Community Voices

Utilizing Community Partners Perceptions to Inform Campus-Community Partnership Policy and Practice

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2009, University of South Florida created the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) in order to have a centralized office whose mission is to build mutually beneficial and reciprocal university–community partnerships founded on community engaged scholarship and service-learning pedagogy. In 2010, the OCE began a study to evaluate community partner’s perceptions of whether dynamics associated with effective partnerships were present in the collaborations formed with the university. OCE also wanted to understand how the university and community based organizations differed in how an effective partnership is defined.

Surveys were emailed and several interviews were conducted with community partner directors and staff. Organizations and their representatives had experience with being engaged with the campus through community based research initiatives and/or engaged learning courses.

Principal Findings

Based on the literature and the partnerships constructs of interest to USF, OCE defines an effective partnership as one that displays (1) shared power, resources, and decision making; (2) partnership management; (3) the university partner’s understanding of the community and its needs; and (4) having a shared vision and goals.

The majority of community partners reported that they believed key components of shared power, resources and decision making were present in their partnerships. However, community partners expressed frustration with their ability to communicate with the university and having access to data and findings of the research projects. Additionally, project management and follow through appear to be challenges to campus community partnerships. Community partners believed that within their partnerships the university participants were not always knowledgeable of the community where they were conducting the project. This was tempered by the perception that students and faculty seemed willing to learn more about the population and the issues the community based organization was trying to address.

Community partners’ definitions of effective partnerships mirrored those constructs of partnerships defined in the literature. Community partners most emphasized their role in the teaching of the university student and were clearly interested in being recognized as a co-educator.

OCE will use the findings from this study to enhance our current campus community partnerships and inform the development of more effective programming and supports for students, faculty, and community partners.

Introduction

Created in 2009, the University of South Florida Office of Community Engagement (“OCE”) is responsible for developing, nurturing, and sustaining the organizational foundation, critical resources, and processes necessary to promote and advance engaged learning,
research/scholarship, outreach and partnerships throughout USF. The functions of the OCE pertinent to community engagement include:

- Policy development
- Communications
- Professional development and technical assistance
- Assessment, monitoring, and feedback
- Incentives, recognition and rewards
- Resource development

The official mission of OCE is to expand local and global initiatives that strengthen and sustain healthy communities, promote social justice, and help improve the quality of life overall. The mission is carried out by facilitating university-community partnerships that are meant to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal in nature that are focused on community based learning. OCE defines “community-based learning” to be experiential learning that combines classroom instruction with some sort of community-based project that is developed in cooperation with, and provides some benefit to members of the broader community.

USF does not have a uniform policy or best practices guide to working with community partners. To possess a meaningful understanding of how best to leverage resources between the campus and our neighbors, it is necessary to go beyond the walls of academia and elicit our partners’ views of what works and possibly more enlightening what does not work in their collaborations with faculty and students. Therefore, OCE organized a study to evaluate community partner’s perceptions of dynamic partnerships and the impact collaboration with the USF has on their organization. The findings from this study will serve to inform the OCE functions bulleted above.

**Overview of the literature**

Poverty, mental illness, homelessness, terrorism, lack of access to health care are just a few of the social issues that plague our existence. Most social problems are too complex to be resolved or ameliorated by one organization or agency. Through collaboration, USF and off campus organizations share resources to find solutions and provide services that would otherwise be absent from society.

University-community partnerships are multi-dimensional and involve participants from varied fields of study. The relationship developed between the community organization or agency and the university should be designed to be mutually beneficial to all participants. The university partner is able to conduct research, practice within the community, and provide educational opportunities to its students. The community partner has the opportunity to gain additional resources to understand neighborhood problems and improve conditions through the development of programs or service delivery enhancement. Moreover, there may be a financial benefit to one or both of the partners (Baum, 2000).

