your partner, the better your service-learning experience will be. Students will also appreciate it when they understand more directly what they are doing.

Be Flexible

Understand that service-learning experiences will not always go as planned. With a multitude of variables at play, remain flexible. Issues may arise in the community, and changes will need to be made along the way.

Utilize the Expertise of Your Community Partner

Recognize that your community partner is investing a lot of time and energy in working with your students. Your community partner is bestowing many talents and skills upon your students and supporting their personal and professional development. Invite your community partner to give a guest lecture. Contact them to attend final class presentations. Ask them to assist in the evaluation your students.

What does an effective partnership look like? How will you know when you have reached that point? Assess, assess, assess. Set time aside to evaluate your partnership. Discuss the impact of the partnership on all participating organizations. The subsequent outcomes⁴ are indicators that your partnership is indeed a fruitful one.

Involvement in Each Other's Activities

Do all entities feel comfortable in each other's settings? Is there evidence of personal investment in the activities of the partnering organizations?

Duration of Partnership

Has the partnership thrived over time? Do all parties wish to continue the partnership if feasible?

Evidence of Shared Decision-Making

Do all parties feel as if they were an integral part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the service-learning experience?

Adaptability to Change

As changes to the plans arise, are parties adaptable?

Evidence of Open Lines of Communication

Are partnering organizations in constant communication? Does everyone feel comfortable to provide feedback?

Impact

What is the impact of the partnership on the participating organizations? What outcomes can be measured to illustrate such impact?

If the answers are positive for all these questions—Congratulations! You have achieved a mutually beneficial partnership that is contributing to the quality of life. Don't stop there! A partnership is a continual process. The commitment of both parties will ensure its success and longevity. The Center for Community Service-Learning staff seeks to support the development of your partnership. Feel free to contact us at (909) 869-4269 with any step of the partnership imitating, building, or evaluation phases. We applaud you in the efforts you have put forth already to engage our communities, our campus, and our students.

⁴ *Holland, B. Understanding and Strengthening the Community Role in Service-Learning Partnerships. Presentation at CSU Colloquium in February 2004.*