

Letters from a Community Partner: Tips for Successful Community- Faculty Partnerships

- 1. TALK! EMAIL! FAX! Send a smoke signal! JUST COMMUNICATE!**
Communication is the cornerstone of collaboration- without it you can't have successful partnership! Be sure to make contact with potential community partners *PRIOR* to the start of the term. By engaging in a dialogue with community agencies at the very beginning of the planning process you can save LOTS of time and energy for you, your students and your community partner. The communication can't stop after your class has started. Be sure to work with your community partner to set up "check-in" times *THROUGHOUT* the term and also for evaluation at the *END* of the term.
- 2. Educate Yourself!** Visit your community partner and spend a few hours serving the way you hope your students will serve. Putting yourself in your students' shoes will provide you with additional teaching tools to further integrate service with your coursework. By visiting your community partner you also help bridge the gap between campuses and community agencies and help put a face to a name.
- 3. Empower Community Partners:** Work with community agencies to establish an agreed upon set of norms for partnerships between you, your students and the agency. Discuss the learning and community objectives you each hope to achieve and how each partner can hold each other accountable to the goals and objectives you've all agreed to.
- 4. Share the Theory:** Service-learning is new to many community organizations and your expertise and experience can go a long way to enhance support for youth involvement in community agencies. Hold community partner forums/seminars; invite partners to on-campus events and lectures; provide community partners with current articles and publications on service-learning techniques and theory; invite partners to co-present at conferences and workshops. In addition, share theories about service-learning with your students so that they too can understand the complexities of working as partners towards a shared goal.
- 5. Professionalism: Pass it on!** Community partners are limited by the amount of time and resources they can dedicate to one particular class or university. Provide your students with training on language they should use when approaching community partners, how to relay information about their course's goals and objectives, how to plan their calendars to incorporate service experiences etc.
- 6. Stand-up for us!** Once you have established a successful basis for partnership it is important that you uphold guidelines established by community partners. Let your students know that they are responsible not only to you, as their professor, but also to the community partner as a co-educator.
- 7. Recognize the inherent bias in service-learning:** Yeah, I know this may sound at odds with our discussion around partnership but recognize that most of what has been researched, published and funded goes to and comes directly from higher education institutions. Service-learning goals and objectives are all measured against *student* learning and progress- not necessarily the fulfillment of community needs and objectives. Take this bias to heart and work with your partner to ensure that their community needs, as well as you and your students' needs, are met.
- 8. Don't Take Relationships for Granted:** Just because you've established relationships with community organizations doesn't mean those partnerships are permanent. Follow each of the tips above, each term, for continued success!