

## WHY DO COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH?

### BENEFITS AND PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

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PERHAPS THE MOST DISTINGUISHING feature of community-based research is that it is collaborative, and the foundation for that collaboration is the campus-community partnership. Faculty and students work with community-based organizations to define the research questions and develop appropriate strategies to address those questions. In this process, the scientific process is demystified and the results are produced to be useful to the community as they pursue their social change and community improvement agenda. However, as Nyden, Figert, Shibley, and Burrows (1997) note, "Successful collaborative projects typically have at their foundation a working relationship that has been built up over time" (p. 5). In this chapter, we focus on the partnership aspect of CBR: how it is that the community can benefit from the partnership and some of the principles that govern successful campus-community collaboration.

Before turning to our examination of the benefits of CBR to the community, we must first address the question, "Who is *the community*?" What we mean by community encompasses a variety of social organization forms that operate at a number of levels of size and complexity. At the basic level, the members of a community share a common interest or identity. Typically, these individuals create a form of social organization to further their common interest or advance their notion of common identity. The community entities with which we collaborate in CBR are those that share a common position in society that places them in a disadvantaged position in structural or cultural terms: they have access to fewer

resources and opportunities due to the way that the larger society's institutions, social structures, or policies operate or the way in which they are perceived (and perceive themselves) in relation to the others in society. Based on this position of disadvantage, members sharing this identity or structural location come together to improve their opportunities and access to resources. The CBR process may collaborate with such communities at any and all levels of this process: constructing the social organization, defining its goals and strategies, implementing its social change initiatives, assessing the effects of its change efforts, and reevaluating its initial goals and strategies in the light of its experiences.

The social bases of these communities may take a variety of forms:

- Geographical location (for example, neighborhood groups, public housing residents)
- Position within an institution or social structure (for example, juvenile offenders, students in public schools, poor people, service sector laborers, senior citizens)
- Personal identity or status (for example, immigrants, women, people of color, gays and lesbians)
- Alliances with such constituencies (such as faith-based organizations and service agencies)

The actual community partners with which we conduct CBR are typically nonprofit organizations, public agencies, or small grassroots groups organized for any number of purposes:

- Provide services to those in need
- Advocate for the disadvantaged or oppressed
- Empower people who are disenfranchised
- Alter structures that limit opportunities and generate poverty, violence, and suffering
- Ally themselves with such efforts

In some cases, these partner organizations are made up of, or controlled by, members of those communities. In those situations, there is a clean fit between the goal of working with the community and actual practice. In many cases, however, those partners are a step removed from the community because community members do not control those organizations. They are often, however, connected to it by staff or board members who come from the community. Those "link people," or "bridge people," or

"translators," as they are variously called, are the connection between the organization and the community.

Other partners are two steps removed from the community because they have no direct connection to the people with the problem. Their staff or boards may share some structural characteristics—of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other important characteristic—but they do not share the experience of the problem. Service providers, institutions, government, and other similar organizations trying to help a community when they have no community base, no community participation or control, and no bridge people are often suspect in a community. It is with these twice-removed groups that many academics partner, which introduces a series of concerns about how well the community itself is being empowered. In later chapters we discuss mechanisms for addressing these issues and strengthening community empowerment. We now turn to an examination of the ways that CBR may provide benefits to such community-based organizations.

## Benefits to the Community

The leaders, staff, and organizers in community-based organizations (CBOs) confront enormous challenges and often feel overwhelmed, largely due to the nature of their work and the environment in which they operate. They labor on society's most complex problems—such as poverty, homelessness, child abuse, illiteracy, hunger, and lack of affordable housing—armed with woefully inadequate resources. They operate in a context that affords them fairly limited opportunity to effect structural changes and even fewer resources to devote to such changes. They are further hampered by frequent policy shifts and the resistance of entrenched elites allied behind the status quo. All too often, they find themselves so busy confronting the immediate threats to individual or family survival or well-being that they have little time and energy left to address the underlying causes of the problems that command their efforts.

Increasingly, these organizations have been asked not only to do more with less but to document with quantitative data that they have succeeded in their efforts. They are asked to undertake research on the extent of need and to select best practices for program implementation within a specific context. CBR partnerships can help alleviate some of these pressures, especially the need to demonstrate impact, and they can be an important resource for those who are working to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people in our communities.

## The South West Improvement Council

The South West Improvement Council (SWIC) is a nonprofit organization that provides housing and other services in a low-income, ethnically diverse neighborhood in southwest Denver. Jan Marie Belle, director of SWIC, needed solid data to support her community organization's case for grants, public funding, and political debates, but she lacked the resources to collect such information. Deb Moulton, a University of Denver doctoral student in quantitative research methods, worked with Belle to analyze the demographics relevant to affordable housing in southwest Denver.

