

# Engaging with Community

In this module we'll focus on developing the skills and dispositions necessary for engaging with the community in ways that are rooted in equity, respect, and meaningful impact.

## Engaging with Community Module Learning Outcomes

Through this module you will be able to...

1. Articulate the role of relationships in community engagement and identify dispositions that contribute to positive relationship formation
2. Identify the various considerations that should be applied prior to entering, engaging, or exiting communities
3. Examine the opportunities for and barriers to engaging in equitable partnerships
4. Reflect on opportunities to maintain engaged on a social issue after completing a community engaged experience

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## Let's Reflect

This discussion section is intended to let you reflect on your understanding of the community and/or social issue you'll be engaging with this semester. As well as what feelings you have about the experience. In the space below, reflect on any/all of the following questions:

- What do you know about the community or organization you'll be working with this semester?
  - Why are you engaging in this opportunity?
  - What do you think the community (the environment, as well as the people) will be like?
  - What do you expect your engagement with this community to be like? Easy? Challenging? Transformative? Why?
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## Entering the Community

*"Entering community" is a boring phrase. It's stripped of the humanity, complexity, and sacredness of it all. When you are entering a community you are entering someone's home, you are learning a history, and connecting with what matters to the people there.*

Before you even step foot in a community, it is important that you do some research, some planning, and lots of reflection. Showing up is important, but it is not enough. We must show up with intentionality, humility, and commitment. This means being clear about your intentions and forming relationships that lead to more impactful projects. It means checking your assumptions and acknowledging your limitations.

In this module we'll explore a number of skills and considerations you should keep in mind when working with communities. Remember, when we say "working" with a community, we mean every aspect of the experience - from forming the relationship, to establishing the goals of the project, and transitioning out of a community.

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## Defining Engagement

There are an infinite number of ways to engage with a community. You might be collaborating with a community partner to conduct community-based research, or perhaps you're offering pro bono legal counsel to refugees, or even interning with a local nonprofit. In all these experiences you may hold a different role, such as researcher, intern, volunteer, or collaborator. But despite your role, oftentimes you'll likely be a **guest** in someone else's community.

Prior to engaging with a community, it is important to take some time to **consider your role and how that role impacts your relationship** to the community or project. For example, as a volunteer you have less control over your experience. Generally a volunteer signs up to assist with very specific tasks. But if you're a researcher, you may have more power to shape the project in collaboration with the community. Thinking about our roles can also help us think about our why. That is to say, **why are you engaging with this community**, this issue? Reflecting on your intentions and motivations may seem obvious, but is often forgotten. **If our motivations are selfish or based in pity rather than solidarity, we run the risk of causing harm.**

In the following pages you'll have the opportunity to explore some common principles that guide how folks approach community engagement. As you're reading, think about the values you hold and how these various principles connect to your values.

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## The Morgridge Center's Community Standards for Service Learning

These standards outline what is expected of students who are engaging with community organizations through Morgridge Center programs. They were developed collaboratively with community partners in Madison.

For Students:

1. Work to understand social status, identity, and community strengths.
  2. Actively reflect on the experience and share reflections with agency staff.
  3. Commit to the organization's cause.
  4. Be self-directed and follow professional etiquette.
  5. Be responsible for institutional requirements and deadlines.
  6. Adapt to organization's scheduling and program framework.
  7. Keep line(s) of communication open throughout project.
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## Community-based Participatory Research Principles

These principles provide guidance on engaging communities in participatory research in a way that is focused on equity and centers the expressed needs on the community. They are based on a combination of two different lists, cited below.

The complete list of principles is as follows:

1. Recognizes community as a unit of identity.
2. Builds on strengths and resources within the community.
3. Facilitates a collaborative, equitable partnership in all phases of research, involving an empowering and power-sharing process that attends to social inequalities.
4. Fosters co-learning and capacity building among all partners.

5. Integrates and achieves a balance between knowledge generation and intervention for the mutual benefit of all partners.
6. Focuses on the local relevance of public health problems and on ecological perspectives that attend to the multiple determinants of health.
7. Involves systems development using a cyclical and iterative process.
8. Disseminates results to all partners and involves them in the wider dissemination of results.
9. Involves a long-term process and commitment to sustainability.
10. Openly addresses issues of race, ethnicity, racism, and social class, and embodies “cultural humility”.
11. Works to ensure research rigor and validity but also seeks to “broaden the bandwidth of validity” with respect to research relevance.

