Building Strong Community Partnerships

The Role of the Advocate

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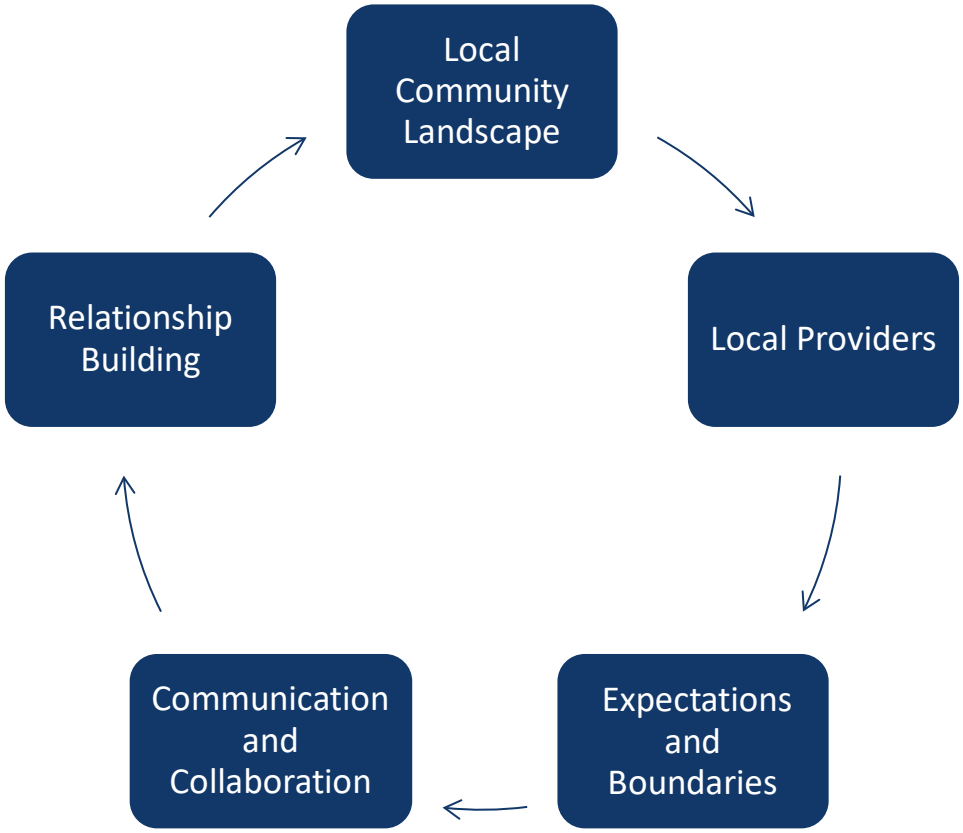
CAMPUS Technical Assistance and Resource Project

The Campus Advocate is not only focused on building solid relationships with students and the larger campus community. The role also requires strong relationships with the community and local providers. Some local providers are offering interpersonal violence (IPV) education on campus are the designated providers for domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and/or stalking cases, SANE exams, alternatives for reporting, and support in such cases. In addition, how students experience local services can create a challenge for Campus Advocates requiring dedicated attention and focus. Consequently, it is vital that the Campus Advocate understand the landscape of providers in the local community and that the expectations of how the two will work together are clearly articulated. This document will provide Campus Advocates with direction on building solid community partnerships.

There are five critical areas to focus on when trying to build and strengthen relationships within the community:



(1) understanding the local community landscape, (2) understanding the provider community, (3) establishing expectations and boundaries, (4) encouraging communication and collaboration, and (5) building relationships with providers.

Understand the Local Landscape

While the Campus Advocate is housed at the respective university or college, they are a part of a broader community that could interface with the campus and inform students' experience when they leave campus or as persons from the community come on to the campus. The local community's concerns can move onto the campus, so having a Campus Advocate that is engaged in the life of the local community can help address those community concerns on campus or enhance the understanding of the community landscape. The local community and the provider community should be distinguished. It is essential to see the distinction between the two communities as providers may not have a presence in the community, may not be connected to the community's pulse, or may not be able to speak in the authentic voice of the community. Therefore, getting to know the local community first is significant. Here are some specific ways that the Campus Advocate can begin to understand the local community landscape:

