**DOS AND DON’TS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION: *Plan Together***

   

**Do:**

* Plan carefully before developing new relationships; Research which leaders and organizations have widespread buy-in and support from community members, have open and voluntary membership, and are serving those most marginalized.
* Develop pre-engagement trainings for both partners and students: this can be a 30-minute lesson or a week-long curriculum but ensure that you have set expectations about the engagement content of the course with students and expectations set with partners for communicating with you and students, the process and structure, and any projects you’ve planned.
* Connect engagement projects to academic and service learning curriculum.
* Ensure that projects and/or relationships are mutually beneficial, as defined by both you and the partner.
* As you start out and throughout your community engagements, plan to encounter challenges and conflict, make mistakes, and be faced with steep learning curves; be comfortable being uncomfortable, take a learner’s stance in your work with communities and be open to failure—it is all a part of the process.
* Provide students and partners with structured reflection time.
* Enable partners to lead: co-design engagements and plans for projects, meet in person often, establish ongoing communication channels, invite them to campus (e.g. to give a lecture or co-evaluate final projects).
* Evaluate the partnership and student learning and growth and re-design your approach accordingly.
* Seek out resources from Georgia Tech offices like Serve-Learn-Sustain and Office of The Vice President for Government & Community Relations, established to support you as you do this work.
* Stay connected to communities and issues that you work on and support community partners long-term; continue to build from and expand upon engagements through additional courses or research projects; or, simply stay in close touch, connecting partners to people, resources, and networks that can help them achieve their goals.
* Be very intentional in talking with students about building authentic relationships, examining their power relationships in the context of community partners, and seeing their work as helping to address systemic issues; guide them in a way that discourages essentializing, romanticizing, or pathologizing experiences of marginalized groups.
* Pay community groups for their involvement and time whenever you can, or, alternatively, ensure that the work or process is valued at a level equal to the time requirements you are asking of partners.
* Read this playbook and follow the guidelines established here!
* Share your additions, lessons learned, and comments with SLS so we can improve this playbook and other toolkit materials for future service learning projects!

**Don’t:**

* Engage in traditional service learning, where the end goal is simply service and no attention is given to systems of inequality or the larger structures and contexts that help to explain the need for service in the first place.
* Structure your engagements as a series of interactions that treat community members or groups as “test users” as this has the tendency to objectify community members and offers few of the benefits of critical community engagement.
* Ask or expect staff at partner institutions to advise students; be especially intentional about the role frontline staff at small organizations take in coordinating work with students—these positions are often filled by women paid relatively low salaries who are already expected to do a great deal of emotional and “disempowering” labor.
* Involve partners only at course-level decisions if the work will be taken to different levels and institutions later on. For instance, do not work closely with partners to collect data on socio-economic patterns only to work the next semester with a more powerful partner (like the City of Atlanta) and leave the community group out of these next steps to make use of findings and influence decisions that might impact their lives.
* Treat partners as research subjects or even as clients—true engagement is about building authentic, meaningful relationships and requires work from both partners.
* Expect that your community partners from People-of-Color, low-income, or other marginalized communities will teach your students about their experiences, perspectives, or neighborhoods.
* Take advantage of generosity of time if it is offered to you; be wary of the power differential.
* Set up relationships without establishing a clear set of expectations, mutual benefits, processes, and plans.