Sources: 1-9, Israel et al., 1998 and 2005; 10-11, Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008.

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## The Wingspread Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning

These principles were developed in the 1990s at a national conference after numerous consultations and conversations between community leaders, nonprofit staff, and higher ed staff. They aim to provide students and program leaders with a foundation for building high quality and sustainable service experiences.

An effective program...

1. engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
2. provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
3. articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
4. allows for those with needs to define those needs.
5. clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
6. matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
7. expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
8. includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
9. insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
10. is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

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## Values Reflection

Now that you've reviewed the various principles of engagement, look back at the lists and select one principle that resonated with you. Briefly describe why it resonated and what it might look like to utilize that principle when engaging with a community.

Also, share one value that is central to you and informs how you engage with others. Sometimes in the hectic pace of a semester or a project we can lose sight of our values. Reflect on how you can ensure you are routinely practicing that value when engaging with the community.

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## Intentionality and Project Management

The idea that planning and forethought is important to just about any sort of project you could think of probably isn't new information. Yet, it is not at all uncommon for students, well-intentioned community members, or faculty to come to a community with half of an idea, believing that the rest will come together in the moment. As we've seen in other modules, this approach is not only irresponsible, but it can also be harmful.

Engaging with a community requires us to be incredibly **intentional and thoughtful about our approach, goals, and relationships**. Some of you taking this module will be engaging with pre-established partners, while others may be pursuing an idea of their own and identifying potential community partners. Although both of these approaches have their differences, it is still important for both sorts of approaches to spend some time **reflecting** on their expectations and/or goals for engagement. Here's just a few questions you might consider pondering:

- What are my goals for this experience or project? In what ways do I want to work with the community? In what ways do I personally want to grow?
- Where is my idea for this project coming from? Did I think of this myself, or did I ask the community if this was something they wanted?
- What am I willing to compromise on if the community partner wants to take the project in a different direction?

# Project Management

For those of you managing your own projects, collaborations, or programs, a brief overview of project management may be a helpful tool. A project management approach to community engagement ensures a high level of intentionality and planning throughout the entire process. Here we'll just give a brief overview, but you can check out this [project management toolkit](#) to explore other useful resources.

## Goals and Timeline

When considering or starting a new project, think very intentionally about the goals you have. What is the desired outcome? What will success look like? If you're working with a community partner, it is a good idea to think through and set goals collaboratively. You should also consider your desired timeline for completion. You may not always follow the desired timeline, but it can be a useful benchmark. It is also important to think beyond the timeline, on how the project may be sustained and supported after you leave.

## Memorandum of Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is essentially a contract. It is intended to provide all parties with a comprehensive overview of their roles and expectations in a partnership. The tool can be helpful in clarifying the scope of a project, individual responsibilities and end goals. Not all partnerships or projects require an MOU to be successful, but it can be a helpful tool for projects with multiple collaborators. The UW Center for Collaborative Health Equity has more [information on and templates of MOUs](#).

## Communication and Feedback

Communication throughout the entirety of a project is essential. Early on in a project you should discuss communication expectations with your partners. How will feedback be collected throughout the process? Who should be communicated with if there are issues or questions? What is the preferred communication medium? How frequently should you meet to check-in and plan?

## Identifying your stakeholders

Identifying your stakeholders means to exhaustively consider all those who may be impacted, directly or indirectly, by a project or partnership. For example, say you are supporting a middle school in developing an outdoor garden. Some of the obvious

stakeholders might be teachers, students, and parents. But what about the groundskeeper who has to maintain the area or the dining hall employees who would source some produce from the garden? That's just a sampling of the many stakeholders for a seemingly simple project. Stakeholders, as primary users of a project or program, are essential for providing feedback and ensuring the project is useful to those who are supposed to use it.

## Planning for Closure

When your time with a project ends, that does not necessarily mean the project itself ends. Always be considerate of how the project can be sustained after you leave. If you are establishing a program and you know it will be handed off to another staff member when you leave, consider writing up an overview of how the program functions or lessons learned. If you're conducting research, how can you ensure that the community who was the subject of the research is made aware of the findings and how the research will or could be utilized? Consider planning for evaluation opportunities so that future efforts can have an idea of what worked or didn't.

