Developing Partnerships

Creating partnerships within the community to connect students with service-learning opportunities requires the essential ingredients of time, knowledge, interpersonal skills and sustainable resources.

Potential partners often approach the relationship from different places with different goals, priorities, capacities and needs.

So, what makes partnerships work?
(1) **Shared leadership, responsibility, and oversight.**

(2) **Relationships are central.**

(3) **An appropriate balance is struck between trust building and action.**
   - Taking enough time for partners to develop a sense of mutual understanding and trust.
   - It is vital to move beyond planning in order to begin taking concrete actions.
   - An action–reflection approach.

(4) **Mutual understanding and benefits are understood.**
   - Partnerships as means to achieve benefits for all partners and the community.
   - It is important to engage in active efforts for each partner to understand the needs, strengths, goals, limitations, expertise, and self-interests of the other partners.
   - Design efforts to reflect those things, including clear expectations.

(5) **Mutual learning objectives and educational activities.**

(6) **Vision guides structure.**
   - What do you hope to accomplish by forming a partnership?
   - What is the vision for the community?
   Answering those questions should precede and guide questions of structure, not vice versa.

(7) **Being attentive to planning, communication, training, orientation, and preparation.**
   - It is important for partners to develop a common language and systems for clear and ongoing communication.
   - Then it is possible to provide the opportunities for all partners to learn
about each other and be successful in building a relationship and working together

Start small and with concrete goals when developing partnerships. From there, emphasize an action-reflection approach and foster collaboration by setting out to do a concrete, focused task that is mutually shared. With this, the collaborative sense of group and ownership develops and trust is established making a sense of mutuality the expectation. Partnerships often start small and will grow in both size and formality as time goes on. This incremental process helps to avoid the situations in which efforts to create ambitious partnerships from the outset results in an immense amount of time and resources. In addition, remember to keep partnerships fluid and to add new people as the relationships develop.