

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: MEETING THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

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Issue(s) Being Addressed:

How does one truly understand, recognize, and meet the needs of community partners?

Actions to Consider:

With the rise of programs at universities and colleges that conduct community-based work, it is often difficult to meet the needs of the community partners being served while also meeting the goals of the campus program.

Overview:

Often times, the needs of an agency can differ widely from the needs of the campus program. Because of the power and authority associated with colleges and universities, struggling community partners are often afraid to admit to programs that their needs are not being adequately met. In conducting a needs analysis of a collaborating agency, recognizing their needs, and finding unconventional ways to address these needs, a program can truly address the desires of community-based agencies.

There are several key components of being a good liaison, meeting both the needs of a specific campus program, and the community partner being served.

Key Components:

- Attempt to build a rapport of trust and sincerity with the community partner. Many organizations avoid being honest with campus staff for fear of resources being taken away. Community partners need to be able to communicate without fear of reprisal.
- Conduct a thorough needs analysis of the community partner. This can include interviewing staff members, surveys, or observation.
- Analyze the results of the needs analysis. Review the results with a key contact at the community partner to be sure their needs have been accurately assessed.
- If possible, assign a liaison to the community partner (i.e. graduate student, work-study student, AmeriCorps* member). His/her job duties can include things such as: research, resource development, fundraising, etc.
- Find other campus departments and programs that can work with the community partner and meet their recognized needs, such as service-learning courses, mentoring programs, or student service groups.
- Make regular contact (at least twice a month) with the community partner to convey the importance of collaboration. This will also help to stay atop of revolving needs. Use the method preferred by the community partner, which can include site visits, phone calls, e-mails, etc. This may also include reducing the amount of contact if community partners are increasingly busy or find the contact intruding or invasive.
- In some cases, the best option may be to terminate the community partnership. If this is the case, discuss this possibility with sensitivity to the key contact(s) at the partnership. Before terminating the relationship, assist the partner in finding other groups that can fulfill their needs, both within and outside the campus.