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## The Role of Relationships

### Community Engagement *is* Relationships

Relationships are the absolute backbone of community engagement. **They are the most essential piece and are key to a successful project and experience.** The relationships you form may look different if you're working with a nonprofit director, or tutoring a ten-year-old, or engaging with a research group, but the importance of relationships remains the same. Community engagement requires us to work in collaboration and understand one another's experience and goals. It requires vulnerability and humility, commitment and compassion. If we do not cultivate meaningful relationships, we're likely not producing a meaningful experience for either party.

**It is important to establish relationships throughout every aspect of a community engaged experience**, from (and often even before) the planning, to the implementation, evaluation and the sustaining of a project. I could go on and on praising the value of relationships, but just listen to folks from the community tell you.

[Relationships and Community Engagement Video](#)

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## What is an Equitable Relationship

### What is Equity?

Before we discuss equitable relationships, let's start with defining **equity**. Equity can often be confused with the concept of equality. Equality is the idea that everyone is given the same level of resources or support. Equity, on the other hand, recognizes that everyone has different needs and works to provide the resources necessary so that each individual can succeed.

### So what does this mean for community engagement?

Equitable community engagement acknowledges the reality that historically, many communities and groups of people have been excluded from conversations about issues that directly impact their communities. It has been far too common that outsider groups enter a community with preconceived ideas about what a community needs, positioning themselves in charge of the project and rarely accounting for, let alone integrating, the voice of those most impacted.

By striving for equitable relationships, we are working to ensure that all voices are heard and that the voices of those actually impacted by the project or services are given greater weight. This means cultivating authentic and strong relationships built on **trust and accountability**, not showing up to be voyeurs of poverty. It means showing up to **act in collaboration and solidarity**, not from a space of self-interest or superiority. It requires us to bring the community into every aspect of a project, so that ownership is shared and the benefits are dispersed amongst all involved.

Consider this quote: "Nothing about us, without us, is for us." This quote has a rich history and has been prominently used in disability advocacy groups to push for the voices of folks with disabilities to be included in the policy making process. Many other local community organizations point to the quote before engaging in research projects with academics. Remember, if the goal of a project is to help and be used by a community, the community needs to be fully integrated into the process.

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## Practicing Cultural Humility

Are you familiar with the term **Cultural Competency**? Maybe you've taken a "cultural competency" training or attended a diversity and inclusion workshop. While that learning is certainly important, let's think more critically about the term "competency." It may make sense to gain competency regarding technical skills like using Excel or grant writing, but suggesting one can become *competent* regarding not just one culture, but many cultures is quite a leap. Even if we think we have a strong understanding of a culture or a group of people, we are likely never fully competent.

**Cultural Humility** on the other hand is a much more appropriate term. The term doesn't treat learning about others like a checklist, where you read a chapter on the Hmong community and cross it off your list, for example. Cultural Humility asks us to recognize that we'll never know everything, but what we can do is be open to learning. Specifically, **cultural humility asks us to recognize the many different ways of living in, experiencing, and understanding the world and not assign value to those different methods.** Without sounding too corny, it asks us to recognize the beauty and complexity of the world we live in and to approach it with a sense of humility and open-mindedness.

The history of this term actually stems from Public Health literature and this video below of the original scholars, Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García (1998), does a pretty great job of explaining it. View the clip and engage with the questions throughout.

[Tervalon and Murray-Garcia Discuss Cultural Humility](#)

Reflection questions:

1. What is the history of you? How does that history shape how you experience the world?
2. What might an inequitable distribution of power look like in the context of community engagement associated with the university?
3. What does it look like to model accountability? What have you done in the past when you recognize you made a mistake or caused someone unintentional harm?

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## Communication

COmmunicate. COllaborate. COmmunity.

In community engagement, like with most things in life, communication is key (they do share the same prefix after all, *com-* means together). Successful communication is necessary to develop and sustain relationships.

In this section we'll focus on three components of communication. It's about **how you speak**, as well as **how you listen**, and **how you show up to community**.

## How you speak

We're using "*speak*" broadly here. It's not about your accent or slang. We're talking about everything from how and when you send emails, to the way you communicate your ideas and feelings, and the tone of voice and language you use when talking with people. To break it down into some key points...