1. **Current Issues in the Community:** It is important for the Campus Advocate to be aware of the hot-button issues and trends in the community and how those issues might impact the campus. There should be an awareness of the current issues being discussed in the community from their perspective, allowing for the Campus Advocate to understand better the context of what is being experienced as it relates to interpersonal violence.
2. **Historical Context:** As the Campus Advocate learns what is currently happening in the community, it is also essential to understand the history of the community. Having an awareness of the historical events in a community provides context for what may or may not be available in that community and how they got there. This information will prove helpful to building relationships and growing trust with the community as there is a recognition of the influence of the past on the present and a deeper understanding of how the community has gotten its current perspective.

3. **State and Local Laws:** In addition to knowing the current framework, trends, and historical context, it is also important to know the laws. The Campus Advocate must know the laws and policies specific to IPV at the local and state levels. It is not enough for the Campus Advocate to understand federal IPV policies; it is essential to understand the state and local laws and how they intersect with serving students on campus. Consequently, the Campus Advocate must be well versed in these local and state policies and be able to translate that information for the broader campus and campus policymaking.
4. **Build Relationships with Key Allies:** Finally, it is essential to work within the local community to build relationships with key allies. These key allies may not be working in IPV specifically. They could be cultural organizations that are well respected in the community, graduate chapters of fraternities and sororities that engage students, leadership development programs, or the faith-based community that has a presence on campus. By attending community meetings and events, Campus Advocates can better identify these individuals and how they can be helpful to advancing IPV work on campus.

Understanding the Provider Community

In embracing the provider community, it is critical to understand to engage in campus work successfully. For some campuses, the community-based provider offers services to students before the Campus Advocate arrives on site. This may require discussion as it may be a significant change in the provision of services. The local provider is still providing critical services and education to the campus community for other campuses because of limitations within the Campus Advocate role. These situations require clarity as to when the role of the Campus Advocate begins, the role of the Community Provider steps in, and where they intersect. There should be respect between campus and community providers – acknowledging that the community provider does not necessarily bring the expertise of responding to IPV on a college campus, and the campus provider should acknowledge the expertise that the community provider brings with negotiating a multitude of systems in responding to needs of survivors and perpetrators. Having a solid relationship with the providers in the community dramatically benefits the work of the Campus Advocate, so investing in the relationship is vital. Here are some ways that the Campus Advocate can work to build positive relationships with the community provider:

1. **Assess the Landscape**: The Campus Advocate should first identify and become familiar with the resources within the provider network for each area of interpersonal violence. This way, the Campus Advocate can conduct a gap analysis to identify the types of services that exist, what services are missing in the community, and what needs are not being addressed for students within the local community. Assessing the landscape allows the Campus Advocate to understand the assets within the provider community and how a partnership with a particular organization(s) can be helpful for students and the campus community.

2. **Campus Climate Check:** The Campus Climate Check should include a campus assessment of the quality of services within the provider community – from advocacy organizations to law enforcement responses. Acquiring student perspectives of how often they may interact with local providers and the quality of those interactions is helpful to providing the community organizations with feedback from how students experience their services. It also helps identify ways that the campus may need to shift to better support students. Feedback from faculty and staff regarding the providers may also clarify how their perceptions could impact reporting to these organizations and the extent of involvement with the organizations on campus. The Campus Climate Check provides a space to obtain this information without fear of retribution, and it allows for objective assessment and feedback of community partners.

3. **Shared Philosophy:** The campus and community programs need to discuss their respective philosophies on how to provide IPV services. In learning about the perspective of a particular program, it may be determined that the community program is not in alignment with the philosophy of the campus program. Discussing program philosophy provides the opportunity for an honest conversation about the fit of the community program with the thinking and priorities of the campus program. Investing time in really thinking about the philosophy and mission of these different programs is necessary to ensure that students are received in a way that aligns with the values of the campus community.