Belle used the graphics that resulted from Moulton's study in a presentation to local foundations and politicians about housing issues in the city. The study's findings had important implications for charitable giving and public policy. "I got lots of thoughtful dialogue; council members commented how helpful it was to have graphics. One of the council members is a lawyer and president of the Colorado Mortgage Banker's Association. He exchanged cards with me, and we talked about forming a coalition to work on these issues in a way that nonprofits alone cannot. Folks like that really like data—factual information to make decisions. We had information he hadn't seen, and that was powerful for us."

In an e-mail note to Moulton, Belle said, "Thanks again, for the respect you are showing and the knowledge you are sharing. You are objective, fair, respectful, truly wanting to empower, not insecure, not trying to take what we have." Belle describes what she learned from her collaboration with Moulton: "Deb showed me how to analyze the data, to update things, and to use the computer program she uses. This was most empowering. I am gratified that she realizes that I can learn new things. It's so empowering to have this kind of data. It puts me on equal footing with those who have the money and political power. With my own data, I can negotiate service for the community. I don't have to rely on someone else's figures."

From the community's point of view, the primary incentive for entering into a CBR collaboration is to help it achieve its social change goals. Although CBO leaders, staff, and organizers may be willing, and even eager, to help educate students or advance the frontiers of knowledge, their objective for partnering with higher education students and faculty is to mobilize additional resources to fulfill their organizational mission. From the CBO perspective, such a partnership may be a significant asset for them. In the short run, the partnership may provide the CBO with access to new resources as well as the opportunity to leverage the resources that are already under its control. From a somewhat longer-term perspective, CBR partnerships have the potential to develop the capacities of community groups by increasing the skills of the staff, thereby enhancing

the organization's ability to operate more effectively and better assess its operations and outcomes. Finally, and on a more abstract level, if we shift our focus away from the internal operations of community groups, we can see how these partnerships are able to make a meaningful contribution to democracy. In the following sections, we examine the potential for CBR to advance the social change objectives of community-based organizations by helping those organizations: leverage new resources and better mobilize the ones they have, develop their capacity, and participate more effectively in our democracy.

### *Accessing and Using Resources*

CBR partnerships are valuable to community groups to the extent that they provide access to new, relatively stable, and diverse resources. In a typical CBR project, a group of students and their professor work on a question that the agency has identified. The significance to the CBO is that it receives a substantial infusion of real energy and expertise. At its best, such a partnership provides a temporary research and development staff for the CBO that it otherwise could not afford. It is temporary in the sense that any one professor and his or her class may share their talents during the course of a one-semester or two-semester CBR class. As the partnership deepens over time and broadens to cover a range of matters, the potential becomes even more powerful. In such a case, the partnership can provide an ongoing mechanism that will connect the community group with faculty members and students from a variety of disciplines, presumably over a long period of time during which a number of research initiatives can be undertaken.

Clearly, CBR is a vehicle to help nonprofits do more of what they are already trying to do daily. The additional resources brought to bear by faculty and students help the CBOs complete more activities that already appear on their short-term agenda. Consider how a simple CBR project can help an organization that runs a mentoring program for at-risk children, but does not have enough volunteers to serve all of them. In this situation, a group of students can produce a directory of all volunteer, service, and service-learning programs in the area. They can interview current volunteers and find out what brought them to the organization and what barriers they overcame to serve there. They can produce a directory of potential funding agencies and explain their distinctive application processes. Perhaps in a follow-up project the next semester, another group of students will draft a grant proposal on behalf of the organization, surveying the alternative program options, analyzing the strengths and weak-

nesses of the program, and documenting the program's existing practices. Each of these projects would help the program accomplish its short-term goal: matching more at-risk youths with positive role models.

CBR can also leverage funding sources well beyond their initial limits. Phil Nyden, director of the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University in Chicago, notes that "the roughly \$10,000,000 in grants received by the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola has leveraged at least another \$10,000,000 in tuition, faculty time, student time, and other university resources. Easily one-third of this has directly gone to community partners, or has been of direct benefit to them" (Nyden, personal communication, 2002). Even when sharing a grant with a higher education institution that takes a large amount of it in overhead, the possibilities of using the remaining funds to leverage faculty time, student time, physical resources such as computer analysis and laboratory testing facilities, and other institutional resources for a CBR project can make an initial grant stretch considerably.

The University of Denver's six-year relationship with La Clinica Tepeyac also illustrates how a CBR partnership can be beneficial for a community-based organization. La Clinica is located in a Denver neighborhood that the university has been connected with through various community-based learning projects for several years. It is referred to as a first-tier partner of the university because whenever possible, La Clinica's research needs receive priority from the university when CBR projects are being planned, and the partners share a high degree of mutual trust. One of the research projects that illustrates how CBR can help CBOs better use existing resources and access new ones to meet goals was conducted by three University of Denver graduate students, who conducted a six-month evaluation of the Reach and Teach Program, an outreach program designed to familiarize local women in the community with La Clinica's breast and cervical screening services. The research team's report made several suggestions for improvement, which were incorporated into the following year's implementation of the program. The program director also used some of the report's positive findings to strengthen grant proposals, and some received funding.

