## Service-learning potential pitfalls, interventions, and preventions

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<th>Potential Pitfalls</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
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| Collaborations can and often do have bumps; partner relationships are messy, especially during the first semester or two of a new partnership. | • Immediate communication with and among all parties. Instructor (and Office of Service-Learning for service-learning courses) communicate with partners as needed.  
• If necessary, instructors and students should sit down with partner to identify a solution.  
• Even if the project doesn’t work out in the end, have everyone meet—again as soon as possible. This helps students frame the experience as a positive learning opportunity and may salvage the relationship with the partner for future projects. | Best practice: Put in time upfront.  
• Meet potential partners several weeks before the course begins.  
• Provide a copy of course syllabus and Stakeholder Expectations (Stakeholder Expectations below) to partners.  
• Very clearly lay out expectations for all parties, including assessment and evaluation.  
• If a match is made, use a written document with dates, times, orientation information, etc. This is not a “contract” but a schedule for all to follow.  
• Consider interviewing students before registration.  
• From the beginning, make sure there is an expectation for all parties that communication about issues or potential issues are discussed immediately, at the first sign of trouble, not after the project has failed.  
• Plan for orientation for partners and orientation at the sites for students.  
• It is strongly recommended that partners have instructor phone numbers in case of urgent issues. For service-learning courses with a TA or service-learning scholar, student assistants’ numbers may be provided in lieu of the instructor’s number.  
• Be consistent, be available, and answer calls and emails promptly.  
• Foster open communication among instructor, students, and partners. Students must trust that site glitches are to be expected and asking for help will not affect their grades, or they are unlikely to admit
problems. Students are taught to see instructors as authoritarian and are unused to a co-learner / co-teacher expectation.

- Contact students four to six weeks before the semester begins and inform them of expectations—conduct, time commitment, pre-placement requirements, e.g. background checks (need to be completed before the beginning of the semester for timely start dates), transportation, etc.
- For service-learning courses, use service-learning project checklist—when to do what.
- First day of class, students sign expectations agreement; include community partner site, rules (see Student Participation Agreement).
- Be certain that students know in advance that they will feel uncomfortable. Invite discussion of discomfort. Also, have a backup plan for students who are in unhealthy (for them) placements.
- Contact community partner half way through the semester to assure that everyone is on track.
- Evaluation of student and partnership; make process and expectations clear.
- Make a final contact with the partner to debrief.
- Make sure partners know up front of planned university closures.
- Consider having a teaching assistant or service-learning student scholar (request through the Office of Service-learning; based upon availability).
- Keep number of students and partners at a manageable level. The more sites, the more communication is required; also we don’t want to overburden partners with too many students to manage. Again, a TA or Service-learning Scholar can help both parties manage.

| Lack of resources—money, people, and time | Ask all stakeholders to contribute if unexpected expenses occur, but *set that* | Seek funding beforehand. The Office of Faculty Development has some small grants available. Always contact the Development |
| Expectation in the planning stage. | Office before writing external grants to get the go-ahead.  
- Agree to share the burden of funding with dollars or in-kind donations.  
- Set realistic goals and boundaries based on available resources to carry these out. |
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| **Contact your dean.** | **Best practice:** Put in time upfront.  
- Meet potential partners a full semester, or as soon as possible, before the course begins.  
- Provide a copy of course syllabus and sample Stakeholder Expectation information (see below) to partners at first meeting.  
- Very clearly lay out expectations for all parties, including assessment and evaluation.  
- If a match is made, use a written document with dates, times, orientations, etc.  
- Consider interviewing students before registration.  
- Set realistic goals and boundaries. |
| Not planning enough in advance (instructors with community partners and students; students with time management)  
- Communicate frequently and remember that better planning makes for better outcomes all around. | |
| Conduct, Liability, Policies | **Conduct:** Communicate directly with parties involved as soon as possible. When appropriate, instructor should contact Student Conduct.  

**Liability:**  
- See Liability guidelines in the next section  

**Policies:**  
- See Office of Service-Learning Policies section below.  
  To reiterate a few:  
  - No touching—includes sitting on laps, frontal hugging, grabbing a misbehaving child, braiding hair, etc.  
  - No Facebook friending with those community members served, e.g. K-12 students, agency clients, etc.  
  - No sharing of personal email addresses  
  
| Where can students go if they are uncomfortable with class, community partner, or project? | - Instructors, whenever possible, should be the first resource for students.  
  - If students do not feel comfortable with an instructor, they may contact the Office of Service-Learning for guidance.  
  - With students, define “safe space” during first contact and reiterate at the beginning of the semester.  
  - Communicate with students “you will feel discomfort” (This is expected to happen during the course and requires students to break out of their shell and try something new. With this they will feel discomfort! Reassure them that this is okay). Meet students where they are, not where you want or expect them to be.  
  - Set realistic boundaries for all parties. |
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<th>Lack of time for follow-through on evaluation.</th>
<th>• Communication; ask appropriate party (partner, student, service-learning scholar, Office of Service-Learning) to follow up with partners.</th>
<th>• Set expectations in advance and include it in the collaboration agreement. It is most helpful if everyone has a copy of the evaluation from the beginning so that they know what they are to evaluate.</th>
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<td>Lack of communication leads to duplication and appearance of disorganization; e.g. students handle something without the instructor’s knowledge, and the instructor contacts the partner for the same purpose.</td>
<td>• Communication among all parties to clarify what has been completed, what needs to be done, etc.—<em>sooner rather than later.</em></td>
<td>• Communicate with one another, and include as many details as possible in Stakeholder Expectations.</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
<td>• Oftentimes, departments will cover the cost of a vehicle if arrangements fall through. Communicate need to your partner(s). • Buddy students with transportation when possible.</td>
<td>• Make sure students know that transportation may be necessary; seek placements close to campus for those without cars; provide bus schedules or recommend the WMU app which includes the bus schedule. • Cover these needs in the pre-semester contact/interview with students; see Car Rental and Reimbursement Process below.</td>
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<td>Many departments are not supportive of those who do or want to do service-learning.</td>
<td>• Check with your department chair and/or dean to learn what the policy is in your area. • Advocate for universal teaching and learning expectations of service-learning.</td>
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