However, in a partnership that is comprised of a university and community organization there may be cultural differences that influence how the individual partners interprets knowledge and approaches problems. Scholars point out that those who reside within the walls of academia view
knowledge as something unique to specialized experts while residents of a community view knowledge as “being pluralistic and well distributed among their neighbors” (Bringle, 1999, p. 506). Furthermore, faculty at a university are viewed as “being isolated, contemplative, theoretical, and cautious” while community leaders are “action oriented, focused on results, expansive in looking for local resources, and responsible for making daily decisions about their communities” (Bringle, 1999, p. 506). In order to move away from partnerships that are rooted in a history of charity towards a justice oriented model of partnerships; the university must be aware of effective partnership characteristics and implement policies and uniform practices that embrace concepts of reciprocity and parity. Incorporating those dynamics of successful collaborations can help to overcome the cultural differences that encumber effective action towards mutual goals.

Writers on the topic of effective partnerships and group processes use differing vocabulary and look to various theories relating to relationships in an effort to describe the dynamics of an effective partnership. Based upon a review of the literature those traits associated with a successful partnership can be generalized to include shared power, resources, and decision making, cooperative goal setting and planning, management of conflict, and group cohesion (Schulz, Israel, & Lantz, 2003; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf & Goss, 2003; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006, Smith & Beazley, 2000, Thomson & Perry, 2006; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Thomson and Perry (2006) view collaboration as a process and identify **five dimensions** of the collaborative relationship. These dimensions include governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, norms of trust and reciprocity. While the process of collaboration should include a governance structure a partnership between a university campus and a direct provider of services typically does not have a hierarchical division of labor. In order to be effective, a collaborative governance structure has mechanisms in place to account for power imbalances among partners. Therefore, partners must understand how to create shared power arrangements through which they are capable of reaching agreement on activities and goals (Thomson & Perry, 2006).

The **administration dimension** of the partnership refers to the partnership characteristics of clear roles and responsibilities, the presence of achievable goals, and open partner communication (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Like governance, administration of a partnership is more involved than the administration tasks required to move a single organization forward. Working successfully within a decentralized administrative structure requires the partnership to have a means to share information and keeping participants focused on the jointly determined rules and goals that govern the relationship.

Also, the **autonomy dimension** is a defining characteristic of organizational partnerships. Each organization within a collaborative relationship has its own identity separate and apart from the collective identity. For example, a faculty member at the University of South Florida created a service learning class aimed at ending homelessness and she partnered with a homeless shelter. The mission of the homeless shelter was not to end homelessness but to secure funding for more beds and provide temporary housing for the homeless. This partnership was unable to fulfill the faculty member’s expectations of the collaboration’s purpose. While this may be an illustration of poor partnership design, it is also a situation which proves that an effective partnership
includes open communication about what the individual’s organization’s goals are and what they can and cannot offer the collaboration.

In addition to information sharing, partnerships must display **mutuality or shared interests** which are based upon an appreciation for issues that go beyond the single organization’s mission (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Organizations that seek out collaborative relationships must forgo their own interests and become interdependent for a mutually beneficial purpose. In her study of collaborations in national service, Thomson (2006) found that commitment to similar target populations proved to be a critical component of successful collaboration. Lastly, Thomson & Perry (2006) point out that a meaningful partnership has social capital norms of trust and reciprocity. Reciprocity deals with “the perceived degree of obligation, such that partners are willing to bear initial disproportionate costs because they expect their partners will equalize the distribution of costs and benefits over time out of a sense of duty” (Thomson & Perry, 2006, p. 27).

Closely related to reciprocity is **trust**. Trust is “a central component of collaboration because it reduces complexity and transaction costs more quickly than other forms of organization” (Thomson & Perry, 2006, p. 28). Trust is defined as a common belief among a group of individuals that another group will “(1) make good faith efforts to behave in accordance with any commitments both explicit and implicit; (2) will be honest in whatever negotiations preceded such commitments; and (3) will not take excessive advantage of another even when the opportunity is available” (Thomson & Perry, 2006, p. 28). Of course, trust is an element of successful partnership that develops over time and with continued contact. As such, trust can be developed through the sharing of information, the sharing of resources, and plenty of opportunities for partners to have open communication between the members.

