



# Teaching toolkits

## How to build partnerships with external partners to enhance learning

How to work with external partners to enhance student experience, enrich academic practice and have a positive social impact as part of your curriculum design.

In Community Engaged Learning (CEL) we expect communities to act as partners in educating our students.

It is our responsibility to ensure that we:

- choose activities that meet the needs of our communities, as well as students,
- deal with our community partners respectfully
- strive for reciprocity in our relationships with our partners.

Failure to do this will result in a bad experience for everyone.

The Classification for Community Engagement to institutions of higher education (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2007) strongly urges campuses to make an ongoing commitment to establish collaborative, two-way partnerships with:

- a high level of understanding
- reciprocity
- mutuality.

The Guidance was developed using existing best practice and scholarship in Community Engaged Learning as well as curriculum co-design sessions with community members, students and academic staff.

It focuses on three steps:

1. Starting a partnership
2. Building a partnership
3. Sustaining a partnership

## Step 1: Starting a partnership

After you identify the learning outcomes of your programme or module (see the toolkit: Five steps to developing a Community Engaged Learning programme, module or project), it is time to consider who would be a suitable partner for your teaching and learning activities and assessment.

You might want to consider:

- Are there social issues or populations with whom you would like students to engage?
- What organisations match well with the programme or module learning outcomes?
- What community needs might be impacted by Community Engaged Learning activities?
- How will the community engagement experience be selected (e.g. faculty identifies community partner in advance, students choose from a list of vetted organisations, students identify their own project, etc.)?

## Finding an external partner

### Explore existing networks

A way to find community partners is through your own department or faculty.

Often, departments have interactions with community partners for programmes, internships and research.

These offer a starting point of organisations to pursue conversations about community engaged learning activities and strengthen university-community connections for their department or faculty.

### Local research

You can do a web research for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations per borough to identify potential partners.

Local council pages are a good starting point.

Network organisations are particularly useful as well.

### Community Engaged Learning Service (CELS)

The Community Engaged Learning Service enables university-community partnerships through:

- Organising university-community networking sessions.
- Liaising with a number of directorates within UCL with access to community and voluntary sector organisations, public bodies, industry partners, cultural bodies and schools in order to forward faculty requests for collaborating with external partners on Community Engaged Learning projects.
- Reaching out to external partners to bring potential curriculum projects in the faculties as a starting point for building a two-way collaboration.
- Developing guidance and resources for the development of university-community partnerships (for external partners and faculties).

We can reach out to our existing community networks, but we cannot guarantee that we can find a partner for your programme or module. The responsibility for finding a partner and for sustaining the partnership is down to the individual programme or module leader.

## Considerations before embarking on a partnership

After identifying your external partner, you might want to consider:

### 1. Learn about potential partners and their assets

- Gather information about their mission, values, programming, and activities
- Identify who the external partner serves and what needs the organisation addresses
- Discuss university and community assets, strengths, and ways in which they would contribute to a partnership

### 2. Determine whether there is compatibility

Before forging a community partnership, consider these components:

- What will be the format of community engagement? (see the toolkit: Five steps to developing a Community Engaged Learning programme, module or project).
- Think through the time, energy, and resources needed from faculty, students, and community partners to carry out a successful partnership.
- Discuss roles and agree each partner has equal value.
- Identify how community partners and faculty will be involved in preparing students for community engagement.
- Develop ground rules for the partnership.
- Timing and duration of engagement.
- Establish a contact person for each partner and an infrastructure to support ongoing communication.
- Determine a location for partnership meetings and conversations that supports the equity of the partner's roles.

### 3. Programme/module adjustments

- Identify adjustments to the programme /module that need to be made (e.g. classroom discussions, assignments, readings, assessment, programme / module grading) to reinforce connections to community engagement activities.
- Identify how community partners need to be prepared to take part in Community Engaged Learning activities with students.

### 4. Determine measures of success

- External partners and faculty members enter into a partnership with the intention of achieving certain goals.
- As part of initial conversations, discuss what success will look like for the partnership. Think about what measures might be used and what sort of assessment or evaluation will indicate success.

### 5. Assess risks

- Assessing the risks of the partnership is very important for the students and the partners and to the communities at large.
- Your faculty should have its risk assessment processes.

