

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: Building and Maintaining Productive Community Partnerships

Source: Laura Stanton, Michigan Campus Compact AmeriCorps* VISTA, Schoolcraft College 2006-2007.

Issue(s) Being Addressed:

Building productive community partnerships can be challenging; successfully maintaining those partnerships can be even more demanding.

Actions to Consider:

1. How should one go about finding suitable community partners? Be realistic about how many partners you can help and what services you can offer them. Honesty, frequent communication and dependability will enhance community relationships.
2. Most communities have many needs, so the potential for partners is abundant. But, we need to remain realistic about how many services we can offer. As Vistas, most of us would like to help everyone; however we need to remain practical.
3. The best way to begin and continue a partnership is to be honest and follow through on commitments. If you are not positive that they can deliver a service, than do not promise it.

Overview:

Most communities have many needs, understanding community programs, becoming an active member on community boards and making community contacts is essential to initiate and follow through on programs that will meet the needs of the community.

Key Steps:

1. Start on your campus; ask to sit in on organizational group meetings such as a Service Learning group, Student Activities, the Honors Group or Student Services. Attend their events and participate in activities.
2. Accept invitations to sit on community boards, as these are good networking possibilities. Even on boards or committees that don't seem to match your criteria, you may meet other potential community partners; or, others may refer you to someone else who is a perfect match for your program.
3. Introduce yourself to community leaders.
4. Networking is the key; it is essential to building and maintaining community partnerships. Good networking skills will help improve the success of your project and increase the opportunity to create new partnerships.
5. Gather contact information, follow through with phone calls, set up meeting appointments, create needs assessment to determine whether you are a good match for this organization, let the potential partner know of your limits, and be as specific as possible on what they can expect and what you can offer.
6. Frequent communication is essential for a productive partnership; this can be done through e-mails or telephone calls. A monthly meeting is usually practical.
7. Surveys are a great way to assess your partnership and identify changes that may be needed.