GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING SERVICE LEARNING COMMUNITY PARTNER PLACEMENTS

Our Model:
We operate on a service learning partnership model. Our program seeks to build reciprocal relationships with organizations where they provide learning opportunities for our students, while our students contribute their academic expertise to the placement organization. (e.g. Placement work should not consist solely of routine, clerical work.) Placements allow community partners to benefit from access to bright, inquiring minds to enhance their programming.

Placement Criteria: Some questions to ask yourself

Applicants
What kind of placement student(s) does the Community Partner need? They should think carefully about this and be honest about the type of applicants they would and would not consider. Is there is minimum level of experience? A certain GPA? A specific discipline they would like the student to be from?

Placement Tasks and Interactions
UTSC students value opportunities to exercise subject matter knowledge gained in the academic classroom in a meaningful, relevant context. It is also valuable to have them exposed to the current needs of communities and the approaches being employed to meet these needs. The project or work should be reasonable, given the length of the semester (approximately 10-12 weeks) and the weekly amount of time the student has to contribute to it (on average, 5-7 hours per week) since students have other courses and responsibilities.

Typical activities can include supporting the organization’s programming and/or projects, developing materials, or other activities. Interaction with people - be it peers, colleagues, fellow volunteers or the community they are serving - tends to be important to students.

Placement descriptions should be specific, with enough detail so applicants have a good idea of what they will be doing,

Examples: “The chosen applicant will
- be part of a team that develops chemistry learning modules for Grade 7 - 8 students”
- assist in creating a brochure that describes what our organization does”
- input research project data into our database”
- do literature searches to monitor new developments in our field of study”
- be provided with an orientation session and a safety training module”
- be asked to write bi-weekly one-page reports”
The Organization

Status
Non-profit organizations are good partners for us, but it's not absolutely necessary for our purposes. We are looking for partners who can provide our students with broad learning opportunities, e.g. understanding community issues, beyond making a profit.

Supervision
Ideally, the organization has a placement supervisor and/or a volunteer program/coordinator. People in these roles are used to supervising and taking care of volunteers. Also, it's important that this supervisor/coordinator understands our SLO program and the requirements of the CTLB03 course, e.g. our timelines (term dates), deadlines, the level of our students’ abilities, hrs/wk students have to offer, that the placement activity is for a U of T course where student are graded and have assignments, and what is covered in class. Also, it should be understood that placement students are getting academic credit for their placement (e.g. are not paid).

Lastly, does the organization and supervisor/leader have a genuine interest in teaching/guiding/sharing, imparting knowledge, etc? This is ideal, though not required.

Applications:

i) Turnaround Time
Once we forward applications to a community organization, we ask that they say yes or no fairly quickly, although we realize this may be challenging for them. Understandably organizations like to have multiple applications in order to choose the best student, and we will try to send several or all applications at the same time, if possible. However, our administrative process allows students to apply to only one placement at a time, and they must wait for an answer from one application before they can apply to another. So, if they are not accepted by one organization they will likely want to apply for another placement or course. The longer the student has to wait for an answer, the less likely it is that they will get into another placement/course and many/most students need to have a full course load for grants, scholarships, professional school eligibility, etc.

ii) Selection
Community organization placement supervisors get to choose from any applicants that we forward to them. They never have to work with a student they do not want, nor do they have to choose any of the applicants at all. The community partner should also be aware that there might not be any applications for the placement. It happens sometimes, and if it does, we still hope to have a partnership with the organization to try again in a subsequent semester.

Location
It is useful for our students if the outreach organization is located in or near the 'East End'. However, this is not absolutely necessary. Some students are prepared to travel to downtown locations for the right placement.
Administrative Issues

Training/Support
Does the organization provide some kind of training (especially safety training) or orientation for placement students? The organization is responsible for needed safety training.

Workplace Insurance
Does the organization provide workplace insurance for placement students? (If not, UT can provide this, but we need to know this specifically.)

Police/ Vulnerable Sector Check
If a police or vulnerable sector check is required, that should be specified in the placement description.