CBR partnerships also provide community groups with a mechanism to leverage and maximize their own resources, which includes their own in-house expertise and staff time. For example, research on best practices—examining how other programs provide similar services, perhaps in comparable contexts—may provide useful suggestions for program changes that would lead to better service provision for clients. In terms of the research process itself, community groups have a significant amount of

knowledge that could enhance the quality of any research effort, but it is often the case that they are unable to make this a high enough priority to which to divert staff time. Most of our community partners simply do not have the right combination of staff time and expertise to design and execute a research project that will provide useful results and withstand serious scrutiny. However, when they enter into a CBR partnership, they join a larger team effort. There are members on that team who complement what the community representatives bring to the table, and vice versa. Thus, it is not necessary, for example, that the community agency has a staff member who understands sampling. Instead, their staff can inform the campus experts about the nature of their population, warn of unique challenges that might confound standard sampling techniques, and advise on the content of the survey questionnaire that will be administered to the sample.

### *Enhancing Capacity*

Working collaboratively on a CBR project enhances the capacity for all the parties involved in the project. Students learn how to conduct research, and both students and faculty learn about the community and the practical challenges confronting people in disadvantaged positions in society. All of the participants acquire skills, learning from others and learning how to interact with others from different positions and with different backgrounds. Community members also acquire technical skills in research, strategic planning, and evaluation. Furthermore, the CBOs within which the community members operate enhance their organization's systems for strategic planning and evaluation, leading to improvements in the organization's self-governance and internal democratization. A parallel development occurs within higher education institutions as well, as we discuss in Chapter Eight.

The participatory nature of many CBR projects also gives community members the opportunity to acquire new skills or develop others by working with academics and students. This may take place informally, as in the case of an agency director who participates in a training session on how to facilitate focus groups that was organized by a professor for her students. Or it may arise out of a more formal approach. At Georgetown University, for example, community partners can participate in community research seminars at no cost, learn how to conduct CBR and undertake a community-driven project, and receive academic credit. At a minimum, these opportunities make it easier for community members to become better consumers of research and savvier when it comes to analyzing the rec-

ommendations that may emerge from a research project. At a higher level, community members may find it easier to play a meaningful role in any participatory research effort that seeks their input in the design and implementation of a project. Finally, and perhaps ideally, community members who participate in CBR projects may learn how to conduct research on their own.

However, it is not enough for a community group to gain access to new skills or even to develop their own skills. Rather, the most desirable goal is that CBOs establish the appropriate internal systems that use and control such information creation and dissemination processes. Here, too, a strong CBR partnership can make a significant contribution. For example, in Trenton, New Jersey, a shelter for runaway and abused children had completed hundreds of intake forms over a twenty-year period for each child who had walked through its doors in order to satisfy a federal reporting requirement. Yet the staff did not have the ability to enter these data onto a computer and examine them. A professor at a local college and his class entered and analyzed the data as part of a CBR project. This proved helpful but was not the most important outcome of this partnership. That came about when the professor later recruited a student from the computer science department to build on the work of the first class project. This second student designed a software program that the staff was able to use at their own site to generate monthly reports. As a result, the CBR partnership provided the shelter with the means to capture and interpret information themselves on a regular basis that is used to monitor and assess the program's operations.

CBR partnerships may also improve the ability of community groups to make more strategic decisions about their operations. David Beckwith, a community organizer from the Center for Community Change, refers to this as "helping us get ahead of the curve" (Beckwith, 1996, p. 167). In part, this stems from the fact that CBR projects can provide these groups with what they need to act more strategically: quality information, data, and analysis. In this sense, the needs of a grassroots group are no different from those of a Fortune 500 company, but the CBOs have no access to resources to pay for quality research and development.

Two essential areas where CBR can contribute to the work of nonprofit organizations are program development and program evaluation, according to Martin Johnson, executive director of Isles Community Development Corporation in Trenton. Describing the contributions of CBR to program development, he notes that many of program partners are forced to act on "anecdotes or gut feelings" when they work on developing new programs. One of his colleagues cites the example of an agency whose director chose

a mentoring curriculum because it was used by her former employer, not as a result of any best practices research, which might have been the case if she had had a CBR team available. Because she had neither the time nor a compelling reason to question the choice of mentoring programs (she is one of only two employees), she chose the only program she was familiar with. In other cases, CBOs with strong professional staff or board often rely on their own, sometimes flawed or limited, internal knowledge to decide what programs to develop. Over time, they can become disconnected from the people they serve. A growing number of CBOs are using CBR teams to help manage focus groups, surveys, and community analyses to better connect, design, and execute plans.