4. **Shared Training:** The campus and community programs should provide opportunities to have shared training centering on a shared knowledge base to build relationships. Campus Advocates can attend coalition training, local provider training, and other educational events in the community. This experience will help the Campus Advocate become more familiar and understand the issues the local providers face and allow them to grow in their knowledge of interpersonal violence. Similarly, Campus Advocates can invite community providers to campus to perhaps hear from faculty conducting research in the area, attend training and educational sessions on IPV, cultural competence, or current national or local trends. These are excellent opportunities to hear each other's challenges and how the two providers can better work together. Sitting in training together builds relationships and helps to ensure that both groups of providers are on the same page, which ultimately helps to create more consistency in services. It also allows the campus to provide information on timely best practices and reinforce expectations derivative of university expectations. Training for law enforcement is another critical opportunity for campuses. When training campus law enforcement, there is an opportunity to invite local law enforcement to participate in these training or during roll calls. It is necessary to take a structured and strategically planned approach to train and education and have shared sessions to facilitate positive relationships.

5. **Engaging Culturally Specific Organizations:** The Campus Advocate should be intentional about identifying and connecting with culturally specific organizations to ensure an understanding of the

experiences of diverse groups with IPV and how it shapes perceptions and experiences with different systems. In addition, it creates an opportunity to further support students from diverse backgrounds by connecting them with providers in the community that shares their experience. Finally, it creates an opportunity for the Campus Advocate's knowledge and understanding to expand to serve diverse groups of students better.

Establishing Expectations and Boundaries

Establishing expectations and boundaries is critical to having a healthy and sustainable relationship between campus and community partners. Without clear direction and discussion of these roles and expectations, services can become blurred, and competition could strengthen in ways that are harmful or, at minimum, not helpful in advancing the needs of survivors. For this reason, constant buy-in and evaluation are essential to the viability and life of the relationship between campus and community partners. The following are ways to ensure that there is proper time to invest in these relationships.

1. **Roles and Expectations:** Similar to what occurs when the Campus Advocate establishes the Campus Advisory Board, there must be clear-cut discussions of the defined roles and expectations between the community and the campus provider. For example, the campus provider should explain the role that it will play on the campus when responding to IPV issues. Then, the community provider can explain what services they may have been offering on the campus if they were already engaged in working with students and what they hope to do or continue to do in the future in collaboration with the Campus Advocate. Following this, it should be clear what role each group will play in providing support and services on campus.

   For example, a university may have had no Campus Advocate, and the community provider did all the IPV education. However, now that the Campus Advocate is present, that individual will be providing campus education unless they create a different arrangement with the community provider. The

Campus Advocate should be viewed as the primary source of support on campus, and the community provider should be considered valued secondary support. There must be respect for the role of the Campus Advocate, and the expectations of how the two will work together should be delineated in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a document that explicitly outlines the community provider's role play on the campus. This document should be reviewed and signed by key stakeholders on campus and community providers.

2. **Plan on How to Work Together:** It is essential to invest time in developing a plan on how you will work together in a unified manner. You cannot fully engage in this step without first discussing the rules and expectations of the partnership. Then, collectively drawing up a specific document providing structure to the relationship and offering a historical context so that continuity can still exist if there is a shift in leadership. Developing an MOU that describes how you will collaborate with each community organization is a helpful tool to reinforce expectations and have clear communication between partners. The MOU should clearly state what constitutes the partnership. It should be explicit in determining who does what and how each partner will work together. Creating the MOU early at the beginning of the collaboration and then making modifications every few years is vital for building strong campus-community partnerships.

3. **Plan for the Referral Process:** A protocol must be developed for making and responding to referrals. This referral protocol should be explicit in the MOU document, but it is essential to carefully consider what the process will look like before developing the MOU. Ideally, the referral process should include the ability of the Campus Advocate to connect with providers directly and in a timely fashion so that a warm referral can be provided. Ensuring that the Campus Advocate can contact providers in this way reduces barriers and helps to facilitate the referral process. The referral process should include sharing direct or cell phone numbers to facilitate quick communication, reduce potential obstacles and enhance the possibility of survivors accessing support in real-time. Also, knowing who is receiving the referral is helpful, as the campus provider can create a warm referral and introduce the student to someone they know or an organization they trust. Investing in developing the referral process is critical to the relationship and will significantly benefit survivors. It is also beneficial to establish a point of contact if the referral is made after hours and on the weekend.

