



## **A GUIDE TO RECIPROCAL COMMUNITY-CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS**

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**A Unique Collaborative Study of Partnerships  
from the Perspectives of both  
Community Partners and Higher Education Partners**

This guide represents the insights, understandings and practices which emerged from the contrasting stories and experiences of community partners and higher education partners--perspectives that merged and blended to produce common insights about how reciprocal partnerships can be described, developed and sustained. In addition to the thinking of the Partnership Forum participants, this guide represents an initial synthesis of existing literature on community-campus partnerships.

NOTE: For users of this guide, please note that it is a developing resource. Portland State University's Center for Academic Excellence is committed to ongoing study of understandings and practices of partnerships, and that study will direct expansion and revision of this guide.

# Definitions and Essential Components of Community-Campus Partnerships

## Definitions:

Partnerships develop out of relationships and result in mutual transformation and cooperation between parties. They are motivated by a desire to combine forces that address their own best interests/mission and ideally result in outcomes greater than any one organization could achieve alone. They create a sense of shared purpose that serves the common good (Partnership Forum, 2008).

Partnerships are the process of two or more people envisioning a better life for themselves and for the community in which they live, learning together ways to accomplish a better life, and then working together in creating it (Gerber, 2008).

Partnerships are collaborative and dynamic relationships between parties working toward and achieving shared goals while respecting individual differences (Partnership Forum, 2008).

## Kinds of Partnerships

Community-campus partnerships take many forms based on the partners or the intentions. Some common examples of community-campus partnerships include:

- Higher Education Institution/Community Partnerships
- College, Department, Program/Community Partnerships
- Individual Faculty/Community Partnerships for Service-Learning
- Individual Faculty/Community Partnerships for Community-based Research
- Student(s)/Community Partnerships
- Student Organization/Community Partnerships

In all of these examples, the number of departments or faculty members or community organizations and agencies may range from one to many. The intentions or purposes of the partnerships will vary widely also influencing the type of partnership. Some examples of those differences are

partnerships for internships, partnerships for research studies, partnerships for event sponsorship, etc.

### Essential Components: Requirements and Characteristics

Beyond the requirement of “more than one partner,” partnerships require a benefit for both contributors of the partnership, that is, each partner seeks an outcome or goal to be achieved. Partnerships also require an understanding of each partner’s needs, resources, assets, interests, and culture. Partnerships require a relationship of power sharing, trust, and respect. The concept of power sharing is a sophisticated understanding which requires intentional processing by partners with open dialogue and ongoing common reflection. “Partners do not need to be equal, but they do need to be honest. Partnerships are characterized by complexity, synergy, hard work, risk taking, communication and miscommunication and transparent processes” (Partnership Forum, 2008).

The report of the Community Partner Summit (Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2006-08, p. 13) identified three essential components for authentic community-higher education partnerships:

1. Quality processes (relationship-focused, characterized by integrity; trust-building; acknowledgement of history, commitment to learning and sharing credit)
2. Meaningful outcomes (specific and significant to all partners)
3. Transformation (at individual, institutional and organizational, and societal levels)

### Essential Components: Processes

- Asset (resources, strengths, and interests) identification and recognition for all partners
- Dialogue within partners and between partners

- Creation of common language
- Relationship-building strategies
- Describing and understanding each other's culture
- Learning together
- Collaborative problem posing and solving
- Collaborative agenda setting
- Identification and recognition of each partner's needs, issues and challenges
- Self assessment and reflection within each partner group and between partners
- Constant negotiation and modification
- Supporting infrastructure in each partner's organization

When you review the list of processes in the context of higher education, please note that there are significant and undeniable implications for: faculty roles, preparation, orientation, and mentoring; expectations of faculty; and reward systems for faculty. The importance of institutional alignment of mission, resources and strategic planning for community partnerships is further highlighted to support the essential processes of partnerships.

## **Practices for Initiating and Developing Reciprocal Partnerships**

### Initiation of Partnerships

Begin by thinking of this initiation stage as a developmental one – not a one-time occurrence but a developing and growing process that requires time and new understandings of self and partner. Each partner needs to spend time within her/his own group being clear about “who we are” and our intentions, motivations, goals and outcomes before beginning to communicate with a partner. From there, it is important to use processes that work toward mutuality in the partnerships. Mutuality assures that each partner will participate in the partnership with a sense of

ownership and understanding of the other partner. Once the decision is made to initiate a partnership, the following processes are essential:

- Sharing of history/tradition, assets, needs, challenges, and interests
- Developing a common language for the partnership
- Establishing processes of feedback
- Developing clear expectations, indicators of progress and incremental successes
- Articulating risks and describing tension points
- Considering ways to share resources

Some practices for achieving mutuality in this initiation phase:

- Use “ice breaker” strategies to begin sharing history/tradition, values, needs, interests, etc.
- Engage in story telling of successes, frustrations, and failures in partnerships
- Develop ground rules for the partnership
- Design a framework of questions that reflect each partner’s needs, interests, understandings, etc.
- Distribute materials from each partner (catalog of university, brochure of program, manual of organization, literature from journals, magazines, etc.)
- Compare missions, values, identity for common ground and contrasts
- Establish a glossary of vocabulary (jargon, acronyms, etc.) of each partner
- Clarify difference between dialogue and debate and set up process for moving from debate to dialogue
- Identify common study topics and share insights and perspectives
- Schedule intentional and facilitated discussions of each partner’s culture and differences between partners, power differences, expectations, and resource differences
- Establish a contact person for each partner and an infrastructure to support ongoing communication

- Determine a location for partnership meetings and conversations that supports the equity of the partners' roles
- Discuss the differences between the partners in terms of culture, modes of decision making, perceived identity, and ways of thinking about knowledge
- Establish criteria for the partnership—qualities that are desired when working together (ex. understanding, humor, efficiency, organization, etc.)
- Develop short-term and long-term goals for the partnership
- Develop an action plan based on goals

### Sustaining Reciprocal Partnerships

- Develop a timeline of the partnership and regularly chart progress and accomplishments
- Develop a means to document achievements over time
- Conduct progress checks using an inquiry approach:
  - What's working well in our partnership?
  - What's not working well in our partnership?
  - What do we need to proceed?
  - What expectations have been met so far?
  - What expectations have not met?
  - What are sources of satisfaction for each partner?
  - What are sources of frustration so far?
- Revise or develop new action plans based on responses to the questions
- Partners take turns reporting on the perspective of partnership – visually, through narratives, “rap” or using continua of criteria
- Check-in every six months—or more frequently—on common goals or the need to revise goals, on the action agenda or the need to revise the agenda and plans

## RESOURCES

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