

Community-university partnerships: Putting good intentions into actual practice

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Overview

- A caveat – our backgrounds and contexts
- Guiding notions for partnership work
- Faculty and community partner roles
- Some academic-specific elements
- Strategies for developing and sustaining partnerships

But first...

Important acknowledgments

- Special thanks to Laura Clark
- And for very significant, broad-based and intentional shifts here at UNC Charlotte: Chancellor Dubois, Provost Lorden, Dean Gutierrez, and Fary Cachelin
- Jim Cook

Some caveats and background...

Our approaches

- RPK
 - My interests / areas of focus
 - Partnership-oriented approach to research / evaluation
 - Teach and mentor undergraduates and graduates
 - Service roles
 - Often integrate work with partners across areas
 - Operate without the benefit of a larger center/ institute

Some caveats and background...

Our approaches

- LYC
 - Approach informed by research/evaluation but also 15 years of non-profit work
 - Value faculty and students as capacity builders and content experts for non-profits
 - Connect faculty and students with potential opportunities whenever possible
 - Very selective about which faculty/students I will work with or recommend

An overarching guiding notion:

- It is critical to draw on the capacity we have on campus, our resources, and our expertise to:
 - give back
 - partner with our community's members, agencies, and systems
 - work for social good
- We need to cultivate *partnerships*

Guiding notions: Partnerships...

- Sound partnerships
 - Provide mutual benefit
 - Are enduring and stable
 - Tap into complementary skills / expertise
 - Work toward common interests
- And partners
 - Rely on one another (and follow through)
 - Assume the best of intentions and actions
 - Share expectations

(Cook & Kilmer, 2016)

Guiding notions: Partnerships necessitate...

- Regular contact
- Open, direct communication – and good listening
- Flexibility
- Sharing of responsibilities, power, processes, products...
- Investment of time, resources... and risk of 'loss', or investment without gain
- Slower processes due to shared decision making
- Support for one another
- Understand that conflict can and will arise; the key is our ability to negotiate through it

(Cook & Kilmer, 2016; Kilmer, Wall-Hill, Cook, Kothandapany, & Weber, 2007)

Guiding notions: Important to each partnership

- Build strong relationships
- Ensure that the effort benefits faculty/student and partner
- Ideally, strive for *5-win partnerships* – faculty, organization (staff), student, university, community
(Cook, 2014; Cook & Kilmer, 2014)

Guiding notions: Important to each partnership

- Attend to 'needs' and 'contracts' (Cowen, 1985)
 - Community partner needs
 - Assess match between community partner needs and expertise, competencies, or interests of university partners
 - Agree on roles and responsibilities for all partners
 - Specificity is critical
 - Scopes of work for faculty involvement
 - Student training experiences
 - Expectations of what is need to be successful

Guiding notions:

Partnerships do not work when...

- They are not characterized by consistent, honest communication
- The interests of one party drive the work
- They lack follow through
- They do not yield useful information, foster change, or support initial goals

In particular, university partners...

- Must be careful not to
 - Take over an effort
 - Or push through modifications that do not serve mutual goals
 - “Use” community members for data, access to settings or participants
 - Put short-term payoffs ahead of longer-term possibilities
 - Operate at an arm’s length
 - Neglect to feed data back in ways that are useful to the community partner
 - We need to help guide action
 - We need to be mindful of data-usage limitations as well as capacity or resource issues

Guiding notions: Potential benefits

- Can enhance effectiveness - complex issues warrant diverse perspectives
- Can build community partners' capacity
- Can develop or refine partners' perspectives about
 - Need for well-targeted data collection
 - Nature / range of skills they seek
- Can yield benefits for student training and professional development
 - Multi-dimensional, 'real world' opportunities to learn
- Can contribute substantive professional products
- Can help partners make their case to other stakeholders, such as funders

Some academic-specific elements

- Implications for tenure and promotion?
- Publication?
- Funding?
- Teaching / mentoring?
- Service?

Crucial note:

- Integration of community engagement into the university's mission statement
- Inclusion of community-engaged efforts in CLAS' tenure and promotion guidelines
- Development of engagement task force

Selected mechanisms for student engagement

- Participation in community-engaged scholarship through involvement on faculty research team
- Community practica experiences
- Engagement in the community growing out of faculty public service involvements and/or connections with community partners
- Graduate assistantships funded by community partners
- Participation in the Charlotte Research Scholars or Charlotte Community Scholars programs
- Service-learning experiences through an undergraduate course

Faculty and community partner roles and responsibilities

- Relationships are powerful
- Partnerships are strengthened when partners have developed a track record of communication and commitment
 - Follow through on requests /agreed upon action steps
 - Raise questions and share information openly
 - Provide opportunities for joint review and feedback of letters, reports, and other products
 - Partners can reinforce strength of the partnership

(Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013; Cook & Kilmer, 2012; Kilmer & Cook, 2015)

Faculty and community partner roles and responsibilities

- Critical backdrop: faculty reputation(s) and/or prior relationships or experiences
- Community partnerships must be mutually beneficial; need to communicate directly about goals, needs, and objectives
- Faculty and community members must also commit to the support and mentoring of students
 - Stability in support is salient; need to have a clear “go to” person on site

(Also see Cook & Kilmer, 2012; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)

Faculty Roles and Responsibilities

- Respect community members' knowledge, expertise, and strengths
 - Ensure that do not fall into 'expert' role
- If students are involved:
 - Provide back-up for quality control; faculty are ultimately responsible
 - Ensure that students are trained and ready
 - Advocate on students' behalf when necessary
 - Provide ongoing, developmentally-appropriate, individualized supervision and guidance

(Kilmer & Cook, 2015; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)

Community Partner Perspective: What I Wish All Faculty & Students Knew About My World

- Appreciate the power of data/research and anticipate how unfavorable outcomes might be received and used
- Ask the partner what products will be useful and respond accordingly; rarely are academic papers the end goal for a community partner
- Balance the need for rigorous research (and what you learned in class/textbooks) with the practicalities associated with being a non-profit organization
- Understand the very real and competing demands every organization faces: multiple priorities and sometimes conflicting deliverables to various stakeholder groups are the norm
- Meet community partners where they are – literally and figuratively

Barriers, issues and obstacles to consider...

- Prior experiences may impact present effort
- Partners representing different settings (university, community) often speak different languages
- Community partners are sufficiently burdened with their regular responsibilities
 - The effort may not (and maybe cannot) be a top priority
- The process is incremental and iterative... there will be 'baby steps'...
 - And sometimes with every 2 steps forward, you'll take two back...

(e.g., Kilmer, Wall-Hill, Cook, Kothandapany, & Weber, 2007)

Strategies and Recommendations

- *Maintain a partnership-focused team*
 - Participatory framework with partnerships
 - Use action research to partner with community members to address social conditions
 - Team-based work and our established relationships provide the bedrock on which student opportunities are built

(Cook & Kilmer, 2012, Kilmer & Cook, 2015; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)

Strategies and Recommendations

- *Participatory and collaborative applied research*
 - Collaborate on research decisions
 - Create research products with an impact
 - Not just research or evaluation to “know”

Let's talk about that...

- Models: Participatory action research or community-based participatory research (CBPR)
 - The studied community helps define the areas to study, the methods, and the use of study results.
 - *CBPR is: "...a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish structures for participation by communities affected by the issue being studied, representatives of organizations, and researchers in all aspects of the research process to improve health and well-being through taking action, including social change."* (Viswanathan et al., 2004)

Core elements of CBPR

- Co-learning and reciprocal transfer of expertise
- Shared decision making
- Mutual ownership of the processes and products

Bottom lines:

Key stakeholders, including those most affected by the topic being studied, are full, collaborative participants in all aspects of the research...

Complementary perspectives and strengths contribute to the integration of science with practice

- science more useful, and practice more effective

(e.g., Balcazar, Keys, Kaplan, & Suarez-Balcazar, 1998; Cook, 2005)

Strategies and Recommendations

- *Think flexibly about ways to work together*
 - Ensure alignment between the nature of the work (and product) sought by the community partner and the competence, timeline, and needs of the faculty /students
 - Different needs / constraints for different efforts and the context or student needs

(Kilmer & Cook, 2015)

Strategies and Recommendations

- *Go beyond the specific, expected task*
 - Demonstrate investment and commitment
 - Adequate, long-term funding can greatly facilitate student engagement and doing more than expected or contracted
 - Significant activity is also possible without dedicated funding
 - Work collaboratively to address needs, even beyond the initial request

(Cook & Kilmer, 2012; Kilmer & Cook, 2015; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)

Strategies and Recommendations

- *Creatively consider ways to build the relationship(s).*
 - Continuity of commitment is a necessity
 - Identify ways to strengthen bonds and connections with current or potential partners
 - A sustained partnership brings with it trust and a 'track record'