4. **Sharing Guiding Principles:** It is also essential to share the university's guiding principles with community partners so they understand the philosophy the university reinforces when working with students. While community partners may not have the same guiding principles, they must understand the campus values and priorities about how students are expected to be treated. Sharing these guiding principles should encourage community providers to treat students similarly. In doing so, continuity of services from campus to community can be more solidified. Students can feel comfortable with a sense of expectations of how they will be received regardless of who is supporting them in the provider network. If those values are not shared, there should be a continuous discussion about what training and accountability measures will be in place to ensure that students are treated with the respect and care they will come to value on campus. Suppose the values are not the same and cannot be agreed upon. In that case, the campus provider may need to forego working with that organization or agree on accountability measures to ensure that students are treated with respect and dignity should they have to access those services.

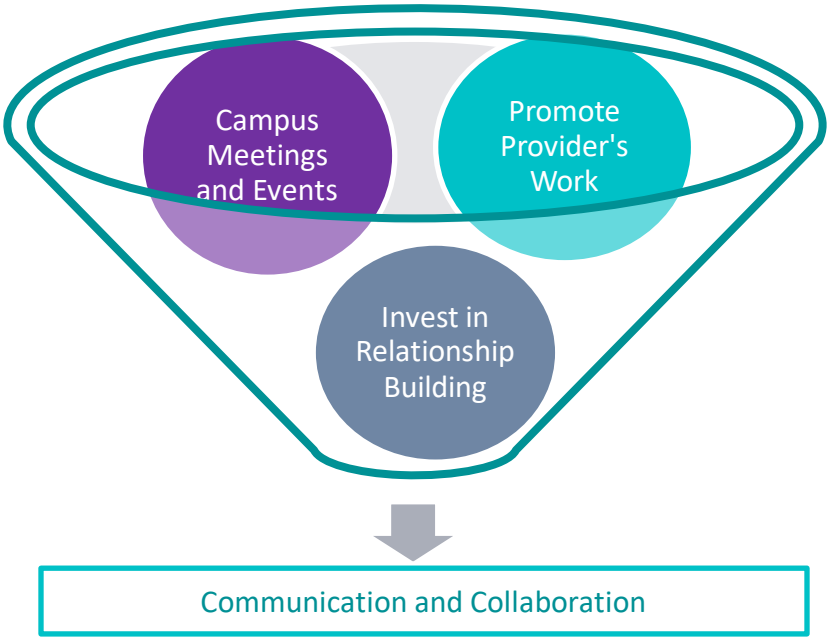
5. **Safety Planning and Threat Assessment:** Safety planning and threat assessment are critical areas where the campus can collaborate with community partners. Safety planning and threat assessment are similar but vastly different in purpose. Safety planning is brainstorming ways to stay safe that may also help reduce the risk of future harm. It can include planning for a future crisis, considering your options, and making decisions about your next steps.[1] The campus Advocate may not have the expertise to conduct safety planning. Conducting safety planning is not as simple as reviewing an online tool with a student. Therefore, connecting with a community partner with this ability will be extremely important. Staff from the community agency may be more skilled and experienced in this area because of their sole focus on conducting safety planning. In such a case, it makes sense for the campus to partner with the community provider so that students can benefit from their expertise. There should be knowledge of when safety planning should occur and how it should be done. There should also be a discussion with the community partner about their capacity to offer 24-hour availability to include safety planning. This way, students can always receive this intervention even when the campus provider is unavailable. Often, community programs have available hotlines and can promptly offer assistance with safety planning. At the same time, conducting safety planning on a college campus is nuanced. There are critical features and circumstances that one may not experience within the community. Sharing classes, friends, and the same residence coupled with utilization of technology and social media during this developmental stage are essential facets of college life that are key to include in safety planning. Thus, there may need to be a discussion about how safety planning will occur that considers the nuances of being on a college campus.

   Many universities have Threat Assessment Teams that are already in place. These teams are often put in place to, for example, conduct active shooter training and development plans for terrorist activities that could impact a college campus. However, they are often not educated and trained to address interpersonal violence's dangers to a college campus. For example, in the case of a domestic violence situation where the student perpetrator might have access to a firearm and has threatened to kill the survivor on campus, a Threat Assessment Team is key to assess the broader threat to the fuller campus community. In this situation, it would be necessary for the Threat Assessment Team to have knowledge of domestic violence and what constitutes a threat for the campus community. There should be a process and protocol in place for threat assessment in cases of interpersonal violence. In addition, it would be helpful for these team members to receive training on lethality indicators for interpersonal violence. Understanding how the common indicators of lethality connect to include the unique factors

for campuses on intimate partner lethality could help save the life of the survivor and others on campus.

