This Quick Sheet explores the subject of **CRAFTING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS** and cites the campus resources available to help you access local community organizations.

A partnership between the instructor and a community-based organization (or multiple organizations) is one of the fundamental components of service-learning. In other words, service-learning requires that instructors work with community-based organizations to assure that the work their students perform meets a community-identified need and the lessons that result from that work support the learning objectives of the course.

The partnership process occurs well before the course begins. In fact, it will take quite some time to approach a suitable community organization; explain your course and its intended learning objectives; solidify the logistics of the service work; and agree upon a plan to communicate challenges and areas for improvement. Once this process has been completed, it begins anew as the partnership is sustained over multiple semesters.

You may find the following information helpful as you navigate the process.

**Criteria for Choosing a Service Learning Site (Littlefield, 1994):**
- The site must be doing work that is connected to the course in ways obvious to the students
- Activities at the site must give students opportunities to reflect on how course concepts relate to the activities
- Students should have direct contact with client populations or constituency groups with which the organization regularly interacts
- Students’ project/service has clear connection to the main purpose of the organization

**Developing the relationship:**
- If you do not already have a partner in mind, work with the Office of Service-Learning to find agencies which have expressed needs that could be met through service-learning or have missions that complement your course’s subject matter.
- Once initial contact is made, meet face-to-face preferably in the community.
- Provide the agency staff with your syllabus. Explain your learning objectives and what you hope your students will gain from this interaction.
- If the “agency need” was not predetermined, allow the agency staff to decide what service students can provide. Please do not assume that you know the best project for the agency. Rather than “pitch” a specific project, describe the qualifications and skills that your students possess and discuss how the community organization could utilize the students’ time.
- Determine the level of commitment that the organization is willing to give the service-learning partnership. The Office of Service-Learning encourages sustainable partnerships that last beyond the initial semester.
- Negotiate an agreement between you and the agency that clearly articulates the expectations of all involved. This agreement can be formal (written document) or informal (guided conversation). Attached to this email is the Partnership Agreement Guide used by OSL. You can find an example of a formally written agreement at [http://www.servicelearning.org/resources/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_partners/index.php](http://www.servicelearning.org/resources/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_partners/index.php).
• Communicate regularly with your service-learning partners. Past community partners have expressed great disappointment with those relationships in which they were not contacted at regular intervals.

• Continually evaluate the success of the project. Include community partners as evaluators as well as students. Solicit ideas for improvement.

What role in this process does the Office of Service-Learning play?

Community Needs Clearinghouse: OSL maintains relationships with a multitude of community-based organizations and works with the Duquesne University Volunteers office to log their service needs. Currently, this log includes listings from over 200 Pittsburgh agencies.

Partnership Guide: Often, the service-learning coordinator will make the initial contact to a “new” agency (one not listed in the service log). The coordinator regularly attends the initial face-to-face partnership meeting (though this is not always necessary) and helps to facilitate the development of the partnership agreements.

Conflict Mediator: There may be times when an agency, student, or instructor does not feel the partnership is working very well. The service-learning coordinator is available to intervene and facilitate the discussion necessary to correct the issue.

There are two additional documents which you may find helpful. The first is the OSL Partnership Agreement Guide. This template contains a list of questions which can help you to guide the conversation toward clear expectations and role definitions. The second document is the OSL Project Description Template which will help you to clearly state the nature of the service-learning project. To be sent a copy of these documents, please email Lina Dostilio, DU Service-Learning Coordinator at dostiliol@duq.edu.

This Quick Sheet was developed by the Duquesne University Office of Service-Learning, 2005.