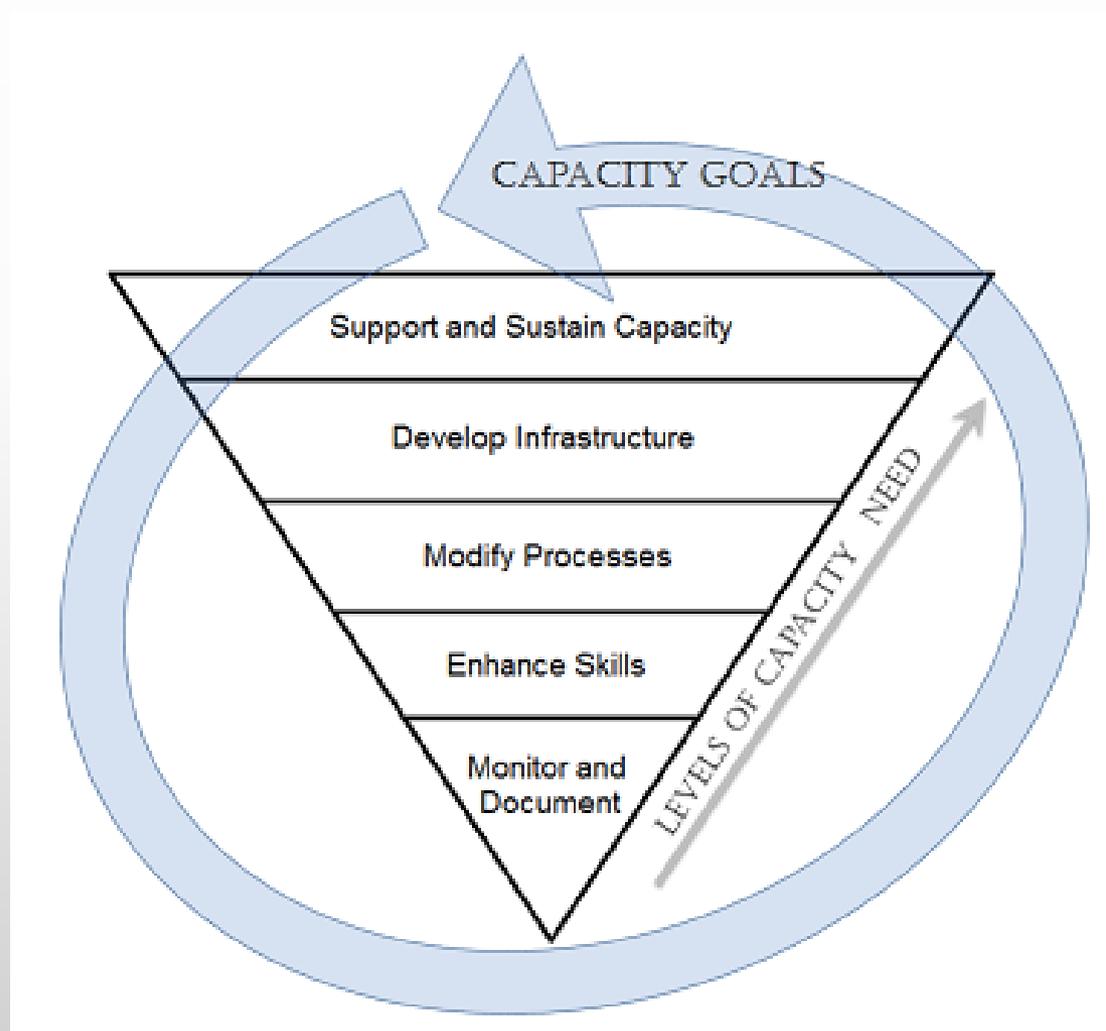
(Kilmer & Cook, 2015; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)

Strategies and Recommendations

- *Engage students as key stakeholders*
 - It is necessary to maintain focus on students' development and training needs
 - As they are able, it is important to engage students as integral stakeholders and participants in the partnership
 - Also important to ensure students have the cultural/organizational competencies to engage authentically

(Kilmer & Cook, 2015; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)

Collaborations: A model of organizational capacity (Strater Hogan et al., in press)



Strategies and Recommendations

- Don't: Try to employ “one size fits all” solutions
- Contextual factors will influence the necessary and sufficient conditions – and requisite steps by community and university partners – for student roles and opportunities
- The specific logistical steps will also vary

Concluding thoughts

- Faculty (and community stakeholders) must assume considerable weight in fostering engagement experiences – and making them work
 - Identify connections and possibilities – ‘matchmakers’
 - Assess and know the needs and the context
 - Clarify areas in which student involvement could be of benefit

Concluding thoughts

- *Faculty must think flexibly and be willing to stretch themselves*
 - Projects or involvements outside typical comfort zones
 - More likely within sustained partnership – can afford risks
 - Opportunities for co-learning
- As students progress
 - Build or enhance a diverse array of skills and competencies
 - Develop an experience base, a record of accomplishments, and a portfolio of achievements
 - Critical steps in their professional development and advancement
 - Working with community partners gives students invaluable real world experience

(Cook & Kilmer, 2012; Kilmer & Cook, 2015; Kilmer, Cook, & Brookins, 2013)