Thomson & Perry’s operational categorization of partnership processes is similar to the elements required for successful cross-sector collaborations proposed by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006). Based on a review of the literature on collaboration, Bryson et al (2006) present an inventory of propositions regarding conditions influencing the success of collaborative relationships. They conclude that cross-sector collaborations will succeed when (1) partners agree on the problem; (2) there is legitimacy; (3) trust building activities are continual; and (4) there is equalization of power and effective management of conflict. Agreement upon the definition of what the social problem is an important mechanism to collaboration formation and successful outcome. This initial agreement helps clarify each potential partner’s interest in resolving the problem and may determine whether the organizations are an appropriate match (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006).

Legitimacy refers to ensuring to both partnership members and outsiders the collaboration is a genuine entity that is fulfilling a valid purpose. Legitimacy leads to trust among members to communicate freely (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). Trust takes time to develop; therefore trust building is an ongoing requirement for successful collaboration (Huxam & Vangen, 2005). Trust building takes place when partners share information and members are held accountable for success and failures. Bryson, Crosby, & Stone (2006) point out that when organizations which differ in status due to size, funding, or reputation conflict may be aggravated. Power equalization minimizes the chances of conflict disrupting the collaborative process. Power
equalization can occur throughout the collaborative process by ensuring each member organization has a say in the shaping of the collaboration agenda; each member is provided with information; and resources are used to put all participants on a more equal footing (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006)

Similar themes of effective partnership characteristics are seen in the literature regarding university community partnerships (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Schulz, Israel & Lantz, 2003). Leiderman, et al (2003) found that community partners perceived their partnerships as successful and partnership goals were achieved if the partnership exhibited eight characteristics: (1) a set of mutually determined goals and processes to select and train people who will come into contact with a community organization or community residents; (2) shared resources, rewards, and risks; (3) opportunity for open discussions about the resources available, the risks and rewards to the organization; (4) a shared vision built on a mutual passion for the issue at hand; (5) campus partner’s understanding of a community’s interests, assets, needs, and opportunities; (6) sharing roles and responsibilities based on each partner’s ability to do them well; (7) parity; and (8) accountability.

As those interviews reveal, the characteristics of design and implementation of a successful university community partnership are almost identical to the characteristics associated with other successful interagency alliances. The only exception may be the element of knowledge of community needs and how to work in communities. This is due to the fact that quality campus community partnerships are formed for the specific purpose of meeting a goal set by the community. This is most likely to occur if the university partner has a comprehensive understanding of “the local context and manifestation of those issues that faculty and/or students are being asked to address” (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003, p. 7).

Peer relationships may be a sensitive issue for the community partner within the university community collaboration and should be evaluated as a key dimension of the partnership process. A small community organization may perceive the campus partner status as higher than its own; or think the campus partner perceives the community organization as one in need of charitable services. Community partners felt strongly that their expertise and experience need to be recognized and utilized in the community campus partnership (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003). While campus partners may bring research skills, an interest in publicizing community work in peer reviewed journals, and applied experience; community partners need to be recognized for their experiential credentials, advanced degrees, and training. Like power equalization, parity can be demonstrated through the sharing of resources, joint analysis of results, cooperative development of goals, and opportunities for open communication about meaningful issues pertaining to the partnership.

University-community partnerships were analyzed through analogy with close interpersonal relationships by Bringle & Hatcher (2002) to provide an understanding of the dynamics of a healthy campus-community partnership. Even under this theoretical framework, many of the same thoughts concerning effective partnerships that have been discussed thus far materialize. For example, campus community partners should have (1) a clear mission; (2) have shared values, goals, and objectives; (3) ability to communicate; (4) equity; (5) interdependency; and (6) means for affirming the value of the partnership (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).
Having a clear mission facilitates selecting the appropriate community partner. The mission may be formulating service learning class objectives which are linked to the objectives of the partnering agency. Effective communication refers to campus representatives having sensitivity to community concerns, provide an honest account of resources that can be contributed to the partnership, be open to community partners’ opinions, and responding to community concerns in a timely manner. Additionally, partnerships should be fair and equitable. Affirmation of the value of the partnership by the campus partner alleviates perceptions of power imbalances and contributes to conflict minimization. Affirmation can be achieved by sharing in rewards and risks of the partnership and inclusion of all partners when developing goals and interpreting results.