DO	DON'T
DO speak/call/email your community partner frequently and in advance, especially as it relates to absences	DON'T email your community partner about missing your shift an hour before you're scheduled
DO listen sincerely and actively when engaging with others	DON'T look down at your phone or dominate the space with your voice
DO speak with respect, clarity, and patience	DON'T speak in a condescending or academic jargon-y way
DO make sure your language/messaging is accessible (i.e. printing posters in multiple languages)	DON'T assume everyone speaks/reads English

## How you listen

Listening is one of the most essential but underdeveloped skills in our society. How we listen to people matters. We all long to be heard but rarely do we truly allow ourselves to hear others. Do not assume your ideas are the only correct ones. Do not be dismissive of others' feelings or experiences. We'll talk more about **active listening** in the next section, but remember that "hearing" alone is not enough. To listen means to actually consider the other's viewpoint and honor their reality.

## How you show up to community

Simply *being there* is not enough. The attitude you bring with you to your site, whether you're standoffish, inauthentic, or uninterested shows. Recognize the commitment you are making and show up to it with energy and sincerity. It takes effort and is not always easy, but it goes a very long way in nurturing strong relationships. We also take this to mean that you need to show up regularly and on time. If you signed up for something, barring extenuating circumstances, you should make every effort to follow through. If you know you are going to be absent, communicate that to your partner as far in advance as possible.

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## Active Listening

When was the last time you truly felt listened to? Is that how you listen to others?

Active Listening is a crucial skill that cannot only improve your ability to engage with community, but also help you communicate better with others in your life. Listening is hard. Oftentimes when we listen, what we're doing is actually listening just enough so that we can figure out how to respond to another person, to figure out what story we have to share or what our opinion on the topic is. While this has its use at certain times, the art of active listening is especially useful for building and deepening relationships. **Rather than listening to respond, the goal is to listen to understand.** It involves **reflecting back what you're hearing** to ensure clarity. It is not trying to give advice or redirect, it is letting the speaker voice their feelings or thoughts **authentically**. Check out this video below to see what active listening can sound like.

[Brené Brown on Empathy video](#)

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## Communication Reflection

What is one weakness you have related to communication? How can you work to improve upon that weakness and engage in communication that promotes the cultivation of equitable relationships?

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## Leaning into Discomfort

Community engagement can be an incredibly exciting and rewarding experience, but for many it is also riddled with fear and concern. Some may find themselves nervous that they'll say the wrong thing or worry that they'll seem silly or awkward. These are all normal and common feelings. Simply encouraging you to embrace the discomfort probably won't solve all of your concerns, but perhaps it can reframe them. None of us are perfect or all-knowing. None of us are as cool as others might think we are.

**Learning requires us to be uncomfortable**, it is through that discomfort that we become open to new ideas and experience changes within us. That doesn't mean you won't make mistakes - you will, and we all do. But it does mean that those mistakes become opportunities for deeper learning. If you were perfect, you wouldn't need to take this class. Even if you're confident, it doesn't mean that confidence is earned. In fact, you're better off being a bit timid and allowing yourself to learn, rather than being so confident you think you can do no wrong.

Simply put, community engagement can be uncomfortable and that's okay, but do your best to lean into that discomfort and be open to learning. Ask yourself where that discomfort might be coming from. Consider how that discomfort shows up to those you are working with. Pay attention to what eases your discomfort.

"The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into our awareness"

- Lao Tzu, Chinese philosopher

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## Learning from mistakes

### Let's Talk Microaggressions

Nowadays there seems to be a lot of fear about saying the wrong thing. This is especially common in community engagement where individuals worry that they will unintentionally say something offensive. **Microaggressions are one of the common ways in which we might slip up, or even let our biases show.** They can be formally defined as, "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or

negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups" (Derald Wing Sue, 2010).

As socialized beings we often pick up on a lot of internalized messages and language about what or who is normal or right. Oftentimes **these ideas are built upon a history of oppression and harm**. Changes in law, like the abolition of slavery, did not simply eradicate racism and marriage equality did not end homophobia. These ideas about who is deserving of rights and equality are not just built into our policies and laws, they are built into our language and the way we interact with others. They can have far reaching consequences and cause people harm. Check out the video below to learn more about microaggressions before we connect them to community engagement **(content warning: depiction of police violence)**.

