

EFFECTIVE USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCE PEOPLE

What is a community resource person?

Community resource people are professionals who lend real life experiences to help enhance an interactive Street Law lesson or class. Attorneys, judges, law students, elected officials, people involved in administering public programs, community organizers and activists, and police officers are often utilized as resource people. A community resource person does not simply lecture the students, but rather participates as a resource in an interactive strategy.

Why use community resource people?

Interactions between the students and significant, law-related adults from the community can have a positive effect on student learning and student attitudes. Use of such community resource people can lead to deeper understanding of the subject matter and provide a more meaningful engagement with the materials.

Youth conform to societal norms as a result of bonds established at school, at home, and in the community. This behavior takes place when youth have relevant, interactive experiences with caring adults. Through carefully structured, interactive lessons with the participation of community resource people, students can be given these experiences.

Community resource people provide the following benefits to students:

- They break down barriers between young people and the community.
- They make the session come alive by introducing real-life experiences.
- They are excellent role models.
- They provide career information.

Community resource people provide the following benefits to the instructor:

- They offer expertise in unfamiliar areas.
- They connect you to new community resources.
- They can adapt a general lesson to include local information.
- They can provide technical assistance in implementing activities like mock trials and moot courts.
- They ensure that your classroom time is dynamic and continually fresh.

Planning for a Visit

To ensure that the experience in the classroom is a positive one for both students and the resource person, the instructor should adequately prepare the resource person for their role. Without proper training and preparation, resource people may be unable to empower the audience they intend to help. Attention should be given to the following considerations:

- Topics covered by community resource people should be relevant to the lesson and scheduled to fit appropriately within the sequence of lesson activities.
- The community resource person should be integrated into the lesson. Time should be planned in the lesson for them to talk to the class about their profession.
- Teachers should help community resource people avoid lecturing to students.
- Visitors should present a balanced picture of the topic, including a variety of perspectives. For some lessons, multiple resource people may be helpful to achieve this balance.
- Before a visit by a community resource person, students should be informed of the planned visit and have time to think of questions that they would like to ask. It may be useful to have students write down their questions before the visit.
- *Community resource people cannot and should not give individualized advice to students on legal or other matters.* They can, however, help the students to access resources to help them get this advice.

Conducting a Visit

Let the community resource person know:

- Date and time of participation
- Length of class period
- Age and approximate grade level of students
- Lesson objectives, topics you will cover, or questions you want answered (Give them a copy of the lesson.)
- How you expect the resource person to participate
- Location of class, parking, and where they should report
- Any security concerns and/or procedures

Find out from the community resource person:

- Audio/visual equipment requirements
- Whether other community resource people will attend the session
- Whether they have handouts they would like to distribute (if so, let them know how many students you have)
- Necessary pre-visit student preparation

In the classroom:

- Acquaint the class with some basic information about the community resource person.
- Before the day of the visit, have the class prepare thoughtful questions to ask the resource person.
- Use interactive strategies (For example, have community resource people participate in a role-play with students and/or debrief the role play, or help prepare for, enact, and debrief mock hearings.)
- Select a lesson related to the community resource person's area of expertise. Keep the lesson relevant to the students' lives and avoid jargon.
- The community resource person is *not* responsible for class management. It is important that the teacher participate in the lesson. This approach models community and adult cooperation. The teacher's presence and participation verifies the importance of the visitor.
- Most community resource people are not trained teachers. It is sometimes necessary for the teacher to give directions to the guest by using appropriate questions or other clues to help the resource person more effectively communicate the information desired.
- Allow sufficient time for summary and to thank the guest.

Debriefing the visit

- What were the major points made by the community resource person?
- How did the class react to the visitor and the issues presented?
- Do students believe the use of the community resource person helped them learn about the topic?
- Ask students if the community resource person had any particular biases.
- If a community resource person is an advocate of a particular viewpoint, it is important to introduce other viewpoints/perspectives in the debriefing discussion.
- Be sure to send a brief thank you note to the community resource person, and, if appropriate, their supervisor.