Based on the literature and the concerns of USF, OCE defines an effective partnership as one that displays (1) shared power, resources, and decision making; (2) partnership management; (3) the university partner’s understanding of the community and its needs; and (4) having a shared vision and goals.

**Methodology**

Despite the different approaches to understanding and creating effective community partnerships, agreement exists across areas of scholarship regarding the characteristics of successful partnerships. An indicator of success is that the partnership was able to achieve its objectives. Campus community partnerships attempt to bring organizations together which can pool resources and ideas to create solutions to problems identified by the community. The objectives of these partnerships are directly related to partnership dynamics that are considered integral to attaining positive outcomes. As such, the evaluation of university-community partnerships must look at how the partnership functioned as a group to work towards their outcome objectives (Schulz, Israel, & Lantz, 2003). How the partnership functioned may be assessed by examining whether not group dynamics characteristics associated with effective partnerships were present in the collaboration.

**Survey**

The survey instrument used in this study was formulated based on an instrument for evaluating dimensions of group dynamics within community-based participatory research partnerships developed by Schulz, Israel, and Lantz (2003). Modifications were made in order to capture the perceptions of our partners relating to those domains of partnership dynamics that are of most interest to OCE. The OCE survey consisted of 24 questions designed to measure whether community partners believed their partnerships had the following characteristics: (1) shared power, resources, and decision making; (2) partnership management; (3) the university’s understanding of the community and its needs; and (4) a shared vision and goal.

Although the university has provided experiential learning experiences for students over the decades, tracking and assessment of these types of partnerships has only begun upon the formation of OCE and the hiring of additional support in 2010. OCE was able to identify past community based research partnerships and engaged learning partnerships through a previously implemented mini-grant program for the development of service-learning courses that was offered through the dismantled program USF Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities. Forty two (42) surveys were emailed to community partners during the fall of
2010 and responses were collected through fall of 2011. Approximately thirty-five percent of surveys were completed by community partners (n= 15 or 35.71%)

Interviews

Ten seasoned community partners were contacted by OCE to take part in one on one interviews to discuss their experiences with partnering with the university. Interviewees were chosen based upon their ongoing involvement with USF. Six representatives from five different community serving organizations agreed to discuss their working relationships with USF faculty and students. Each interviewee had participated in service learning projects, research, and utilized student volunteers over the past ten year period. The continuity and multiplicity of partnership experiences endows this group with an informed opinion of the university system and a sophisticated point of view of what makes certain campus collaborations successful and what makes other unsatisfactory.

The goals of interviewing community partners are threefold. The first goal was to make the community perspectives of campus-community partnerships clearer in order to assess what features our partners think are necessary to create an effective partnership. Second, the interviews serve as a means to gain insight into the social geography of the various communities that partner with the university so faculty and students have a comprehension understanding of the local context and manifestation of the issues that students are being asked to address. Third, OCE is interested in how the community partners think they benefit from partnering with USF and what they think are the costs. Six organizations agreed to be interviewed. Individual interviews took place through fall 2011 at sites most convenient for the community partner. OCE developed the assessment questions and conducted the interviews.

Findings

Responses from community partners to survey questions and during the interviews provide us with a more complete vision of ideal partnerships. Characteristics described by community partners during the interviews are closely aligned with the dynamics of effective partnerships as defined in the academic literature and set forth in the survey. The value added to our understanding of successful partnerships, by including the voice of our community partners, is being able to identify what is important specifically to the members of USF’s particular partnerships.

This report is organized in the following areas:

- Community partners perception of the existence of pre-defined effective partnership characteristics
- Community defined effective partnership characteristics
- Benefits of partnering with the university
Community Partners’ Perceptions of the Existence of Pre-Defined Effective Partnership Characteristics

Shared Power, Resources, Decision Making
The majority of survey respondents reported that they believed key components of shared power, resources, and decision making were present in their partnership. Community partner’s perceptions of whether the dynamics of shared power, resources, and decision making existed were elicited by asking respondents to answer yes or no to nine statements:

- (a) In this partnership, partners showed respect for each other;
- (b) this partnership provided opportunities for open and honest communication;
- (c) all partners were involved in the development of this project prior to project implementation;
- (d) all partners participated in making major decisions;
- (e) responsibilities and processes were established with the input of all partners;
- (f) individual capacities and resources were taken into consideration when establishing roles and responsibilities;
- (g) data and findings were accessible with all partners;
- (h) all partners participated in the interpretation of results.

