**BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIPS**

**BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION: *Select Community Partner***



Strong relationships are essential for high-quality community engagements. Building and maintaining relationships can be challenging and time intensive, but these tips should help you:

* Consider building new relationships based on relationships that your colleagues, friends, and/or faculty and staff at SLS have already developed. SLS’s Service Learning and Partnership Specialist, Dr. Ruthie Yow, can help you connect with community or institutional contacts.
* A few faculty members we interviewed for this playbook talked about building their community-based relationships with people they have personal connections with. If your personal network allows for this, take advantage of it. Building from a current and authentic connection is ideal.
* SLS has established relationships with a number of community organizations and their key members or staff. If before starting a community-engaged course you would like to invite someone from a specific organization or working on a content-specific issue to your course or would like to plan a site visit to them, reach out to SLS to connect with Dr. Ruthie Yow.
* Even when you aren’t working on a community-engaged course, maintain the relationship by checking in every few months, sending e-mail updates, including partners on updates on your work or life, and attending community-based events.
* Seek to create and maintain authentic and mutually beneficial relationships based on dialogue, solidarity (or a commitment to continuing social justice work after the engagement), and true connection that builds off an acknowledgement of who you are “and the biases that shape [your] interactions.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Work on relationship building through both content and process (the ways in which you relate to and connect with students and how you encourage them to connect to partners). Use both content and process to explore issues of identity, personal and collective histories, and privilege and oppression.
* Encourage students to continue to work with partners and/or for social change and social justice once the community-engaged course has ended.
* Consider creating a Cooperative Partnership (see Guide to Cooperative Partnerships link) to address some of the power differentials and to help create authenticity in the relationship through a more equal partnership.
* Remember that due to various structural issues, trust with community organizations is often fragile and you will have to continuously work to maintain and strengthen it. Do not be surprised to learn that trust is not always a given or a constant, even in long-term relationships.
1. Mitchell, Tania D, “Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models,” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)