

Best Practices: Partnering with New Communities

Tennessee Arts Commission - Teaching Artists 2024

Lynda's Group:

- Go into a community you are interested in, meet people in the organization, introduce yourself, and connect with people – the community, including the staff and leaders. Knock on doors – be bold, try cold calls!
- Bring joy and respect to all in the community - from clients, staff, administrators. Make friends, share yourself, smile – you will always get a smile and warmth back when you give it.
- Listen to others in the community - from the participants to the leaders - and hear what their needs and interests are.
- As a teaching artist, focus on the needs and interests of the community through your own artform.
- Use your “6th sense” when meeting new people to see how best to meet them where they are and make them comfortable.
- If you are interested in involving yourself in a new community - show up, volunteer to get a better feeling for their interests and needs. Be social, connect with others.
- Understand the structure and ‘rules’ of the community. Ask questions, observe closely.
- Be open minded to ideas and people you may not have interacted with before – be curious. This is the essence of all learning.
- If you are interested in the community and the opportunity, make it happen. Help others help themselves.
- Find one person in the organization to begin a relationship with.
- Share your own professional arts practice with the community.
- Our time is valuable - spend it in ways that are meaningful to ourselves and others.

Vinny's Group:

- Be open, curious and enthusiastic.
- Manage expectations early on. Don't overburden your community or partner right away. Know that you will need to adjust your expectations as you go.
- Be welcoming and create a welcoming environment. Don't put pressure on people or go right into a “sales pitch”.
- Share the work you're doing. Invite people into the process. Make the community aware of the program.
- Leverage the community you have. What network do you already have? How can they help introduce you to others, or get you connected to the folks you want to work with or serve?
- Consider it a long term relationship. Think about planting the seeds of sustainability early on. Invest some time and energy.
- Be genuine.

- Make everyone you meet feel important and heard. And don't just make them feel that way, actually treat them that way too!
- Be clear about what you want and how you plan to achieve it.
- Be present.
- Be creative in your approach. Be flexible.
- Keep communication lines open. Check in regularly with your partners.
- Be open to input and feedback along the way. Be ready to change.

Asma's Group:

- When entering new communities, make an effort to take the time to learn who all the stakeholders are. That could include caregivers, administration, participants and even the maintenance and reception staff. This might require participating in some community activities at the site, as well as a planning meeting with the activities director.
- Make sure to ask questions about the site's needs and what the facility has to offer in terms of space.
- Be willing to make adaptations to suit the site's needs.
- Enter with humility and reserve any judgment.
- Do research on site and population before you go as well... google it.

Jade's Group:

- Have prior visit(s) to the organization. This will help you to feel warmer each time you visit.
- Speak with the director or program director. Then ask to be directed to the right people. It is extremely helpful to meet in person.
- Communication is key - both verbal and body language are important.
- Be sincere, have the right attitude, be on time when working together. This can help build trust.
- Show respect, be friendly. Smiles are powerful!
- Get to know people who work there such as receptionists, lunch workers etc. They are very helpful in pointing out small things that may help a great deal in running the classes.
- Have a list of questions ready to be asked - general schedule, layout, table arrangement, location of sinks etc.
- To work well together, try to understand each other's needs and be honest. This can reduce uncertainty.
- Be flexible, learn from mistakes, and do not assume things - always ask questions.

Rhynna's Group:

- SP: Dedicar mucho tiempo a la comunidad: Conocerlos y familiarizarse con su dinámica.

EN: (Spend time within the community: Foster understanding and familiarity with their dynamics.)

- SP: Cultiva relaciones sólidas: Particularmente con los padres al trabajar con jóvenes.
EN: (Build strong relationships - particularly with parents when working with youth.)

- Adquiere habilidades de first aid y CPR.
EN: (Learn first aid and CPR)

- SP: Involúcrate activamente, anima y acomoda a los miembros de la comunidad, fomentando un espíritu de participación.

EN: (Actively engage, encourage, and accommodate community members, while fostering a spirit of participation... & Dance!)

- SP: Inicia contacto con personas que posean un profundo conocimiento de la comunidad:

EN: (At the start, connect with those who have institutional knowledge and experience with the community, and who know the physical space.)

- SP: Respeta los descansos y evita interrumpir las comidas o periodos de descanso.

EN: (Don't approach people while they are eating or resting, give people proper breaks.)

- SP: Prioriza la comunicación efectiva y la colaboración entre artistas y organizaciones

EN: (Work towards strong communication and collaboration between artists and host organizations.)

- SP: Mantente adaptable a planes evolutivos y preferencias de la comunidad.

EN: (Be ready to change your plans: you might come in with one plan in mind, and learn that the host or community wants something different.)

- SP: Prioriza la contribución de los estudiantes y adapta los métodos de enseñanza en consecuencia.

EN: (Listen to your students and be flexible to their needs; this is about what they want to learn.)

- SP: Reconoce las capacidades de los estudiantes y evita subestimarlos.

EN: (Don't underestimate your learners.)

- SP: Conduce una investigación exhaustiva de antemano: Comprende la demografía e intereses de la audiencia.
- SP: Identifica los temas clave para la discusión o actividad.
EN: (Research in advance: Who is the audience? What is the main topic to address? What are the ages of the participants?)