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide narratives in order to explain the reasoning behind their answers. One respondent who indicated the partnership did not have open honest communication explained,

*I wish you had a category “Not all the time”. I answered “no” when in actuality it should have been “sometimes”. We have so many projects and involvement that it really was not accurate for me to simply say “yes” or “no”. The overall experiences have been positive. At times the person who is involved communicated well with us, but sometimes this was not so.*
**Partnership Management**
The results yielded fewer affirmative responses to whether dimensions of project management were present within the partnership. The existence of partnership management was measured by community partner’s responses to the following three statements:

- (a) This partnership had a person who was skilled at project management;
- (b) partners followed up on commitments and work products were developed on time;
- (c) there was regular assessment of goal achievement and partnership objectives; and
- (d) this partnership used an effective approach for resolving conflicts between partners.

Although all community partners that took the survey responded “yes” to the statement that the campus partner followed up on commitments and work products were developed on time it should be noted that one respondent qualified their affirmative response:

*The degree of student commitment and quality of student work varied. Some was outstanding, other was disappointing. A common experience is for faculty and students to drastically overestimate the amount of time they will actually have available to devote to the work that the partnership entails.*

**University’s Knowledge of the Community**
Two statements on the survey relate to the university’s knowledge of the community:

- The university partner was familiar with the community we serve; and
- the university partner was willing to learn more about the community and the needs identified by the community.

Although two respondents indicated that the university was not familiar with the community the organization served, all respondents believed that the university was willing to learn more about the community and the community’s needs.
Shared Vision & Goals
Three statements were included in the survey to assess the community partners’ perception of whether the partnership had shared vision and goals:

(a) This partnership was based upon a shared vision among partners;
(b) goals of the project were mutually agreed upon by partners; and
(c) all partners had a shared vision that was built on genuine excitement and passion for the identified issues.

The majority of community partners responded positively to the statements related to the elements of shared vision and goals. No respondents reported there was an absence of shared vision and goals. However, it may be interpreted that this set of questions was unclear to survey participants that reported they were unsure whether these characteristics were present in their partnership.

The survey is an initial guide for instructing the campus community in creating, co-managing, and maintaining positive relationships with community partners that produce successful outcomes. What we can glean from the survey responses is that most community partners believed key components of shared power, resources, and decision making were present in their partnerships. The results yielded fewer responses to whether dimensions of project management were present within the partnership. Additionally, the university-community partnerships are seen by the responding community partners as an effective means to achieve goals and receive benefits they otherwise would not have realized had they not collaborated with the university.

Community Defined Effective Partnership Characteristics

While the survey is a useful tool for initial assessment of the partnerships formed between the university and community organizations, it does not produce a full picture of partnership creation and maintenance. The survey does not take into account the environmental factors unique to the Tampa Bay Community that may influence the community partner’s perception of benefits and partnership dynamics. Therefore, OCE interviewed six long term community partner organizations to assess how they define the qualities of a successful partnership. Taken together with the narratives provided by survey respondents, it appears that USF’s local community partners define a successful partnership as one that treats the community organization as an academic equal; they have access to information produced through the partnership; the university
has an understanding and knowledge of the goals of the community partner; and there is a clear communication pathway into the university system.

