

## Beginning a Partnership

### Starting the Conversation with Community Partners

1. Think about the big picture  
How does the agency's mission dovetail with the course mission and student learning objectives? Is this a good match?
2. Understand the organization  
Gather information about the agency and its mission before setting up a meeting
  - i. What are the goals and mission of the organization?
  - ii. How is the agency organized?
  - iii. Who works there? Are they full-time, part-time, volunteers, or some combination?
  - iv. What are their hours of operation?
  - v. Where is it located?
  - vi. How will students get there?
3. Assessing the needs of the agency
  - a. Give the agency the ability to address current needs (perhaps through a questionnaire). Agencies involved in service-learning courses usually are willing to mold the service experience to meet the needs of students and faculty. Make sure *the community partner's* needs will be met. Listen well.
  - b. Meet with the Executive Director of the agency so the needs of the whole agency are being heard.
    - i. What assets and skills does the organization have?
    - ii. What assets and skills are missing?
    - iii. Can students help fill those needs in a way that not only will help the agency/community partner but also help the student learn course content?
  - c. Build rapport with clear statements of the academic and community agendas. Understand these agendas may change during the conversation among University and community partners.
    - i. What are the goals—including the learning objectives—of the course?
    - ii. Who are the students and what are their skills?
    - iii. Where do agency and course goals overlap?
    - iv. How can the agency, students, and course instructors work together to meet the needs of all partners?

### Embarking on the Partnership

1. Know the nuts and bolts of what the partnership will entail. Discuss the possible need for:
  - a. Volunteer training development and completion
  - b. The timeline of the students vs. timeline of the agency
  - c. Background checks
  - d. Decisions about liability
  - e. Confidentiality policies and procedures
2. Develop a partnership agreement
  - a. Delineate the expectations of what will be provided by the organization, the faculty, and the students
  - b. What are the students' specific tasks?
  - c. What is their time commitment and when will it occur during the arc of the semester?
  - d. Ensure the agreed upon activities will provide service learning opportunities and not just a service to the agency
3. Design assessment opportunities and tools
  - a. Make sure students know they will be responsible for carrying out service in a timely way that will fulfill the partnership agreement, but that they will be graded on their understanding of course content.
  - b. Discuss with community partners who will assess student service and student learning. If the community partner will be involved in assessing students, jointly discuss how that will take place and include in the instructor/community partner agreement.
  - c. Discuss with community partner how to assess the larger outcomes of the service-learning project and partnership.

### Project Debriefing

1. Complete assessments  
All parties should complete assessment and evaluation tools about the partnership
2. Distribute results to all parties involved
3. Debrief the experience in a face-to-face meeting with the community partner
  - a. Revisit objectives in the agreement. Were they achieved? If not, what could be done differently next time?
  - b. Ask and answer each other's questions
  - c. Discuss any unexpected events or situations that may have arisen
  - d.
4. Close by offering thanks and setting up a time to discuss the next steps, if any.