



BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR SERVICE LEARNING

Effective partnerships between agencies, schools, colleges or universities, businesses, government, and residents for the benefit of the community are a vital part of youth service in America. Service learning collaborations provide students with an increased confidence in their ability and show the community that young people can make valuable contributions. (PA Service-Learning Resource and Evaluation Network) By working together, we can reach a larger population, avoid duplication of efforts, make better use of resources and deal more effectively and thoroughly with the myriad of problems faced by our young people. Whether it is schools partnering with Volunteer Centers, community based organizations partnering with business, or youth corps partnering with nursing homes, the potential for and productivity of effective partnerships are limitless. However, there are a number of issues related to creating effective partnerships and this Resource Packet provides some resources that will get you thinking about how to develop and sustain them.

Like a piece of art, true collaboration is a long-term process, often going through many revisions as our environment and relationships change. However, there are a few techniques that will ensure the final masterpiece is ready for the gallery. Here are a few simple guidelines, or techniques, to guide you as you form collaborations for service learning:

- Make sure everyone shares a commitment to a common vision, since some problems will surely arise.
- Put agendas and needs (personal and organizational) out in the open, agendas or needs do not need to be identical, but should be compatible.
- Be sensitive to the needs, styles, and limitations of other collaborators.
- Involve more people at all levels; by involving more people at your organization and those with whom you collaborate you will improve the sustainability of the collaboration.
- Maintain frequent and open communication.
- Be sure everyone understands expectations especially concerning tasks and accountability.

“Full collaboration, includes not only the exchange of information, altering activities and sharing resources, but also enhancing the capacity of other partners for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.” (*Working Together for Youth*) It is important to realize that DiVinci did not paint the Mona Lisa the first time he picked up a paintbrush. Since full collaboration is the most complex form of partnership, it may not be the best way to start partnerships among organizations that are unfamiliar with each other. For example, a school that has never worked with a community based organization may want to start a partnership by networking or coordination, which are simpler forms of partnership. Networking is simply sharing information for the benefit of both parties, while coordination includes a willingness to alter activities to achieve a common purpose. So our school may choose to work with a community organization by sharing relevant information about its curriculum; that is networking. If the school (or teachers at the school) decided to teach a unit at a different time during the school year because it fits in with a service opportunity, that would be coordination. A

Benefits of Service-Learning Partnership

- Accomplish work together that would be difficult or impossible to accomplish alone.
- Build a shared sense of commitment and responsibility throughout the community.
- Ensure that everyone who is touched by the service is represented in the leadership, planning and implementation.
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts among agencies.
- Offer opportunities for people to learn from each other and share resources.
- Contribute to rebuilding healthy, caring communities.

slightly more ambitious form of partnership is cooperation. It builds on coordination by involving shared resources. In our example, the community organization might provide brochures and background information for students and teachers. Establishing these partnerships and personal relationships can prepare people and organizations to enter into strong true collaborations for service learning. Remember success is the best way to encourage continued partnership, so be sure to set goals that are concrete and obtainable, especially at the early stages of a partnership.

The remainder of this resource packet will include on-line resources, information on organizations and more tips. Supplementary materials have been created to help agencies work with colleges, universities and schools, as well as for colleges, universities and schools work with community organizations. If you did not receive the appropriate supplement to this packet please contact Youth Outreach at the Points of Light Foundation.

Sorting Out Agency/School Partnerships

| Type | DESCRIPTION | ELEMENTS | EXAMPLE |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| Networking | Sharing information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Low commitment, low risk • Separate | Volunteer Center puts a teacher on a mailing of youth volunteer opportunities |
| Coordination | Sharing information and altering activities for mutual benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Low commitment, low risk • May be joint may be separate | Two agencies planning schedule for service projects so they build off of one another and are not competing for volunteers. May schedule joint activities |
| Cooperation | Sharing resources, as well as information and altering activities for mutual benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Higher commitment • Work together | No one school can hire a Service Learning Coordinator, so two schools hire a service learning coordinator to find service opportunities for students at both schools |
| Collaboration | Sharing resources, information and altering activities to enhance the capacity of other partners for mutual benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Very high commitment • Work hand-in-hand • Seek joint funding | School and multiple agencies form a collaboration to engage young people as leaders. The new collaboration gets a grant to fund youth led projects with sponsoring agencies |

Discussion Starter Questions

The following questions can help you start conversations about partnering with schools, agencies or campus. Remember it will also be important that you provide answers to these questions to potential partners.

