PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COMMUNITY PARTNER SUCCESS

1. **Remember, service learners are students first and foremost.** Supervisors must always keep in mind that not only do service learning students want to help meet important community needs, but they are also using the experience as the basis for understanding their college course. Students receive academic credit for learning through their service efforts. Your role would be to help students think about what the experience means to them, the organizational context, and overall societal issues and impacts.

2. **Plan ahead.** Clear, well thought-out service learning placement descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities, and skills needed must be prepared and given to the office of Academic Community Partnerships, the student and the course instructor. Often a fresh needs assessment with key staff will allow you to more effectively and creatively use service learners within the framework of your agency/school. Are there tasks that you and your staff are now doing that could be divided up and given to one or several students? Is there a project that you’ve always wanted to do but never had the time to organize? Positions that carry some degree of responsibility and involve client contact are ideal.

3. **Orient, train, supervise.** Students require carefully structured orientation to your agency/school, staff, and clients. This should answer such questions as “Where do I fit in? How do I get things done? What do I need to be aware of? What is expected of me? How do I get information/support if my supervisor is not available? What do I have to learn?” Introduce them to other staff, give them a tour of the facility, and make sure they feel comfortable and welcome. Students should also be familiarized with your mission and key community and societal issues facing your agency/school (i.e., “the bigger picture” – why you do what you do and how the student can contribute to this end). Please see the Orientation Checklist on Page 16.

4. **Be aware that some students may not match your needs. Be selective.** Although the university will refer student service learning candidates to your agency/school, the final selection will be made by you. If a student’s qualifications and/or motivations are not in harmony with your needs, it is your right and obligation to not accept this student.

5. **Be realistic with your time commitment expectations of students. Think academic term.** Remember that you will have to be aware of the academic schedule and adapt accordingly. (Offer training sessions early in the term and expect students only for a term.)

6. **Be an involved teacher and mentor for our students.** Throughout the assignment, the supervisor should help the student interpret the experience and the relationship between what he/she is doing and the work of the agency/school and others. The student-supervisor relationship is one of the most significant parts of the
student’s experience and often determines the success of the placement. The supervisor is truly a partner in the student’s education and should view himself or herself as an “educator.”

7. **Say thanks.** Like everyone, students want to be welcomed and appreciated. This may take many forms, either a letter of recognition, a thank you note, or a simple acknowledgment of a job well done. Students also need to see how their work is important to your agency/school’s mission. Ask the students how they’re doing and what can be improved upon.

8. **Talk to us.** Please keep the office of Academic Community Partnerships informed of any concerns, problems, successes, or other pertinent issues related to the placement and/or student. We are here to facilitate the entire process and ensure that all parties are satisfied.