

1.11 Teacher Tool Box- Project Partners



Importance of Project Partners

Identifying and collaborating with project partners is an essential component of the service-learning process. The selection of community partners, designated *Project Partners* is based on five key criteria.

- **Significance:** Not all projects can be undertaken, so priority is given to partners whose projects can provide the greatest benefit to the community. This is the reason for the extensive needs assessment to be completed by the students.
- **Level of Student expertise:** Projects must be challenging to, but within the capabilities of, the high school students and should align with core curriculum and standards. Remember we never want to promise a project to a community partner that cannot be delivered. It is better to scale back a project and deliver a quality smaller project than to commit to a huge undertaking and have it fail.
- **Expected Duration:** Projects that will span several semesters or even years offer the greatest opportunity for our students to participate in an extensive design experience. It has also proven valuable to have a mix of short- (one semester to one year) and long-term (multi-year) projects, in that the short-term projects build confidence and help establish the relationship between the student team and the community partner. If you are new to EPICS, it might be well to start with the smaller duration projects then move to more extensive projects as you, your students and the community partners build relationships.
- **Project Partner Commitment:** A crucial element of the program has been the commitment of individuals in the partner organizations to work with the students. Expectations of our partners include:
 - Meeting with the students multiple times per semester.
 - Responding via email or phone once every two to three weeks.
 - Agreement to assume the majority of liability for projects after completed and delivered.
 - Agreement to participate in the maintenance and service of delivered project.
 - Participation in project identification, requirement specification, and providing ongoing critical feedback.
- **Availability of appropriate students** – When working in a high school environment it is not always easy to attract and retain students over multiple semesters. Students have graduation requirements and college expectations. Because of that factor, the documentation of the project is of paramount importance with artifacts saved and possibly a class notebook created and archived. This will give important information to new students as they join an existing team and project. As you continue to expand your EPICS Program this documentation will become second nature and will help to provide the framework for a robust and continuing presence in the community.

Connection between Project and Community Partners

Project and community partners could be one in the same depending on your project and the needs in your community. A project partner is the main contact between your students and the stakeholders. They give important guidance to the needs of the stakeholders and also to the organization that may be serving in the community. The Community partner is usually a parent organization with the project partner working within that agency.

The Community Partners are usually a business or government agency which will have rules and regulations based on government policies or those created and enforced by the governing organization.

Example 1: You may be working with a park within your city. The community partner may be the park or the city while the project partner would be the contact person with whom you are working to implement the project.

Example 2: Your class may be working to design learning manipulatives for an elementary science classroom. Your project partner would be the teacher of the class, while the community partner would be the elementary school and the school district.