

The Principles of Partnership: The Foundation for the Community-Campus Partnership

A growing body of literature focusing on collaboration and partnership building amply describes the challenges of developing successful partnerships (Flower, 1998; Lasker, 2000; Maurana, 2000). In 1998, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health board of directors and conference participants established “Principles for a Good Community-Campus Partnership.” Revised in 2006, these principles, or values promoted by these principles, have often been cited as the underlying force for success among many partnerships.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) Principles of Partnership

1. Partnerships form to serve a specific purpose and may take on new goals over time.
2. Partners have agreed upon mission, values, goals, measurable outcomes and accountability for the partnership.
3. The relationship between partners is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment.
4. The partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners.
5. The partnership balances power among partners and enables resources among partners to be shared.
6. Partners make clear and open communication an ongoing priority by striving to understand each other's needs and self-interests, and developing a common language.
7. Principles and processes for the partnership are established with the input and agreement of all partners, especially for decision-making and conflict resolution.
8. There is feedback among all stakeholders in the partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the partnership and its outcomes.
9. Partners share the benefits of the partnership's accomplishments.
10. Partnerships can dissolve and need to plan a process for closure.

The power of a community-campus partnership can bring diverse groups of people together to identify new and better ways of thinking about building communities and strengthening higher education. By establishing the partnership on the principles

presented above, the partnership is well-positioned to focus on the pre-planning and planning strategies necessary for the development of a service-learning course. These are also key principles that can encourage the institutionalization, growth, and sustainability of both the partnership and the service-learning curriculum.

Integrating Community-Campus Partnerships for Health Principles of Partnership and Service-Learning

Principles #1 and #2: Specific purpose and agreed upon mission, values, goals, measurable outcomes and accountability

The first step towards agreement in these areas is to discover the questions each side has for the other. Institutional representatives may have questions as to the mission and strategies of the community partner, and the community organization may have questions regarding the institution's curriculum building process and self-teaching opportunities. Once perspectives and agendas are better understood, a negotiation and prioritization process should be used to distill the areas of mutual agreement that can be used to piece together the beginnings of a working relationship.

Principle #3: Mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment

These elements will become stronger over the passage of time, but it's critical to highlight their importance at the very beginning stages of relationship building. The main message is that each side needs to offer up genuine respect for the other in terms of the value and importance of the resources, perspectives, knowledge, and time each side devotes to the partnership. Even though partners may look different, dress and speak differently, it's important for both sides to reserve judgment and to maintain an open mind as to the motivations of the other party and the quality of what each side brings to the table.

Principle #4: Build on strengths and assets, builds capacity, and also addresses needs

Assessment can be productive, even at the beginnings of partnerships. The conversations that were held while discussing the first two principles should provide a base upon which to maximize each side's assets while also determining areas of weakness or need that can be further developed through the partnership. Establishing a history of assessment will also pave the way for rigorous and meaningful evaluation as the partnership evolves. Further, until issues and needs are revealed, no true understanding or honest partnership will develop.

Principle #5: Balance power and share resources

Many institutions assume that their community partners hold limited power and that it's necessary for the institutions to "build them up." However, this is not always the case. Power dynamics must be carefully assessed and then, if necessary, methods of power redistribution should be considered. Once a more equitable balance of power is in place, resources can be more effectively shared. Partners should also be creative as to how resources are defined. Resources are not just financial, but can also include people, supplies, space, or knowledge. Appreciation and energy can also be seen as resources that can be and should be shared and celebrated by partners.

Principle #6: Clear, open, and accessible communication

The key to successfully addressing this principle is establishing real accessibility. Participants were advised that voice mail simply does not suffice in this case. Email and regular in-person meeting times were noted as much more desirable. In addition, two-way site visits where each partner visits the other were strongly recommended.

Principle #7: Agree upon roles, norms, and procedures

Many partnerships begin with the discussion of roles and procedures. However, if values and goals aren't aligned, and if mutual trust and effective means of communication have not been established, the process design phase is unlikely to go smoothly or to have successful, lasting results. Thus, it is strongly recommended that parties address the first six principles before embarking on the course of designing processes and defining roles.

Principle #8: Ensure feedback among all stakeholders

Again, the idea here is to use feedback from all parties involved to inform process and program refinement. Gathering feedback is an effective way to show respect for partners, but incorporating that feedback into evaluation outputs and program design reflects a true appreciation of each partner's perspective.

Principle #9: Share the credit

Credit can also be defined in this context as appreciation, and appreciation can be shown in a variety of ways. It is important for each partner to share credit and show appreciation for the other partners, whether it's through financial methods or a mention in an organization's annual report or newsletter.

Principle #10: Partnerships evolve and can dissolve

Effective partnerships must have the capacity and patience to consider and embrace change as they develop. Partnerships can be viewed as living organisms that must be nurtured over time. Not all partnerships do or are meant to last forever. This needs to be acknowledged and anticipated.