**Community as Co-Educator**

When asked directly about what made their partnerships with USF successful, the overwhelming initial responses pertained to what the organization was able to contribute to the education of USF students. When discussing a service learning project between USF and one local community development center which provides services to a low income neighborhood the community partner pointed out:

*Education students learn to do their planning and assessments here. They learn to think outside the box because this is not a regular school environment. So, it allows teachers greater ideas. What we are doing is helping teachers be better teachers. We are providing USF a place where they can train teachers not only be pure academic, but also in application. But then they have the real hands on participation in what they are going to do in the future. And I think it’s great, because at this point you want to know, do you really want to be a teacher or not? So, it either intensified the love they have for teaching, or it tells you gotta’ back out. Which is a win-win situation for them as well as our kids. So we feel like we are a seeding ground for future teachers. And then our kids in turn get the kind of tutoring that I call the “Sylvan” of this area.*

Other community partners explained the importance of their role in assisting in the education of USF students:

*Some professors hold their classes in buildings around in the neighborhood. What I think it gives the university students a real life picture on how neighborhoods function and how well they work synergistically together. They give us great resources, their energy and their vitality. And what we give back to them is the ability to see how that energy and those resources can be applied in a real neighborhood situation.*

*We provide a wonderful augmentation to the professors because the professors are there [at the university]. They are not in the community, many of them. Some of them are pretty active to some extent. But that is not their job. Their job is in the academic world and this allows them to also see in that same vein how what they do can translate to the students from us. It makes all of the theoretical and philosophical components of the educational process have a reality base. It’s not just all theory. What we are quite frankly, is the applied research component of the theoretical research component that happens up there (at the university).*

*I think it’s so easy just to study this stuff, but until you are ready to apply it it’s meaningless. You may have somebody that’s a graduate student that studies urban society or urban issues, then they step into [our community] and they can’t even have a conversation with a homeless person.*

**Shared Information/Access to Partnership Results**

Community partners interviewed for this report indicated that equal distribution of power within the partnership requires that the community organization have influence over interpretation of partnership outcomes and how information will be disseminated. Campus researchers must be mindful of not engaging in behaviors which appear to be exploitative of the community members for whom the community partner organization is providing services.
USF professors have presented our programs throughout the nation. They have gotten rave reviews for this type of tutorial program. We did not have access to that information to put on our website. I didn’t even know where they presented. When we write grants to support our programming it would be great to have the results of research we participated in.

Community organizations that repeatedly avail themselves to students and faculty through service learning courses noted the importance of receiving deliverables from the course. Having the ability to access the information, evaluate, and provide input influences whether the community partner will be willing in the future to work with USF.

We have made every effort to connect specifically with USF because we can show you year after year what has happened with the USF students. I think that’s a success. Now I know some other neighborhoods have complained that students come and do research and leave and they never receive results. I’ve heard neighborhoods say, “don’t come back unless you do something for the neighborhood.”

We’re usually invited to an end of class presentation or we get a copy of their final report or paper. Sometimes I have to chase it down. One time, I was very angry about this, this particular graduate student had conducted some interviews and focus groups and participant observation. The idea was we were going to get an objective perspective about [the program]. I knew the class ended and the student showed up at a community meeting and I told her I never got a copy of the assessment, her research. She told me it was with the professor. I asked her if she received a grade and she said yes, but the professor is editing the paper. I called the professor who said there was stuff in the paper that we wouldn’t want circulating. I thought, if this research had been done properly then this wouldn’t be an issue.

Goal alignment and having an understanding of the community
Researchers and students from the university must have familiarity with the community they are seeking to work with or study. Additionally, academics must be cognizant of what their community partner organization is trying to achieve prior to designing a course and service learning project. Experiential learning should not merely be focused on the benefits for the students. Although we provide engaged learning opportunities for students in the hopes that the university is producing self aware & civic minded graduates; it is imperative to include in the equation how this partnership promotes the cause of the neighborhood or community.

I think the success I eluded to…its alignment. If there are either faculty members or graduate students that have an interest in our area they need to be focused on being able to bring something to the table that will help out that cause.

I think they [potential campus partners] need to meet with the organization prior to the fiscal year. Find out what the organization’s particular mission is. Within the mission we have many goals. Maybe by having faculty involved with my strategic plan, they can provide me with ideas. Ideas that will meet the needs they have for their academic goals as well as the goals of the organization.
I think with service learning it is good to be involved with the organization’s goals for that year. Getting in early so that the service learning is really of quality. It’s not just, “Hey I need a grad student, just found out that I need to find out how many one handed residents live in that community.” You know, it becomes that shallow sometimes.

Community partners focused on follow through from faculty and students when clarifying what goal alignment meant to them.