[Fusion Comedy video on Microaggressions](#)

## Learning from Mistakes

As mentioned above, one of the most common fears folks have when they begin engaging with communities with which they are unfamiliar is that they will say something wrong. And it's a valid fear, because it happens all of the time! **We constantly make mistakes because we are all always learning**. No one could possibly know every microaggression or navigate through life without ever making mistakes, it's part of being human. So although we can't always prevent mistakes, **we can control how we react to mistakes**.

Oftentimes when we accidentally offend someone - perhaps we make a poorly timed joke or unknowingly use an offensive term - we become overwhelmed with guilt. We can become profusely apologetic and ashamed, so much so that the situation becomes more about us than the person impacted. Or, on the other hand, we could throw up our defenses! Exclaiming, "That wasn't what I meant!", "You're overreacting!" This response doesn't help either and just invalidates someone else's experience.

Here's some suggestions, from a [Huffpost article from Pooja Kothari](#), for ways you can respond if you learn or realize you have committed a microaggression or offended someone.

### 1. Intent vs Impact

For the most part, we rarely intend to cause harm to someone. But our intentions don't stop harm from happening. If someone is hurt by something you said, it doesn't matter

what your intentions were, the harm has already happened. **So own up to the impact and recognize that you caused another person harm.**

## 2. Throw Away Your Defenses

Our defenses and diversions often stem from our own discomfort. Having to learn of and be accountable to harm you committed doesn't make anyone feel good. We don't want to be seen as a bad person. Owning up to our impact and listening to the person we harmed **takes a great deal of vulnerability**, which means letting down your defenses.

## 3. Embrace the Learning

Being accountable to the impact you have on others also means **learning about how to be a better person**. When someone is willing enough to inform you of the way in which your words or actions impacted them we should be grateful. This can be an opportunity for further learning and improve how we relate to people later on in our lives.

## 4. Move Forward

Don't dwell on the past. If you've talked out the occurrence with the person involved, there's no need to keep bringing it up. Move on and **take the knowledge gained from the experience with you.**

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## Community Voice

We've talked a lot about relationships and how to work in collaboration and solidarity with the community. One phrase that has been thrown around is the idea of **community voice**. Community voice can take many forms. It can be the voices and experiences of the members of a community or the clients of an organization. It could be the statements put out by leadership of local organizations or outspoken community members. It could be the poems of teens in an after school program. For the sake of our community engagement, it might be helpful to think of community voice this way:

*"the voices of people most impacted by a given program or service [that] should be heard and understood [in the planning and implementation of a project/service]"*

- Dahnes Medora with the [Meyer Memorial Trust in Oregon](#) (2019)

Similar to the quote we discussed earlier, "Nothing about us without us is for us," community voice is the integration of those impacted by a program or service into the planning of the program. Depending on the project you're working on, community voice may not always be easy to find or consider. Especially during a global pandemic when a lot of work is done remotely. This is why it is important to be very intentional about planning for ways to listen to the community and solicit their input and involvement in a project that impacts them.

One space in which we can better listen to community voice, even before engaging in a project, is reading our local newspapers. Madison is home to a number of local publications such as the Cap Times or Isthmus, as well as papers written by and for certain Madison communities, like Hues (folks of color in Madison), Our Lives (Madison LGBTQ+ community), or the Badger Herald (UW students). Through engaging with local news sources (in print or online) you can better learn about the community you will be working with, as well as what topics or issues are relevant to them. These sources are great because they often interview a variety of people, to get perspectives from the average citizen, nonprofit leaders, or city officials. They look at topics and issues occurring right in your backyard.

## Dig Deeper

Want to learn more about the value of local news? Check out this episode of Hidden Brain, [Starving the Watchdogs](#).

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## Community Voice Activity

1. You're on a research team for a community-engaged research project studying the health impacts of a waste site located in a low-income neighborhood. For this project you're working in collaboration with an environmental nonprofit located on the other side of town from the neighborhood. Which of the options below would be the best for integrating community voice into your research process?
  - a. An advisory board of members of the impacted neighborhood
  - b. Executive Directors of the waste site
  - c. Employees of the nonprofit partner
  - d. A day tabling outside of a local grocery store to get survey responses
2. What is your reaction to the quote, "Nothing about us without us is for us"? What connection does the quote have to community engagement?
3. How do you get most of your news about the Madison community? Do you get any? Why might it be important for you to get acquainted with local news when working with a new community?