Encourage Communication and Collaboration

Finding ways to build and solidify communication and collaboration between campus and community providers is key to building strong community partnerships. We must be intentional and consistent when working to grow these relationships. Building relationships is an ongoing process and requires a focus on itself.



1. **Campus Meetings and Events**: The campus needs regularly and consistently scheduled meetings with community partners. This helps create a placeholder for the conferences and something that the community provider can plan around. Meeting consistently also reduces the space for miscommunication and builds trust between the local providers and the campus advocate. There should be meetings with just the community partners and, from time to time, with the entire campus advisory board and the Coordinated Community Response team. It is essential for these campus meetings to be productive and time-bound to facilitate interest and attendance. The time of day should be planned around when most community partners are available and not when it is necessarily the best time for the Campus Advocate. When possible, food and transportation should be provided as a positive gesture to the community providers.

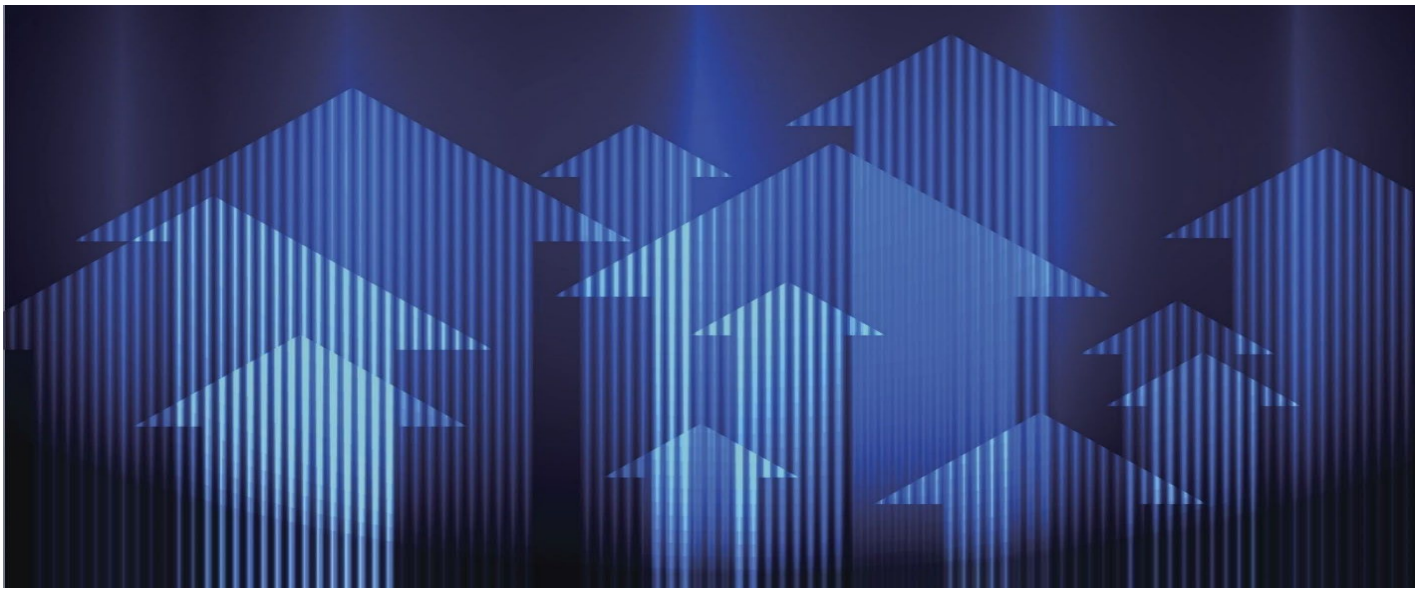
The Campus Advocate should also invite community providers to attend events on campus. Whether that is tabling an event together or inviting the community provider to an event that students are planning, it allows for an opportunity to learn more about the student body and how to best support them while also helping to build a relationship with the Campus Advocate. It helps build credibility and connectedness to the campus, which can be helpful in emergencies or when the community provider needs to be accessed.

