

IDENTIFYING STRONG PARTNERS

Working with people and organizations is fundamental to projects that make a difference. Whether you are looking for a partnership for curriculum, research, or an individual project, consider these steps and tips to find the right folks to work with.

WHY HAVE PARTNERS?

Working with other people can be challenging! Consider why you want to work with a partner, and the mutual benefit for each entity from this relationship.

- Opportunity to work on a real-world problem with people who are on the ground dealing with it.
- Direct connection to those impacted by an issue or problem.
- Opportunity for students to learn to work with individuals, groups, or organizations.
- Access to resources or activities through a partner.
- Build on an existing relationship or develop a new relationship.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PARTNERS

When we think about partners, we have many definitions. The categories below describe some of the types of partners you might engage.

Individual: A single person who has an interest or connection to an issue. Example: Students from a class work with a neighbor to understand her needs.

Group: A collection of people who are brought together around a common issue. They may not have a formal affiliation. Example: Students work with patients with diabetes to develop a new service.

Organization: A formal entity that deals with a specific issue, such as a nonprofit, government, or business. Example: A faculty member conducts a studio with UrbArts to design a new performance space.

Community or Neighborhood: A place-based approach where the partner is the various individuals and organizations in a specific place. Example: A class works on a site in Old North, interacting with neighbors, the community organization, and developers.

Expert: Individuals who have a particular level of expertise related to an area, and provide insight or feedback. Example: An urban historian gives a tour and provides feedback on design proposals.

DEFINE YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Before you start looking for partners, it helps to define the type of partnership you're looking for.

-  Consider issues relevant to community.
-  Inspired by a community.
-  Study of issues relevant to a community.
-  Provide by serving, building, creating, or recommending for a community.
-  Co-create with a community as partners to produce the end outcome.
-  Facilitate multiple stakeholders in a community.
-  Join a community as an integrated participant and member.

WHERE TO FIND PARTNERS

Once you know why you're looking for a partner and what you're expecting of them, you can start looking for your partnership.

Consultation

- You may want to meet with the Office for Socially Engaged Practice or staff from the Gephardt Institute to learn more about past partners and requests that the School has received.

- Experts can also provide valuable perspectives on potential partners or specific community needs. Contact others on- and off-campus and ask for their advice as you build your network.

Reaching Out

- Faculty are welcome to reach out to potential partners on their own. Be thoughtful about managing expectations, and don't make promises you can't fulfill.

- Be sensitive to the volume of requests partners may receive. Give as much lead time as possible, and make clear asks in all of your communications.

Requesting Participation

- For some situations, you may want to request participation through calls or requests for proposal. Work with on- and off-campus partners to distribute this information. Discuss this possibility with the Office of Socially Engaged Practice or the Gephardt Institute.

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BUILD ON THE WORK OF OTHERS

Many sites, topics, and partners have participated in prior student projects. Understand the work that's already been done, and build on it as much as possible.

Questions To Ask

You may want to ask the following questions to help understand prior work:

- What do you already know about this topic? How did you learn that information?
- What prior reports or research have been completed on this topic?
- What questions did the previous work raise for you or your organization?

Finding Prior Work

Select projects are highlighted on the Sam Fox School [Recent Initiatives Page](#). Full studio boards for select studios, as well as books produced about the St. Louis region, may be available in the [St. Louis projects section of Open Scholarship](#). For other past projects, contact the Office for Socially Engaged Practice (samfox-engage@email.wustl.edu).

REMEMBER: MAKING AN IMPRESSION

Even a brief interaction with a potential community partner leaves an impression about WashU. Think carefully about your communication, setting reasonable expectations and following up on emails, phone calls, and meetings, even just to say thank you.

EVALUATING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Once you've found a potential partner, you'll want to thoroughly evaluate whether working together is a good fit. Take these questions into consideration.

Partnership

- Do I want to work with this partner? Do I support their mission and like the people?
- Will the partner really be a partner in the process to the extent necessary?
- Who would take the lead in this partnership?
- Does the partner have the staff and/or capacity to engage in a partnership now?
- Does this initiative address an issue or priority for the partner?
- Does the partner get something out of this relationship? Would the relationship be reciprocal?
- Will the partner be flexible throughout the process, including with the content of student work?
- Will we be able to hold the partner accountable for their obligations?
- Will the partner be able to implement/maintain the project when it is completed?
- Is there a possibility for long-term collaboration?
- Is there an opportunity for the partner and/or their community to provide feedback and critique?
- Does the partner represent or have a plan for engaging the impacted community?

Impact

- Is someone in the community asking for this initiative? Is this needed?
- Could this initiative be realized?
- Do I/the partner have the expertise required to complete this initiative?
- Do I/the partner have the resources to execute this initiative?
- Does this initiative support other goals in the community?

Logistics

- Is the initiative site/partner accessible?
- Does the partner's timing match feasible schedule options?
- Is the partner communicative?

Curricular / Research Goals

- Does this partnership meet the learning and curricular objectives of the course?
- Is there sufficient space in this proposal and with this partner for design creativity in content, process, and application?
- Will I be able to publish, share, or exhibit the outcomes of this partnership in a valuable way?
- Will the work have a measurable impact on the partner?
- Will the ownership model of the final product benefit the students, the partner, and me?

CONSIDER EQUITY AND ACCESS

It can be easy to connect with the people we know in the communities we are comfortable in. Consider these ideas to expand beyond your current network and encourage greater equity and access to University partnerships.

- Consider your own identities and how they may be interpreted or represented with your partner or others.
- Are you working outside of the Central Corridor? Consider extending into North City/County or the East Side.
- Check out neighborhood-based organizations that are supported and run by local residents.
- Consider working with faith communities or other similar types of affinity groups.
- Attend local events outside of your circle and talk to people to learn more about who they admire and work with.
- Be cognizant of racial, economic, religious, and geographic diversity in the organizations you work with and populations you connect to.

GETTING STARTED

To get started in finding a partner, contact the Office (samfox-engage@email.wustl.edu) to discuss your initiative and next steps.