

Tips for Establishing Positive Community Partnerships

- Community partnerships are at the center of CEL classes. As with any relationship, it takes time and effort to build trust and understanding.
- Make contact with your community partner well in advance of the start of the course. Be clear about your course goals. Share your syllabus and learning objectives. Brainstorm project ideas together with your partner. Aim for a collaborative effort that reflects a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Identify what the community partner hopes to gain from the experience. Typically, community partners are seeking a new source of volunteers, prospective interns, or technical expertise from faculty and/or students. It is important to have a conversation about the likelihood that these objectives will be met.
- Provide a realistic overview of the skills and abilities of your students.
- Develop a plan with your partner of supervision and assessment of students.
- Share your evaluation plan with the community partner. What standards of performance will you use? It is important to communicate that students will not be evaluated solely on “showing up.”
- Prepare your students to work with the partner.
- If the agency has a volunteer manual, it should be made available to the students.
- Pre-service screenings required of volunteers, including criminal background checks and TB screenings, should and, probably will, be required of students. Ask about any specific screening requirements prior to the start of your course. Share those requirements with your students during the first few days of class. Be prepared to make alternative arrangements if a student does not meet screening requirements.
- Utilize a community engaged learning agreement for students, faculty, and community partners. It is a good policy to have clear written communication that explains expectations and requirements for all parties involved.
- Communicate with the community partner on an on-going basis over the semester.
- Invite the community partner to participate in the evaluation of final projects, presentations, portfolios, web pages, etc., and scheduling time for this in your syllabus.
- Be flexible. Things will not always go according to your plan. Remember that you can use those unexpected moments to foster even more powerful learning than from a perfectly executed plan.