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## Flexibility and Adaptability

In community engagement, you never really know what could happen. Take the COVID pandemic for instance. Back in 2020, very few of us could have imagined that we'd still be dealing with this virus and that our world would look entirely different. Very few of us were prepared for the monumental shifts we would have to make in order to ensure the safety of our communities. Now think about what that may have meant for folks involved in supporting their communities. Consider the speed and urgency with which organizations like food pantries and homeless shelters had to implement policies and adjust programming (all while managing shifts in their personal lives as well).

A pandemic may be an extreme example, but it is emblematic of the importance of flexibility and adaptability within community engagement. **Projects will not always go according to plan**, you will run into obstacles, needs will shift, and often you will have to go with the flow. The things we've discussed, like **communication and relationships, are especially useful** to ensure that changes and adaptations can be met with confidence and strategy.

The point here is to say, **expect the unexpected**. You may have signed up to do a specific task with an organization and find out when you arrive that you are needed elsewhere because of a staffing shortage. Do your best to be okay with those changes and recognize that those in charge are adapting to best meet the needs of their clients or organization. Be ready to think on your feet and consider new ideas and solutions.

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## Scenario Activity

In the following activity you will be given one scenario regarding community engagement experiences. Consider the scenario and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

### Scenario #1

You are a second-year masters student in nonprofit leadership. For your capstone in the degree you are required to partner with a local nonprofit to complete a project that meets a community-identified need. You've been working in collaboration with a local nonprofit that focuses on youth education to expand and assess a tutoring program. A month into the semester your staff partner informs you that he will be transitioning out of his position within the next two weeks to take a job across the country. In your time together you've established a structure for the project and formed important initial relationships, however, your partner's

sudden departure leaves you feeling frazzled and severely alters what may be possible for the project.

How does this departure impact your project and its original timeline? It's likely the project won't be completed by the end of the semester. What steps might you take to readjust the project in a way that is still useful to the community partner? What information might you want to make sure you can get from your partner before he leaves? What other considerations should be made? Who else should you be talking to/working with?

## Scenario #2

You are a third-year undergraduate assisting a professor with a community-based participatory research project focused on the effectiveness of a public health intervention model intended for Black women. Your research team has partnered with a local nonprofit focused on access to health services and with a history of outreach to this population. After one of your early meetings with your research team and the staff of the nonprofit partner organization, you are hanging around in the nonprofit building, waiting for your bus.

A Black woman approaches you, asking if you're from the university. You answer yes and briefly explain your intention to do research with the nonprofit. The woman appears annoyed and begins to explain that you and your research team are not welcome in the community. She says that she is sick of elitist university folks coming into her community and treating her friends and family like lab rats. She explains that researchers are often condescending and rude and never really share the results of the research, just ask their questions and leave. You're in shock and don't know how to respond, but the woman walks away before you really even have a chance.

What do you do with this new information? Who do you share it with and how does it shape your project? The woman's concerns are valid, what will you do to address them? What actions do you think the professor and research team should have taken beforehand to better prepare students and the community for this project?

## Scenario #3

You are the president of a student organization that promotes physical activity and health literacy with elementary school children. Your organization has been partnered with a community center for a few years now and provides classes and activities to children who attend the community center after school. Your members have really strong relationships with the children and your activities and classes have become an essential component of the community center's programming.

Imagine that you are the president of this organization when COVID hits. Let's say the community center remained open to support families that needed child care but they had to rethink a lot of their programming to ensure physical distancing and child safety. For you, all of your university courses moved online and some of your student organization members moved home. What ideas come to mind for how you might still be able to continue supporting the community center during this time? How might you approach conversations with community center staff?

#### Scenario #4

Houa is a director of a local nonprofit. You're the professor of a CBL class in computer science that has been working on developing a software program for the organization that will allow them to better track client engagement. Around week 5 of the class, Houa hears students talking about the program they're developing. Although you had given students pretty clear directions on the specifications of the program, from what Houa heard, it sounds like students are taking the project in a slightly different direction, the problem however is that Houa is concerned this new direction may not be compatible with their dated technological resources, nor do they have staff knowledgeable on how to upkeep such a program.

In your monthly check-in meeting with Houa, this issue is brought up. You can tell Houa is pretty hesitant to bring up this issue. She has enjoyed having the students around and has seen them working hard on the program. But she's been a bit overwhelmed hearing them talk about it. With her limited technical background and the organization's limited staffing, she's afraid she'll struggle to fully integrate the software.