- What experiences have you had in community service or volunteering? What impact has that had on you?
- What experiences has your agency had working with students?
- What experiences have you had working with students?
- Why are you interested in this partnership?
- What do you think is the most important reason for involving students in service-learning?
- What is one thing you hope students would learn about the community or society?
- What are the major challenges to providing services to community?
- One dream you have for those served through your agency.
- What do you hope service-learning will accomplish at your organization?

ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

1. Know your objectives. Before contact, build a solid base.
2. Be able to articulate your goals, your service objectives and your learning expectations.
3. Know your volunteers. What types, their range of interests, their limitations, their talents.
4. Know your resources. Can you provide PR, transportation, duplication? Remember, simple details loom large to agencies.
5. Know agencies and their programs. Understand their structure, their mission, and their activities at least well enough to ask informed questions.
6. Make a strong effort to involve others in approaching agencies and to use them in an on-going way for program implementation.

A CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP IS:

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Schools
- Youth Service Organizations
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Businesses
- Recipients of Services
- Individuals

IDENTIFY NEEDS WHICH ARE OF MUTUAL CONCERN

- Do a needs assessment of the community with students and agency representatives.

DETERMINE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL SERVE AS PRIMARY LIAISONS IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

- Assign student coordinators.
- Visit agencies ahead of time.

SET UP A LOCAL ADVISORY BOARD

NEGOTIATE AND AGREE UPON DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR:

- Recipient of Volunteer Services
- Student/Youth Volunteer
- Nonprofit Organization
- Educational Institution
- Others

NEGOTIATE AND AGREE UPON EXPECTATIONS FOR THE:

- Recipient of Volunteer Services
- Student/Youth Volunteer
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Educational Institution
- Others

DETERMINE BEST METHOD FOR ON-GOING COMMUNITY AND EVALUATION

PERIODICALLY, REDESIGN RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON CHANGING NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Select Bibliography & On-Line Resources

Building Bridges: Across Schools and Communities; Across Streams of Funding

Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform (1998)

This report summarizes a 1997 conference that brought community activists, school reformers and community funders together to talk about how to organize for reform using local resources and strategies, and combining school and community efforts.

The New Community Collaboration Manual

National Collaboration for Youth (1997)

Provides philosophical background of the seven keys to successful collaboration (shared vision, skilled-leadership, process orientation, cultural diversity, member driven agenda, multiple sectors and accountability).

The Coordinator's Handbook of The Thomas Jefferson Forum: A Comprehensive Guide for Developing High School-Based Community Service Programs.

Thomas Jefferson Forum, Inc. Boston, MA: 1991.

This manual has an excellent section on forming partnership and gaining support from the community and schools.

A Pocket Guide to Building Partnerships for Service Learning

National Education Association (1996)

This guide offers insight into starting partnerships between schools and agencies for strong Service Learning Programs.

Service Learning Educator

PA Service-Learning Resource and Evaluation Network

Describes practices that promote collaboration and demonstrates the value of collaboration between schools and community.

Seven Tips to Building an Effective Partnerships

U.S. Department of Education (1998)

Here are some tips for building partnerships with schools, parents, community organizations, businesses and faith groups. This article was created by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education to help strengthen communities and improve educational standards.

Thinking Collaboratively: Ten Questions and Answers to Help Policy Makers Improve Children's Services

Charles Bruner (Education and Human Services Consortium) (1991) <http://www.cyfernet.org/research/thinkco.html>

Provides some questions to ask in the planning stages of partnerships and addresses some of the limitations of collaborative partnerships.

Working Together for Youth

RespecTeen (Lutheran Brotherhood) (1993)

Pages 54-55 and 58-60 explain the different levels of collaboration and the six factors that contribute to effective partnerships.

Working Together: From School-Based Collaborative Teams to School-Community-Higher Education Connections

Center for Mental Health in Schools (1997) <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/worktogh/intro.htm>

This is a packet of materials on forming effective partnerships, including information on working together effectively and examples of model school-community collaborations.

Younger Voices, Stronger Choices: Promise Project's Guide to Forming Youth/Adult Partnerships

by Michael McLarney, Loring Leifer (July 1, 1997)

It's also important to partner with young people! This book shows how to create true partnerships between adults and youth for real community change.