How to Establish a Community Partner

**Partners** are the experts on community: what is needed and how to deliver it. These relationships need to be as prized as the volunteers in your organization. It is the partnership that offers the force and potential to make significant change.

- Consider the goal as maximizing mutual benefits to campus and community
- Outline exactly what students can contribute to the improvement, expansion, maintenance or continuation of the agency and vice versa.
- Research. Keep a file of news articles and websites about each agency. Learn its mission and history. Check with the **Department of Community Service** and the **Office of Experiential Learning** to see if a relationship already exists with a partner you are considering doing a project with.
- Visit. If you can’t visit each site personally, you should at least know where the facility is and exactly what your students will do there.
- Remember. Take note of names of people you meet, talk with and what their role in the organization is. This important for building relationships and maintaining good communication

**Be Respectful**

- At all times, be polite, considerate and give thanks even when you receive a no.
- Take responsibility for your part in the partnership.
- Be prepared and organized. Be considerate with your time, planning and communication.
- Be respectful when conflicts arise, recognizing that your agency probably is under-resourced/staffed — that is why you are needed!

**Solid Communication**

- Exchange schedules. Let agencies know vacation and dates students will be gone on break. Learn the agencies’ schedule and availability
- Concise, clear, consistent communication with email and phone options. Recognize the preferred method of communication and best person to speak with at the agency and adjust accordingly.
- Ask for a detailed job description. Agree on specifics of the volunteer placement.
- Give and get volunteers and agency feedback. It will help you assess the effectiveness of placements.
- Agencies, for numerous reasons, may be unable to provide the promised level of supervision or expertise, and your volunteers may feel short-changed. Likewise, ask agencies for their feedback on the quality of partnership relations. Give agencies feedback and thank you’s- Let them know the impact.
- Encourage agency partners to be co-educators. Welcome them to challenge volunteers and report successes/difficulties to you.