



Fact Sheet: How to Find a Community Partner

Introduction:

There are many questions one needs to address when selecting a community partner to work with as a part of this class. There are three entities that need to be satisfied throughout the service component of this course. YOU need to be satisfied. The COMMUNITY PARTNER needs to be satisfied, and the CLASS REQUIREMENTS need to be satisfied. The process of finding an adequate community partner is the first and one of the most important steps. If done thoroughly and correctly you and the community partner will be provided with a rewarding experience, class requirements will be satisfied, and any problems or hassles you might encounter will be minimized.

A note on working with community partners:

Before we begin, it is important for you, the student, to understand the role the community partnership plays in this class. In lieu of a physical classroom, you should consider your time and efforts at your community partner as a sort of “community classroom,” where you are required to be actively involved and responsible for being there on time and for completing tasks as assigned. In return you should be learning from the experience while also fulfilling the stated requirements for the class. It is also very important to realize that the community partner is investing a significant amount of time and resources in supervising and training you. Upon agreeing to a community placement you not only have a responsibility to our class, but also to this community organization. They are counting on you to be professional, reliable, and to actively help them meet organizational goals.

#1 – When should I start the process of finding a community organization to work with?

IMMEDIATELY. If I could put this question in 100pt font, bold, underlined, and in neon green, I would. The most common, and potentially the worst, mistake that students make is waiting to confirm their service placements. As you will see from the following steps, there are many issues that need to be considered before you can even agree to an acceptable placement. In addition to these steps, there are often also application processes or background checks for placements with many organizations, especially ones that work with sensitive populations like children or the mentally challenged. **YOU ONLY HAVE 1.5 WEEKS TO FIND A COMMUNITY PARTNER TO WORK WITH AND GET YOUR FIRST HOUR OF WORK COMPLETED.** Make several calls to potential partners. At least 5 initially, the more the better. It is crucial that you follow up and follow through on phone calls made and/or emails sent. If you don't hear back in 24 hours call/email again. Community partners are typically very busy and the responsibility of securing a placement is on you, not on them.

#2 – How do I find a community partner that works for me?

- Look at your schedule and identify the days and times that you are available to work, but you must BE FLEXIBLE. You may have to work on weekends or during the weekday.
- Identify areas you are within commuting distance of. It is key that you find an organization that you can commute to.
- Think about, or search for, community or social issues that are of interest to you.
- Do a general search for organizations in your region that work on the issues you have identified. Once you find these websites look for links that say “volunteer,” do a search for the word “volunteer” or look for an employee who is designated as a “Volunteer Coordinator.”
- Look for organizations offering service placements through general volunteer placement websites. If you find an organization that fits your interest but not a placement that you like, feel free to call them to see if they can fit you in. Often they can.
 - Idealist – www.idealists.org
 - Volunteer Match – www.volunteermatch.org
 - Volunteer Solutions – www.volunteersolutions.org
 - Network for Good – www.networkforgood.org
 - Your local United Way Volunteer Center – search for “United Way Volunteer Center,” and your County.

- Select several community groups that interest you is extremely important and call them all using the supplied phone rap. Choose the best community partner to work with that fits all requirements.

#3 – What community organizations are eligible for Leadership and Advocacy, Pol 110?

There isn't any hard list of organizations that qualify as appropriate community partners. However there are many easily identifiable characteristics of acceptable partners. Below is a list of the most common indicators.

- The organization exists to alleviate or address a community or societal problem.
- The organization is considered “non-profit” and/or has 501c3 tax exempt status. For profit organizations are almost always ineligible for placements.
- The organization has a designated “Volunteer Coordinator”
- The organization has advertised volunteer placements that involve the volunteer in responsible and challenging actions that lead to the common good.

In general, the organizations that you will be working with will be serving underserved, underprivileged populations of individuals. They will not charge for their services. Good examples are the New York Public Interest Research Group, Coalition for the Homeless, the American Red Cross, the United Way, the Food Bank of New York City, and many others.

#4 – I've found a community partner that I am interested in and that fits eligibility requirements.

What placement within this organization will fulfill course requirements?

It isn't enough just to find an eligible community partner. You have to find out if that organization can fit you into their hectic schedule and provide you with an opportunity that is interesting to you and fits in with at least the minimum requirements of the class. Not only do you not want to have to be stuffing envelopes all day, but it won't fulfill course requirements either, though some envelope stuffing or comparable responsibilities may be undertaken some of the time. An acceptable placement will minimize the amount of time doing administrative or office tasks while engaging you in responsible actions that contribute towards the goals of the organization. The following are some indicators of acceptable and unacceptable placement primary responsibilities. Remember, these are only indicators.

Examples of Acceptable Indicators

Handing out Leaflets
Soliciting emails in support of programs/legislation
Staffing an Informational Table
Setting up a social media outreach plan
Leading a food drive
Designing a Website

Examples of Unacceptable Indicators

Stuffing Envelopes
Cleaning
Organizing Closets
Receptionist Work
Copying

In addition to the previous indicators, there are other characteristics that can qualify/disqualify a placement for fulfilling the requirements of this course. A list of these is below.

- Your placement must be able to fulfill your minimum number of volunteer hours as required (see your class syllabus).
- Your placement must be an ongoing placement where service hours are spread over the course of the semester, as opposed to an event that happens over the course of one or two days.
- You cannot be compensated in any way for any of the work you do, nor may you be a current employee of your chosen organization. You must be a true VOLUNTEER.
- You must be engaged in a non-partisan and a non-denominational placement. In other words, you may not advocate for a particular political party, candidate, or religious belief. That being said however, that does not preclude you from advocating for a particular social cause, legislation, or from working with your church to coordinate something like a food pantry program, for example.
- Your placement cannot be a part of pre-professional hours required for your major.
- Your placement cannot be a part of any career oriented internship. There is no “double dipping” where you get course credit for your work outside the credit offered by our class.

Conclusion

We cannot stress how important an early jump on researching and contacting community partners is towards ensuring an enjoyable and rewarding placement for you and for the community

partner. Those who wait inevitably run into problems. Email the organization. If you don't hear back in a day, call the organization. If you don't hear back in a day, call them back. Always ask who the appropriate person to speak to is regarding volunteer placements, and note their phone number, extension, and their email address. Follow up and follow through is important. Treat this process the same as you would a job search/interview process.