

# Community-Engaged Learning

## Guide for Community Partners



## What is community-engaged learning?

**Community-engaged learning (CEL)** offers varied opportunities for students to apply what they are learning in post-secondary programs by supporting the efforts of a community-based organization.

One form of CEL is **community service-learning (CSL)**, where students address community objectives by applying concepts learned in a classroom setting, and students' coursework includes deep reflection on their experience in community. Students, faculty, and community partners work together for mutual benefit, aimed toward meaningful community impact and greater awareness of civic responsibility and social justice.

Find out more about the benefits of CEL [here](#).

This guide was developed by **Community Campus Engage Canada** and the **Community Engagement and Research Centre** at the University of Regina.

## ***Items to consider before connecting with an academic partner***

- **What is your project's objective?** Will it involve answering a research question, addressing your organization's logistical needs, developing tools or resources, or some other goal?
- How could the project **benefit your organization** and the communities you serve?
- What might be accomplished **within an academic semester(s)**?
- How could the project **draw on your expertise**?
- Is there someone within your organization with **time/interest/skills available** for managing the CEL project and supervising students?
- **What kinds of organizational resources might be required** for this project (e.g., staff time for mentoring students, office space, transportation, technology support, etc.)?
- What kinds of **deliverables or outcomes** could be developed out of this project? (See the box at right for a sample list of CEL deliverables.)

*See a sample list of CEL deliverables from Western University [here](#).*

*Click here for a map of community engagement offices across Canada.*

## ***How to connect with an academic partner***

- **Contact a community engagement or experiential learning office** (if one exists) at your local post-secondary institution – see the box at left for a map of community engagement offices.
- Check the **websites of university, college, and polytechnic departments** with related interests/focus to your organization, and contact the department's administrative staff. They may be able to point you toward professors working in your area.
- Look at **faculty listings** on post-secondary institutions' websites, and reach out to individual professors who share your interests.
- Attend **post-secondary speaker events** on themes related to your organization's efforts to learn about and connect with potential project partners.
- Contact a **university's research office** and ask about opportunities to partner.

## Questions to discuss as you co-design the project

- How could the design of the community project be **integrated into the goals and structure** of the academic course?
- How might the **community project schedule** correspond with the academic semester timeline?
- For large projects, are there **smaller components** that could be drawn out and achieved within a single semester?
- What scope of community project involvement can students be reasonably expected to **complete within one (or more) academic term(s)**?
- How will academic and community partners **equitably co-govern** the project? How will potential disagreements be addressed?
- Do students require any **specific training or prior knowledge** before they work with the organization and/or members of the community? If so, which partner (academic or community) will facilitate this knowledge transfer?
- Would **individual involvement or a group project** by students work best to support community objectives?
- How will students be **supervised** by the instructor and the community organization representative? How much time will be required by each? What types of feedback are expected, and how will students be evaluated? Will community partners be expected to help grade the students' work?
- How will **variability in quality** of students' work be addressed?
- Will the community organization be able to **select students**?
- Will approval from a post-secondary **research ethics board** be required for this project (for example, if the project team will be communicating with human participants through interviews or surveys)? If so, how much time is usually required to obtain ethics approval, and how can this be accommodated within the project schedule?
- Is there any **funding** available for community participants in this project?
- How much **in-kind support** from the community organization is required?



*The Community Research Ethics Office (based in Waterloo, Ontario) offers information about research ethics.*

## ***Documents to guide the partnership***

**Forms and agreements** that you co-develop with your academic partner help you equitably co-govern the project, set reasonable parameters for the partnership, and guide students to success.

*See examples of guiding documents for students [here](#).*

*See examples of project proposals and partnership agreements (e.g. Memoranda of Understanding) [here](#).*



## ***Maintaining an effective and respectful relationship with your academic partner***

- Make time for **regular check-in meetings** with students and instructors (for example, every two weeks with the student, every month with the instructor).
- Get to know each others' **expertise, interests, needs, and values**.
- Communicate in ways that can be **understood by all** – translate academic, policy, industry, sectoral terms and phrases.
- Foster **honest conversations** that allow for flexibility and constructive critique.
- Consider **strategies to deal with changes** to project goals, deliverables, and participants.
- End the project with a **wrap-up meeting** where participants recognize the efforts of all involved.



## ***Evaluating the project***

- Were project goals achieved?
- Did student(s), faculty, and your organization fulfill their roles and responsibilities?
- What aspects of the project were satisfactory for your organization, students, and the instructor? What aspects were unsatisfactory?
- How did all involved deal with any unforeseen challenges?
- How might the process be improved for a future CEL project?

***Want to learn more? Check out the webinar Partnering with universities and colleges for community impact: Tips for community organizations.***

## ***Resources and additional information***

Campus Engage. Campus-community partnerships: An introductory guide for community groups and organizations.

CFICE. Ensuring community comes first in community-campus partnerships: Actions for CCE practitioners.

CFICE & U-links. Community-campus engagement primer for community organizations with research questions.

Institute of Translational Health Sciences & Seattle Children's Hospital. Community partnership guide for engaging with academic researchers.

McMaster University. Office of Community Engagement: Community guide.

University of Manitoba. Working in good ways: A framework and resources for Indigenous community engagement.

Western University. Community partner guide to community engaged learning.

The Community Research Collaborative. In it together: Community-based research guidelines for communities and higher education.