I think, going back to alignment, the part that really hurts me, hurts my staff, and the kids we serve, is when the class is over they say, I’m sorry I don’t have any more time for this. When we worked with a faculty member in [name of College] and that faculty member got a promotion and was put on several different committees, she dropped out in the middle of the project. It was horrible. It broke the hearts of the kids. This made me very skeptical about partnership with the university because the fear of the project leader just walking away. You have to clean up the mess with the kids, you have to clean up the mess with the community, you got to clean up the mess with the parents.

Another community partner recounted her experience after the university invited the surrounding neighborhoods onto to campus to discuss partnerships:

All the neighborhoods turned up and we were talking and thought we were going to go somewhere. At the end of it, we were told “there’s a $5,000.00 grant and you all go talk to each other, and you all figure it out.” And that was it. I don’t know of anybody that made any progress. I made communications back with faculty. We ended up with nothing. You know there was no follow through from the university. That was disappointing to me.

Community partners, who provide services in an area of Tampa where much research has been conducted, pointed out that the university may not be utilizing its own resources to educate the students about the history of the research or project area prior to sending students to the work-site.

I think that there’s a lot of history of those who have done major research in this particular community, and I think often some of the classes where I’ve been invited to speak don’t know of the university contributions. I’m thinking, whoever is teaching this class should have given you [students] the reports written by [names of USF professors]…They should have least had you done some homework.

I think it’s sad to see how empty the knowledge base is about a community that helped shaped Tampa. We’re not talking about [an area of Tampa] that was full of trees up until 10 years ago. We’re talking about one of the longest and oldest communities that went from prosperity to poverty and it’s trying to get back to prosperity over the last 150 years.
Communication
Closely related to the importance of goal alignment is communication. Communication was discussed in conjunction with goal alignment:

> All communication lines need to be crystal clear when it comes to what the goals are and the actual implementation and follow through. I think that if one small component [of the project] is not communicated, I don’t think [our partnership] would be a successful as it is.

Community partners also discussed communication and how it plays a vital role in understanding what resources the university has to offer and also project management once a project is initiated. A theme repeated in nearly every interview is the need for the community to have a point person they can talk to that can be accountable and direct them towards resources that can further their missions:

> We need communication. But, that goes back to the very problem I think is lack of a liaison. If there is a stop for both of us [campus & community partner] that is consistent, it doesn’t matter who comes in to keep the project going, there is someone who is monitoring making sure that it continues, making sure that information is somewhere and that we can access it.

> We need a conduit into the university. Someone at the university that can answer where are the resources at the university where we can go? Having a coordinator... [At USF] that understands the whole goal [of the project] is and making it happen.

Benefits of Partnering With the University

Public management scholars consistently break down public sector partnerships into four categories based on the mission or purpose of the partnership (Agranoff, 2001; Milward & Provan, 2006). The purpose of the partnership may be to implement services, share information regarding a problem, attempt to solve a problem, or build social capital in a community based setting. OCE strives to bring the university and the off campus community together in an attempt to address some of the more dire problems facing the public through the sharing of resources. Knowing the prevalent reasons why the community would seek out campus partnerships provides us with an understanding of what the community believes the best use of USF resources are. The top three benefits community partners expected to receive from partnering with the university are general collaboration (86.7%), improvements in programs (66.7%), and increased research on a community issue or need (53.3%).
Additionally, during interviews many community partners talked about how partnering with the university made their organization and the social issues they are attempting to address more visible to university students who otherwise would remain unaware of resource disparities.

*A benefit to us is that I think it [service learning] exposes them [students] to a different demographic, a different, I don’t want to say lifestyle, but a different perspective on how everyone lives, because it really opens their eyes when they come out and really begin to work in this neighborhood. Before …they may have only known what they have been taught or what they’ve gone through in their own lives. I think that is a huge part of our partnership because it opens your eyes to what’s here and opens your eyes to people’s struggles just in your backyard.*

Using university community partnerships to enlighten students on the total human experience and awakening the drive in students to want to change the injustices they see benefits community partners because the students become “*an avenue for us to advocate for more resources because there are more people who know the story of this partnership. Students wrapped their hearts around this community and knew what they were doing was life changing*”.

