**GETTING TO KNOW COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

**BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION: *Learn More***

 

Choosing the right community partner is a critical step in making your community engagement a meaningful experience. Selecting a partner that other community members identify as doing good work and representing their interests is important as well. To understand if this is the case, talk to people about the organization, learn about their goals, staff, expectations, history, funding, board structure, and previous experience with university partnerships. Also, consider the roles and responsibilities the work you’ll be doing will require of community partners. Think about whether there are people at the organization that can take on these roles. Roles that may be especially useful for staff from partner organizations to take on during a community-engaged course, include:

* specific content expert
* collaborator
* teacher (content, community context)
* community resource expert
* community historian
* facilitator
* supervisor
* information source
* planner

Along with looking for an organization that is relevant to the content and focus of your course, consider whether an organization and its staff will be interested in working through some of the difficult but essential questions of high-quality community engagements with you. Some of the questions that you should feel comfortable addressing in collaboration with partners, either in tandem with the work (especially if the work is tied to major social or economic justice issues), or in addition to the work, include:

* What are the historical patterns at play in the problems we encounter in this work?
* How do students and community members relate to these problems differently?
* What are the patterns of historical and current power, oppression, and injustice that most deeply impact the community?
* How do the systems of power, including academic institutions, relate to, try to disrupt, and/or perpetuate these patterns?
* How, through our work together, can we break down patterns of injustice to create systems change and ensure that communities have democratic control over decisions that impact their lives?