2. **Promote Community Provider's Work:** Collaboration with community partners also provides the campus with an opportunity to promote and value the work of these organizations. The organizations need to benefit from this partnership, and promoting their work offers an opportunity for Campus Advocates to show appreciation. In addition, Campus Advocates can help connect community providers with researchers on campus, which can add to resources for the community organization. Having this type of relationship is another way to grow trust between the campus and community providers.

3. **Investing in Relationship Building:** Relationship building between campus and community providers is invaluable and should be a primary focus for the Campus Advocate. There must be a conscious effort to know the advocacy community, particularly those that might be more likely to work directly with students. Having a shared meal with a local advocate or advocate team might be a helpful way to break the ice and build a relationship with these critical provider groups. It also requires getting to know detectives, for example, who work on domestic violence and sexual assault cases, and then determining how campus and community law enforcement will work together. During this relationship-building process, one could discuss whether the Campus Advocate can be present when detectives conduct domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking interviews. Having that conversation and building a relationship before utilizing the support is extremely helpful but starts with developing a connection. It is also essential to build relationships with the local SANE program. It is important to understand that if certain hospitals conduct SANEs, the Campus Advocate should better understand who the nurses are and the ideal protocol in providing transportation and/or accompanying a student during a forensic exam. Court Advocates is an additional community partner, often not included in the relationship-building process. It is crucial in situations where a student might need a protective order, for example, that the Campus Advocate understands the process of supporting a student who has a protective order. The Court and Campus advocate may work together whereby the Campus Advocate, who is often with the student more, might be able to provide additional support and information needed in a court case. All of this happens by being intentional in building relationships with community providers.

Summary

Collaboration with community organizations takes time, intentionality, and hard work. It is crucial to have difficult conversations and be creative with how to engage and work together. It is essential for the Campus Advocate to show appreciation to the community provider and that there must be validation that campus work is different from community work. There should be mutual respect, structure, and healthy and continuous communication while both groups work towards their collective goals.



Frequently Asked Questions

Below is a list of questions and responses that some Campus Advocates have asked related to how to build or strengthen community partnerships. These responses offer a brief explanation but can be expanded upon during Technical Assistance meetings with OVW Campus TA Providers.

Question: *How do you identify key partners based on their relationships in the community, not just their title/role?*

Response: *The Campus Advocate needs to be present at different community events and meetings to observe other relationships and identify key partners. The Campus Advocate can also ask directly as stakeholders to help identify key persons in the community doing the work or persons that can help grow and shape the IPV response on campus. In addition, if the campus is doing good work, key persons and organizations will take notice and reach out to them to partner or learn more about what they are doing.*

Question: *What is the transition like when you go from contracting with a community partner to having a Campus Advocate?*

Response: *It is essential to have a targeted conversation about the transition when the Campus Advocate assumes the role and primary responsibility on campus. It is necessary to be clear about roles, expectations, and referral processes. It is also important to accept that some of these conversations may be difficult. The Campus Advocate should have a goal for these meetings and discussions and should be firm around boundaries to ensure there is no miscommunication. The community organization should also be heralded for what it has contributed and acknowledged formally in some way.*

Question: *How do you keep community partners engaged when they are so busy?*

Response: *To keep community partners engaged, meetings should be scheduled at times that the majority can attend. It should be recognized that they already have other arrangements, which should be considered when planning. The meeting should be brief, and, if possible, lunch or breakfast should be provided to prevent the community partner from trying to find food before or after the meeting. There should also be parking provided, and the meeting should be held at a location that is easily accessible and accessible to diverse groups. There should also be a virtual option to eliminate potential barriers to meeting participation.*

Question: *What if the community provider competes with the campus provider to offer services on campus?*

Response: *Ultimately, any organization is a guest on campus. Therefore, community organizations must recognize that they must be invited on the campus. Working with the Campus Advocate could only benefit them if they are interested in supporting students on campus. It is vital to have a healthy conversation about how to collaborate and why having expectations and boundaries are essential for the work to be done effectively on campus.*

Footnotes

[1] Safety Planning | RAINN