## Considerations before embarking on a partnership

### 6. Identify costs and other logistics

- Consider issues of fair compensation and reimbursement. You need to identify who is responsible for them and how do costs affect the programme's or module's viability over time.
- You also need to think about scheduling, background checks, health screenings etc.

### 7. Discuss demonstration and celebration activities

- Demonstration and celebration involve strategies that share the results of community engagement as well as celebrate accomplishments with community partners, students, and any other constituents.
- Faculty should invite community partners to help plan and shape what this will entail. Some partners may choose not to be involved, yet many will want to be part of recognizing what was achieved.

## Step 2: Building a partnership by designing collaborative projects

It is essential that you include your community partner(s) in the planning process for your programme.

It is disrespectful to send students out to engage with communities that has not been prepared or consulted.

Similarly, do not have someone come into your classroom unless you have mutually decided what their role will be.

For building a partnership and designing collaborative projects, you might want to follow the below journey:

### 1. Design a collaborative project

- Outline the information both the partners need.
- Determine deadlines.
- Outline partnership goals.
- Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)/Memorandum of Agreement (MoA).

### 2. Implement project and build trust

- Stick to the agreed-upon roles and responsibilities.
- Hold regular check-ins.
- Agree to terms of who is accountable for what.

## Step 2: Building a partnership by designing collaborative projects

### 3. Student, faculty and partner reflection

Some questions to consider are:

- How successful have you found this experience to be?
- How can we adjust the programme or module as we continue to work together? What can we do differently?
- How can the students be better prepared for community engagement?

### 4. Consider learning goals and deliverables

- Revisit the MoU/MoA to identify if the deliverables were met.
- Document all the products that were collected, such as photos, stories or reports.

### 5. Collect thoughts, refine and apply revisions

- Meet with your partner and get feedback on their perceptions of the experience/ reflect on student experience.
- Discuss with community partner possible adjustments to be made.

## Step 3: Sustaining your partnership

Determining strategies for maintaining communication before, during, and after the project is essential. Even with a Memorandum of Understanding or a contract outlining roles and responsibilities, ongoing communication cannot be substituted (Tryon & Stoecker, 2008).

Community partners seek open, regular communication with the faculty to better understand their programme, module or activity, the various aspects of Community Engaged Learning, and to ensure expectations are being met by students and their organisation.

Your programme or module may be bounded by a semester, but your partnership is not. Multi-modal, multi-year partnerships with clear goals and outcomes can unite people across disciplines, methods and (co)curricula to meet joint interests.

Short-term partnerships can be fine when they are what everyone wants.

Many partners strongly desire faculty to visit the community site and include in-person contact as part of their communication strategy (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

#### Top tip

Develop long-term collaborative projects with external partners for student cohorts across the years to ensure positive impact on the partner as well as a way to maintain the partnership

## Step 3: Sustaining your partnership

### Tips for success

- Hold regular check-ins.
- Actively engage with your community partner.
- Remain flexible in making adjustments and changes along the way.
- Develop a timeline and track progress.
- Refer back to the MoU/ MoA goals.

### Resources

- Bacon, N. (2002). Differences in faculty and community partners' theories of learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 9(1), 34-44.
- Butcher, J., Bezzina, M., & Moran, W. (2010). Transformational partnerships: A new for agenda for higher education. *Innovative Higher Education*, 36(1), 29-40.
- Humphrey, L. (2013). University-Community Engagement. In P. Benneworth (Ed.), *University engagement with socially excluded communities* (pp. 103-124). Springer Netherlands.
- Seifer, S. & and Maurana, C. (2000). Developing and Sustaining Community-Campus Partnerships: Putting Principles Into Practice. *Partnership Perspectives* 1, 7-11.
- Sandy, M., & Holland, B. A. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 13(1), p. 30-43.

## Where to find help and support

communityengagedlearning@ucl.ac.uk to:

- request advice or consultancy services
- book a curriculum design workshop
- book training for your students

### **Other toolkits in the Community Engaged Learning (CEL) series:**

- Five steps to developing a Community Engaged Learning programme, module or project
- Working with schools to enhance your curriculum
- Engaging the local London community in your teaching: how to find out more about them

### **For general teaching advice or curriculum support:**

arena@ucl.ac.uk: contact the UCL Arena Centre

[bit.ly/CELHowTo](https://bit.ly/CELHowTo) to access this full online guide, including links and further resources.

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