Assets-Based vs. Needs-Based Approach to Service-Learning

When assessing a community, university partners tend to focus on the problems, deficiencies, and *needs* of its constituencies. As such, universities and institutions often enter a community intending to “fix” and to “help.” However, this approach can drive community leaders and groups to feel marginalized and to disengage. If community members don't establish their *own vision* for the future of their community and the strategies for getting there, most university actions are not likely to effect real and lasting change. However, if community members are actively mobilized and invested in community development, the likelihood for real progress is greatly strengthened. Thus, a “*develop*” versus “*fix*” orientation encourages institutions to first discover community assets and then devise ways build upon them.

Following the model for *asset-based community development* set out by Kretzman and McKnight in Building Communities From the Inside Out, there are three levels of assets

to be considered: (1) individuals, (2) associations, and (3) institutions. Within these asset groups exist, for example, grandmas that provide free daycare to their families, active parent-teacher associations, neighborhood block captains, and tenant associations. University members and the practice of service-learning can be seen as external resources that can expand the capacity of these pre-existing groups to develop and strengthen their community. Service-learning can be most effective when it is able to connect not just with other major institutions, but also with entities in each asset level, as well as when it can provide linkages between community assets that did not exist before. These links can create new powerful networks and avenues for information flow and resource sharing.

Key Takeaways:

1. Begin partnerships by assessing and building upon the value and importance of what each side brings to the table. Be creative as to how resources and assets are defined.
2. Find areas of common ground in terms of values and goals before defining roles and processes.
3. Don't just "help" communities. Instead, provide resources that communities can use to develop their capacity to help themselves.
4. Establish real and accessible channels of communication, and be rigorous in your dedication to comprehensive evaluation and intentional change.

Tips for getting started

The following tips are designed to help you think through the steps involved in 1) forming a partnership, 2) establishing the pre-planning activities of the partnership, and 3) developing operational strategies for a partnership planning committee. These tips assume that you are playing a lead role in developing the partnership. If you are joining as a member of a partnership, then many of these tips will still apply. The order of the activities discussed below may vary depending on the status of your community-campus partnership's focus and experience.

Community partners frequently express the thought that academic institutions "ask for a lot" from the community partners with whom they work. Thus, not surprisingly, faculty express occasional difficulty in convincing community organizations to commit to service-learning. Many strategies can help academic institutions better communicate the value proposition that service-learning can provide to community partners. For example, service-learning provides an opportunity for community members to *have a voice* in how the next generation of college graduates is trained and educated. Service-learning, when designed well, can help community partners *form links* and create *new networks* with other associations, institutions, and individuals active in bringing change and improvement to the community. In addition, association with an academic institution can provide enhanced legitimacy and validation in a community partner's fundraising efforts.

Even though the students will be interacting with the community organization for a short period of time in the context of the class, these future graduates should also be viewed by the community partners as *potential future donors* and *potential future volunteers*. Additionally, students can still provide short-term benefits to community partners, in the form of their energy, ethnic or socioeconomic diversity, and fresh perspective. Students can also be sources of third party evaluations, and the work that students do through journals, papers, and portfolios can be very enlightening in terms of how the programs and the mission of a community organization are seen through the eyes of outsiders.

Forming a service-learning partnership:

Examine the historical legacy of the relationship between your school/university and its surrounding communities. Historical information will contribute to and shape the development of the partnership. Have there been instances of exploitation, mistrust, and misunderstanding between the school and communities in the past? If so, have the concerns been resolved and addressed? Have there been instances of success and positive contributions? If so, how have these successes and contributions been recognized and celebrated? Interviewing leaders on campus and in the community can help you to gain a broad, balanced, and honest perspective. Acknowledging and being up-front about this historical legacy can help in achieving successful community partnerships.

Identify your partners and know your community: Are you teaching or developing a service-learning course that will determine the type of community partners that must be involved to teach the course content, or do you have existing community relationships around which you plan to build a service-learning course?

In either scenario, it is very important that you “know your community.” The process of knowing your community and identifying new or additional partners can be achieved in a variety of ways. **You may begin by becoming acquainted with people in the community by being an active observer and listener.** What are others telling you about the community? What are the nuances, culture, and traditions of the community? An appreciation and respect for the community will happen at a natural pace when you become more involved by attending or joining community events and groups, such as town meetings, K-12 activities, religious and spiritual events, or other social forums. Developing relationships in the community you live and work in provides an opportunity to meet new people and address the larger concerns of those around you together. By visiting with the local volunteer center, a directory can be located with a listing of agencies in the community that may be addressing issues of similar interest. If a volunteer center does not exist in the community, the local church, synagogue, United Way, or school may have resources that provide assistance in the development of the partnership. Finally, you may be able to build from existing community relationships through volunteer activities, or other community partnerships.