Something on the minds of many people during this current economic crisis in 2012 is translating a sound education into a job. Community partners identified campus community partnerships as good recruitment tools for their organizations. Hiring university students that have worked with an organization through a service learning class were seen as desirable candidates because these students become familiar with the organization’s systems, the organization sees how they approach and resolve problems and those students are knowledgeable about the community.

Community organizations that partner with the university for the purposes of service learning were particularly enthusiastic about university students acting as role models. Students and faculty may be coming in for research purposes, but the interaction they are having with the community members impacts neighborhood participants in ways that go beyond the stated purpose of the project.
The [university students] think that’s a basic research class for a basic research project for a student. But they are able to come and interact with the kids, and the kids grew up and they learned how to interact with the university students and they learned that now we could go to college.

The kids learned in a semester what they would never have learned had it not been for the interaction between the university and them. Those things, I’m sure, those young people are talking with them as they go on with their lives whether they go to college or not.

Conclusion

Campus-community partnership has proven to be a successful approach to addressing social problems and finding ways to efficiently and effectively deliver services to the vulnerable populations that the university and direct service providers are most concerned. In order to achieve positive outcomes for both the university participants and the community based partners the university players within these networks must understand the dynamics of effective organizational partnerships. An overall view of the findings indicate that community partners view their partnerships as positive and many of the dynamics associated with successful collaboration are present within the partnerships. Additionally, the campus community partnerships are seen by responding community partners as an effective means to achieve goals and receive benefits they otherwise would not have realized had they not collaborated with the university:

*Getting the support of USF provides the organization with important social capital, also lending legitimacy and credibility to the organization and its work.*

This is not to say there are not areas in which the university could improve. The following actions have been taken by OCE to mitigate some of the most pressing challenges encountered by our community partners.

**Creation of the OCE website to improve communication.** Clearly, community partners want to know what activities are happening on campus and moreover, they want the campus to know what their goals are and what is happening in the neighborhoods they serve. OCE website provides an abundance of information for those who are seeking more information about engaged scholarship. In addition to other information, OCE website provides links to community based organization’s websites, a databank of community based research initiatives and service learning projects, and contact information for OCE staff. The OCE website also provides information and the link to ServicePro, USF’s service database which can be used to identify appropriate service opportunities. OCE continues to develop our online interactive resources in order to facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships.

**The Community Quarterly** is the OCE’s newsletter which increases the visibility of OCE and improves communication among our various community and campus stakeholders.

**Professional Development Workshops** for faculty and students who are interested in engaged learning course design and community based research. These workshops promote best practices when working with off campus partners and serve as a forum for community based researchers to connect with one another.
Support for Working Groups & Graduate Students who focus on community based research. OCE supports the Graduate Student Research Network (GSARN) which is comprised of a group of interdisciplinary graduate students, but who share a common passion for community based research. OCE has also initiated The Sulphur Springs Working Group which encourages faculty and graduate students from across the campus but who all are conducting research in the Tampa neighborhood of Sulphur Springs to come together to share their research experiences and consolidate their projects when appropriate.

Research That Matters Conference and Grant Competition. OCE hosts an annual Research That Matters Conference where community based organizations and USF faculty present the results and findings of their collaborations. OCE also provides seed money for faculty to develop community based research projects. OCE also provides mini-grants for faculty to design and implement engaged learning courses.

Community Partner Appreciation Luncheon. In conjunction with the Center for Leaderships and Civic Engagement, OCE host an annual community partner appreciation luncheon. The purpose of this luncheon is to recognize the contribution our community partners make to the university. However, one of the challenges when working with community partners is that there may sometimes be a disconnect between the expectations and understandings of the community partners and the resources USF can provide. Therefore, the luncheon is also an opportunity for us to clarify our abilities and the community partners’ expectations.

Seek funding to continue to build USF’s capacity to support engaged learning throughout the campus curriculum. OCE continually seeks out resources to develop programming that will be mutually beneficial to faculty, students, and community partners.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of campus-community partnerships and the impact engaged learning has on students, faculty, and community partners.
Works Cited


