

Student Guide to Community Partner Relationships

Haas Center for Public Service

These guidelines are meant for students wishing to develop a service partnership with a community-based organization (e.g. Fellowships, Community Service Work-Study, student groups, ASB, research, etc.)

IDENTIFYING ORGANIZATIONS

Before you begin, **clarify your interests and objectives**. What do you hope to learn and focus on? What type of service work do you want to do, and where? What knowledge and skills can you offer to an organization? What types of people do you want to interact with?

Once you have established your needs, **start your research early**. The professional world does not work on a student schedule, and many times relationships take months to establish and nurture.

Begin your organization research with any **past information or connections** that have been utilized, either by other students or Haas Center staff. A relationship that has been previously developed is more likely to be an easier one to maintain, because community partners are more likely to be responsive and have more experience being supervisors to or collaborators with Stanford students. This also helps reduce roadblocks that always exist with a new partnership. For all Haas Center programs, we have lists of previous organizations that students have worked with, and we may even have contact information. In addition, Haas staff have many external connections, so ask around.

If you need to expand your search, begin **networking**. Tell everyone you know that you are looking to partner with a public service organization. Contact previous employers and volunteer supervisors. Attend any Stanford events where you can meet professionals. Go to the Career Development Center and to find out more about their programs and events. Register with the CDC to establish a Cardinal Careers account, which will allow you to interface with organizations in a recruiting/job search manner. Potential leads may come from faculty members that know about the subject. Contact alumni through www.stanfordalumni.org. As you begin contacting relevant organizations, be sure to ask them for other leads or recommendations they may have. Web resources include: www.idealists.org, www.craigslist.org, www.volunteermatch.com, and www.interaction.org.

DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP

Before you begin making phone calls, **identify what you have to offer in terms of knowledge, experience, skills, and interests**. Develop a brief “elevator pitch” about yourself and what you would ideally like to do. Do your homework about the organizations you are contacting, studying their website and printed materials.

When making contact, **give yourself a lot of time**, especially when communicating with community-based organizations, which are often overworked and understaffed. Organizations do not have time to respond to every request that comes in. If you do not hear back, **be friendly, patient, but persistent**. Try using multiple forms of communication – frequently phone calls are returned more often than e-mails. Follow-up using another form of communication within a few days may be helpful, but do be patient.

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Begin with any existing known contact within the organization, even if the person is not in the position to supervise or collaborate with you. If you cannot determine an established connection at an organization, you can begin by asking for someone who coordinates volunteers or interns.

After identifying a potential supervisor/partner within an organization, **be prepared to make the needs/parameters of the opportunity clear.** This will include number of hours, supervision or collaboration required, nature of possible projects, expectations, etc. You may want or need to follow-up your call with a letter outlining the information you presented with any other relevant information and forms.

You will also want to **consider the number of organizations you are contacting.** Not everyone you contact will be interested in your proposal, so be prepared to call more than one organization. However, you also want to be careful not to contact too many organizations. This is both time-consuming, and can be awkward when apologies need to be made. Local organizations especially get inundated with calls, so be respectful of everyone's time.

Be responsive to any leads. It is important to remember that while your schedule is complex and you have many commitments, so does your community partner. The organizations are doing you a favor, so present yourself well. Remember, you are also serving as an ambassador of Stanford.

If you need to make a choice between several possible placements, you should **determine the likelihood of your relationship being successful.** Does the organization clearly understand the expectations? Are they excited about the work that will be done? Is your supervisor/partner interested in supervising or collaborating with you? Is the work realistic, substantial, and aligned with your interests? Is the partner responsive? Choose the organization that seems the best fit. Do follow up with organizations that you are not working with to inform them of your choice. It is common courtesy (and you may want to work with them in the future).

MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP

Once a partner is selected, make sure you **agree upon expectations:** the roles that both partners will play, what will be accomplished, and the logistics. Many Haas Center programs have an agreement or contract for this purpose. If there is none provided, do put in writing the expectations agreed upon by both partners of the relationship. This is important as it helps alleviate any misunderstandings that may happen. If at all possible, discuss these expectations in person.

While in the process of working with your community partner, **maintain the relationship by having regular check-ins.** Use your original contract or agreement to clear up any misunderstandings. Be professional in manner. Compromise. Give and take is crucial to any successful relationship.

COMMUNICATING & FOLLOWING-UP WITH ORGANIZATIONS

A little on-going communication with the placement supervisor/partner can go a long way in building a relationship and retaining trust. The people you meet are also invaluable contacts for future academic, professional, and personal endeavors. Do not forget to formally thank your community partner for their role in providing and enhancing your learning experience. Ask for feedback about the relationship, both to help others who may work with the organization in the future, and for your own personal and professional growth.

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