

BUILDING AND BENEFITTING FROM INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Whether you have a long list of established international partners or are building out a partnerships approach from scratch it is essential to have well-defined objectives and routine evaluation processes. Here we outline the steps involved in building partnerships that benefit your institution over time to support your internationalization strategy.

This resource supports institutions to assure quality of transfer credit in learning abroad partnerships. It is just one chapter in CBIE's capacity-building series ***Assessing and Implementing Credit Transfer in Student Mobility Partnerships: A How-to Guide for Post-Secondary Institutions*** as part of the national *Learning Beyond Borders* campaign.



OBJECTIVES-SETTING

It is important to build and review your international partnerships strategy against the wider internationalization strategy of your institution. By being clear about your goals you enhance your ability to evaluate the appropriateness of each partnership opportunity.

Here are two ways to get started:

1. Define what benefits you seek in international partnerships:
 - Are you looking for an enhanced student experience?
 - Do you want to bring greater diversity to your classrooms?
 - Is your goal to retain exchange students for the long-term, or have them return in future?
 - What academic and research enrichment do you hope to achieve from partnerships?
 - Do you aim for partnerships to have a revenue generation aspect?
2. Develop a plan for your offerings to students:
 - How many institutional partners is ideal for your school given size and capacity/resourcing?
 - How could a student from abroad on exchange in a mobility partnership afford living expenses in your setting?
 - What sort of partnerships would bring geographic/cultural diversity to your campus?
 - What types of partner schools would appeal to your students?



FINDING NEW PARTNERS

I. THINK STRATEGICALLY

Internationalization objectives, in addition to the characteristics of your own institution should help you define the value of a strategic partnership.

1. Be clear about the status and goals of your own institution; any new partner institution needs to operate at the same level as you do.
2. Identify academic units who are interested in mobility or who competitively need to consider developing opportunities abroad for their students and work with those departments to identify potential partners that meet the criteria you have established.
3. Seek programs and courses that seem suitable for transfer credit and that would fit the timing and course requirements for your students.
4. Look also to see if there are academic opportunities for your students that are not available in your home institution.
5. Go beyond the academic and inquire about connections with industry or the research community.
6. Pursue stronger ties with institutions that demonstrate the value they place in partnering with you through strong communication and trust building.
7. Check references from existing partners or other similar Canadian institutions.



II. DEVELOP WELL DEFINED PROGRAM GOALS AND STUDENT-LEARNING OUTCOMES WITH YOUR PARTNERS

For a partnership to be balanced, it is important that you develop and define the program goals together. As well as being part of a common learning process, it is much easier to identify with a program in which all intellectual contributions are valued. Match your partnership goals with your resources; build on existing structures, courses and programs and value-add. It is important to ensure, through curriculum arrangements, that the widest possible number of students and/or faculty members can take advantage of these opportunities. Although you may start with one program group for exchange you should think ahead to opportunities for deepening the relationship.

Develop an understanding of the amount and type of support available for your students when they arrive at your partner school so that you can adequately prepare them before they depart. Be clear about the services you offer at your institution as well; orientation, housing support and social activities for international students are all an essential part of the learning abroad experience.

III. CHAMPION INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS YOUR INSTITUTION

A culture of support of all partnerships is essential from the outset for a program to be sustainable. An internal-facing letter of commitment from your leadership can help communicate who institutional partners are and articulate the benefits of partnership for students and staff.

Operationally a close working relationship with the Office of the Registrar is essential to develop a means of registering the incoming students and to prepare the staff for receiving transcripts that may be in unfamiliar formats. Student financial aid mechanisms must also be clarified so that travelling students remain eligible for support.

IV. ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT STAFF RESOURCES ARE INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM

The burden of building, implementing and maintaining partnerships should be shared across the institution. Engage committees of faculty and administrative staff and have a succession plan for institutional leads.



V. TAKE YOUR TIME

Never sign with a partner if you feel uneasy about their ability to provide the courses and support your students need. Curricula review for exchange must be carried out by knowledgeable staff across implicated departments. Referrals from other institutions cannot replace your own due diligence.

VI. TRACK AND COMMUNICATE

Routinely assess the student experience. Leverage your reviews and reports to tell the student mobility story in local media. Identify those students who can showcase their experience well and have them present to your senate, education council and the board of governors. Broaden your support so that the reputation of learning abroad is enhanced.

VII. MAINTAIN RECIPROCITY

Generally, reciprocity of numbers in exchange agreements is achieved over a period of time. Long-standing partnerships tend to have little fluctuation in either incoming or outgoing student numbers whereas newer partnerships tend to fluctuate and require a flexible adoption period. A general rule of thumb is for agreements to seek reciprocity over a 3 to 5 year period. International office staff in both institutions must oversee reciprocity. If a great imbalance persists over time then the partnership may need review. However, before discontinuing a relationship it is necessary to determine any other important linkages or benefits your institution may derive from the partnership.



IN PRACTICE: One undergraduate institution insisted on a term by term reciprocity. This effectively dismantled an otherwise successful exchange program with a German institution because the Canadians could only go to Germany in the second semester and the Germans to Canada in the fall term.

EVALUATING EXISTING PARTNERS—A TOTAL CONTRIBUTION APPROACH

It is essential to review partnerships and assess their contributions to your overall institutional international strategy and activities.

International offices and Finance departments can track numbers to maintain exchange number parity—that is, equal numbers of students coming and going. However a more sophisticated analysis will reveal the true value of partnerships, especially with mobility and credit transfer in mind.

For each partnership, activities need to be tracked. Formal review of partnerships may indicate a need to downgrade or terminate agreements—even those that have existed for many years. Building and investing in partnerships which serve institutional objectives leads to better outcomes for all involved and shows returns for all stakeholders involved.

