Building Relationships with Community Partners

Designing a volunteer project is a collaborative effort between you and the agency. Keep the following pointers in mind during this process...

- You do not need to have your volunteer project fully developed before your initial meeting.
- Present clearly articulated ideas for what your volunteer group has to offer.
- Projects should be based on addressing a community need, not on outcomes for volunteer participants.
- Begin your conversation by describing your volunteer group and interests, and then ask the community partner to describe their needs. A good way to get the partner thinking about needs is to ask them to think of specific things that they feel like they would like to see happen, but are currently either understaffed or under funded to do so.
- This is a negotiation process. From this point in the conversation, you will want to find a middle ground between your volunteer interests and the agency’s volunteer needs.
- Ultimately, both parties will experience a mutually beneficial relationship.

5 KEYS to Create Lasting Partners

KEY: Include them. Invite community partners to speak at meetings, attend events and stay engaged.

KEY: Keep the doors open for other groups. Even if a partnership won’t work for your particular project, understand that there may be partnerships in the future or with other Brandeis programs.

KEY: Recommend community partners to other groups. If it is fitting, let other Brandeis groups know about the agency’s work and their upcoming needs. Perhaps, they could partner soon.

KEY: Continued gratitude. Letting agencies know the impact of working with them and mentioning that ‘you look forward to future opportunities to partner’ goes a long way in maintaining relationships.

KEY: Trust! Partnerships take time to build trust. It is crucial that relationships are treated with care because only one incident can destroy a relationship for your group’s future or other groups’.