Engaging Students in Reaching Out to Community Partners

The initial interaction between students and community partners will set the stage for the successful service-learning partnership. Students demonstrate the importance of youth voice in the following suggested process:

Introduce students to local organization or agency partners

Present students with a list of – or have them research on their own – possible community partners. Ask students to identify two or three whom they would like to know more about, and possibly work with.

What would you like to know ?

Have students develop a list of questions that they would have about the partner - what would they like to know about the organization/agency - and write it up as a survey to be presented to the partner. (see next page for sample questions)

What service opportunities does this partner have for students ?

When the survey is presented (by students) to the partner, inform the partner that students would like to volunteer and provide service to the organization.

Give the organization specific guidelines about the possible project engagement:

how much time they would have from the students

your goals in having a learning connection for the activity

the need to involve a reflective piece (and therefore to allow for time for this)

celebrating student success following the activity

Invite the partner to prepare two or three possible options to propose to students for their engagement (giving students another opportunity for student voice, as they "choose" the project).

Planning for a school visit

Invite the partner to come to school to meet with the students, to be prepared to answer student questions about the organization, and to present and discuss the options for a service activity.

Once students have selected the project activity, invite them to brainstorm with the organization representative what they will need to do in order to coordinate with the organization to accomplish the project. Depending on your level of confidence in the students, you may choose to have them assume responsibility for pieces of developing the relationship with the partner.

Helping Students Learn About Agencies/Organizations

The following are suggested "starter" questions that students might have about agencies or organizations, as they begin the process of developing a partnership for service-learning.

- ☆ What is the purpose of the agency/organization?

- ☆ How does it contribute to the life of our community?

- ☆ What is the history of the organization – how, when and why did it get started?

- ☆ What kind of organization is it?
  Non-profit (independent sector)? For profit (private sSector)? Civic (public sector)?

- ☆ Who makes the important decisions for the agency/organization ?

- ☆ What public policies shape or influence its work?

- ☆ What is its vision for the future?

- ☆ How is it funded?

- ☆ What programs does it offer?

- ☆ Why did it choose to focus on those programs?

- ☆ How do volunteers participate in this organization?

- ☆ Are young people involved with the organization ?

- ☆ Is it possible for students to have a role in planning or implementing programs with this organization ? How would this work ?

- ☆ How do you think young people could play a larger role in helping this organization?