A GUIDE FOR PARTNERS: COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

Community engaged learning provides students and partners the opportunity to collaborate on real world questions. Students bring learning from their degree and apply it to questions posed by community partners. This also provides the opportunity for students to learn from local knowledge.

By bridging academic knowledge with hands-on experience, students gain valuable skills while working on community-based questions. At the same time, community partners benefit from fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, fostering mutual benefits for both students and community partners.

Community engaged learning is a collaborative process, where students and community partners work together to co-create knowledge and solutions through coproduction.
Aims of community engaged learning include:

- Bridging theory and practice
  Students apply what they learn in the classroom to tackle real-world questions.
- Valuing local expertise
  Community partners bring deep knowledge of their own contexts, helping shape meaningful and impactful activity.
- Enhancing student learning
  By combining academic insights with the lived experience of community partners, students can gain a richer, more well-rounded education.

At Bristol our community engaged learning activity is underpinned by 6 values

KEY VALUES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

1

Mutually beneficial, reciprocal and collaborative

Opportunities must be collaborative and of mutual benefit for all stakeholders

2

Empowering

Unequal power dynamics between stakeholders should be recognised and challenged. Academic, local, students and partner knowledge are all of equal value.

3

Diverse and inclusive

Working with a diverse range of organisations, communities and individuals enables richer more inclusive projects with deeper innovative and creative research outcomes.

4

Respect, trust, and openness

All stakeholders should work towards building trust and to encourage openness.

5

Contribute to social justice

Community engaged learning should provide all stakeholders the opportunity to better understand and address social justice issues.

6

Transformational and intellectually stimulating

Community engaged learning opportunities should strive to be positively transformational and intellectually stimulating for all stakeholders.

What are the Benefits for Community Partners Engaging in the Community-Engaged Learning Programme?

- A creative approach to a question or problem based on the latest academic thinking.
- Fresh insight into an area of potential interest.

Project Results

Project results will be shared with community partners, as outlined and agreed upon in the Partnership Engagement Agreement. Please keep in mind that outcomes may vary, and while we aim to produce valuable insights, there is no guarantee that the project will achieve specific goals or results that are immediately useful.

Timeline and Commitment Levels

Community engaged learning activities vary in length, depending on the course and student involvement. Below is a general guide:

Project Type	Duration	Partner Commitment
Short-term Engagement	1-2 weeks (eg: Sprint Challenges)	Light involvement (briefing, one check-in)
Term-long Projects	8-12 weeks (one academic term)	Medium-Higher Involvement (regular check-ins, ongoing collaboration, feedback sessions)

Typical steps in a community engaged learning activity

Get Contacted by an Academic or See an Opportunity Advertised

An academic from the University may contact you to explore a potential collaboration or you may come across an advertised opportunity that interests you. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to fill in a project proposal and due diligence form. You will receive information outlining key dates, expected contact points to engage with students (eg: initial meeting, mid-project check-in, and final presentation), feedback mechanisms and sign a Project Engagement Agreement document outlining roles and responsibilities.

Running the Opportunity

As the activity progresses, you will need to meet the students, provide them with the relevant materials, background and insights to create a meaningful project. Provide feedback on students' progress, address any challenges or changes in project needs and encourage reflection and learning for students.

Project Conclusion

At the conclusion of the project, you will receive a previously agreed final output, such as a report, presentation or other outputs. You will also have the opportunity to participate in student evaluation and feedback to help shape their learning.

Evaluation

Your input is invaluable! We encourage you to share feedback on your experience collaborating with students at the University of Bristol. Your insights will help enhance future activity and strengthen university-community partnerships.

Roles and Responsibilities

Community Partners (You!)

- Define the project scope by providing students with a clear idea of the problem or opportunity they will address.
- Offer insights and guidance to support students with expertise, resources, and real-world context.
- Set clear expectations by communicating preferred ways of working, deadlines, and practical considerations.
- Engage in regular communication and be available for check-ins (agreed upon) and provide timely feedback.
- Evaluate the project outcome by reflecting on the experience and offer feedback to the University.

Students

- Engage with the project professionally.
- Apply academic knowledge to real-world challenges by using research, skills, and analysis to support the partner's needs.
- Meet deadlines and communicate effectively.
- Be open to feedback and learning.

Academics

- Facilitate the collaboration by matching students with partners and ensure smooth engagement.
- Provide academic guidance and supervision to help students connect their coursework to real-world application.
- Offer logistical and administrative support to ensure agreements, safeguarding, and risk management etc. are in place.
- Collect feedback for continuous improvement to assess the impact for both students and partners.

Realistic Project Scopes and Deliverables

Scope Definition: What makes a good project?

- √ Clearly defined problem or question.
- √ Discussion between academic and partner to ensure the question fits within the students' academic knowledge, timeframe and contributes towards intended learning outcomes of unit or programme.
- √ Realistic expectations regarding deliverables (e.g., students can't fully implement a solution but can provide research or insights and recommendations).
- √ Support from the partner, with enough time allocated for engagement.

What Students CANNOT Do

- χ Conduct high-risk or legally sensitive work, such as handling confidential data or make any financial decisions.
- χ Solve deeply complex issues without proper guidance.
- χ Work independently without communication and supervision.
- χ Guarantee immediate, fully implementable solutions.
- χ Operate outside the agreed project scope.

Tips for a Successful Partnership

1. **Be clear about your needs:** Ensure students understand what you want from the project.
2. **Communicate proactively:** Regular check-ins keep projects on track.
3. **Encourage creativity and initiative:** Give students room to think critically and propose solutions.
4. **Provide constructive feedback:** Help students improve and grow from the experience.

See the My Bristol website for examples for inspiration.