It's mid-October, so students are in a bit of a rhythm and changes to the project might stress out students. But, there should be time to adjust the project. The question is, how might you work with students to adjust the project to better meet Houa's and the organization's needs? Are there additional or supplemental outcomes you could consider adding? It seems that this whole discussion might reveal areas of opportunity for future partnership. What are your thoughts?

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## The Role of Reflection

Reflection is one of the most crucial pieces of community engagement. Throughout these modules you've had to think about ideas like self-awareness, our understandings of service and motivations for engaging with communities. You won't find answers to these questions in books. These topics are all internal. They require you to do some digging, some processing about yourself.

As you engage with communities and different social issues, you will learn a lot of different things. Some will relate to your course material and some won't, but it's all valuable. But reflection doesn't just happen. It requires seriously taking time to allow yourself to think, feel, and react. Some people write, others draw, or talk out loud. Whatever works for you, do it. **Reflection is a life skill** and will always look different, but here are some questions to get you thinking:

- As I'm engaging with community, what am I witnessing? How does it compare with the assumptions I had about this experience?
- Why are people interested in the project/group I'm working with?
- Why does this issue exist? How can it be prevented?
- What values am I using to guide my experience? How do those values show up in the way I interact with others?
- How do I stay involved in this issue when I am no longer a part of this class?

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## Exiting the Community

As the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. Community engaged courses and projects all have their own lifespans. While some of you will complete your required number of hours working with students, others may work towards publishing their findings from a community-based research project. No two project endings look the same, but it is important that you be conscious of how and when you want your experience to end in order to ensure communities still receive partnerships that are impactful and equitable.

Far too often, students or faculty from the university drop their community partners and projects once they've reached their desired goal. For example, an education student may have spent a semester working with a local elementary schooler, but once they complete their required hours simply drop communication with the student and the volunteer site. Or perhaps a group of researchers conducted ample focus groups with community members to understand a local issue, but once they had their findings they left without sharing the findings with the impacted community. These are examples of poor and disrespectful ways to end community-based experiences.

While you may not be able to stay committed to a project or a community partner once the semester ends, there are ways you can exit a community that are respectful and beneficial. Here are a few examples:

- **Plan a handoff** - consider how you can close out your experience with a community in a useful way. Perhaps someone new may come in to take the

reins or the community will become owners of the project. Prepare information and materials that can be handed off to those involved to maintain continuity of understanding.

- **Support sustainability** - oftentimes projects end because funding runs out or staffing resources change. From the beginning it is important to consider the sustainability of a project. What can be done to further engage the community as stakeholders so that they can take over the initiative once the project reaches a certain end point? How can resources be shared or secured to support the project in the long run?
- **Recognition** - Communities are not the only ones who benefit from strong partnerships. In many ways, community-based projects provide students, staff, and faculty with innumerable rewards and benefits (i.e. increased learning, publishable research, etc). It is important to recognize the work of community partners in supporting university-oriented goals. Consider recognition in the form of compensation for community partner time, awards, credit in publishing of research, or publicity.
- **Assessment** - In each project, there is always room for improvement and growth. Ensure that you are building assessment into your experience to consider ways to improve the project in the future and allow community partners to provide feedback that shapes the experience.

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## Staying Engaged

Reaching the end of a community engaged experience can be bittersweet. While it can be exciting to finish a project or see a student you tutored graduate, we may often still find ourselves newly passionate about an issue and unsure what to do now. Although your engagement with a community or project may end with the completion of a semester, it does not mean we cease being engaged citizens. In fact, the hope is that you find ways to **stay engaged with your community and issues that matter to you outside of the classroom**. The hope is that you keep learning and considering ways you can work with those around you and build a better world.

If you built a great relationship with a community partner but can't commit to after school hours next semester, **talk with your site supervisor to ask about other opportunities**. Consider other organizations that connect to issues you care about. Research organizations that may have virtual engagement opportunities. Consider internship opportunities! There are so many ways to stay engaged beyond the

semester. Organizations are often looking for consistent volunteers and reliable support, so don't be afraid to ask about such opportunities.

[The Pathways of Public Service model](#) is another way to consider how you can stay engaged. You could take another course (community-based learning), advocate for policy change (community organizing), donate what you're able (philanthropy), vote or run for office. There are so many ways to make a difference and engage in your community and we hope you feel empowered to do so!