Program evaluation is the second area cited by Martin Johnson where CBR can make a substantial contribution to the work of nonprofit organizations. He sees a shift in the ways that CBO funders and communities measure success: "Simply measuring the number of organizational outputs (houses, counseling sessions, events, and so on) is no longer adequate. Now we have to answer the 'so what?' question. What outcome has occurred because of your work?" This question requires new and better indicators and data collection methods than most organizations can manage. One of the program directors in his organization, who runs a program for high school dropouts, sought to improve their evaluation system because, like most other typical program measures, it failed to measure whether the participants were becoming more self-reliant, a core value of the organization. Instead, the data were limited to how many of the youth received a general equivalency diploma, acquired a job, or entered a training program. To develop a more focused way to assess their impact, the director helped a research methods class at the local college develop a new and more effective way to measure increased self-reliance in the program. Another colleague of Johnson runs a program that matches college volunteers with formerly homeless preschool children in an effort to develop their emerging literacy skills. In this case, the director worked with an education class to administer a pre- and posttest that served to clarify the effectiveness of this volunteer effort. Program evaluation, when it is done well, can lead to significant improvements in the way a program is designed or implemented. In this case, the results might indicate a need to increase the number of service hours each child receives or to change the way that tutors are recruited or trained.

In sum, CBR partnerships can be a useful tool for community organizations, helping them get more done in the short term and strengthening their capacity to plan and implement quality programs in the longer term. Such partnerships help these organizations complete concrete tasks that

have a sense of urgency attached to them, think and act more strategically, develop skills, and establish more sophisticated internal systems. CBR partnerships have the potential, however, to do more than just enhance the capacity of community groups to achieve their programmatic goals. They also help position them to play a more active role in our democracy.

### *Effective Democratic Participation*

Campus-community research partnerships might, finally, be seen as means by which we can help create what Barber (1992) calls a "strong democracy" in America. They do this by sparking interest in civic activism on the part of historically marginalized groups and, even more important, by removing some of the barriers that have long worked against real grassroots political participation. These barriers include lack of compelling information to engage policymakers, low credibility, and a dearth of feelings of civic efficacy and competence on the part of community groups and members. We discuss each of these in turn.

**COMPELLING INFORMATION TO ENGAGE POLICYMAKERS.** Community groups working with academics typically devote their greatest effort to developing projects whose results can help them accomplish their primary mission. The information, data, or analysis that they obtain often can be used to help sway government officials and other key decision makers at all levels as they draft legislation or develop budgets that may have an impact on CBO constituencies in long-range, powerful ways. CBOs seldom have the financial resources with which to hire expensive lobbyists. This means they must resort to other strategies, and one basic but potentially effective one is to inform the policymaking process with compelling information whose aim is to influence presumably well-intentioned and rational decision makers. This was the aim of the director of a transitional housing agency for homeless families when she asked her local CBR center\* to help her design and carry out a survey of those whom the agency had helped in the past. She hoped that the data would demonstrate the effectiveness of her program and thus help convince state officials to create

\* A CBR center is typically a centralized office that coordinates an institution's CBR activities, including soliciting community projects, matching institution personnel and resources with projects, conducting trainings and outreach, and other related activities. Such centers can range in size from a single staff person or faculty member to large operations managing numerous programs.

an exception under the new welfare law for transitional housing programs. Although she was not entirely successful at influencing state legislation, she was able to use the results to convince a reluctant funder to provide continuing financial support for her agency.

**CREDIBILITY IN THE EYES OF DECISION MAKERS.** Sometimes it is the message combined with the messenger that makes a difference when it is time for officials (public and private) to make an important decision. Community groups and their causes often acquire additional credibility when the reports they are disseminating are authored or coauthored by someone with an advanced degree who is affiliated with a university or college. David Beckwith (1996), of the Center for Community Change, calls this "using your priestly power for good" and recognizes that many professors working with community groups may be initially reluctant to highlight their credentials (p. 166). "You may not like to put that 'Ph.D.' after your name," he advises academic researchers working with the community. "But a letter from Professor Jones, Ph.D. can convince people that [the community] really has 'somebody' on their side. In life, that matters." He cites a market study of Ohio nonprofit housing developers that was produced from the Urban Affairs Center at the University of Toledo. The content of this report *and* its connection with the university made it legitimate in the eyes of the state legislature, which later passed an appropriation to support community development.

**HIGHER LEVELS OF CIVIC EFFICACY AND COMPETENCE.** We previously noted that community members who participate in CBR projects often develop research skills. Such participation can also develop what political scientists call civic efficacy and civic competence. People who actively participate in a research project that addresses a local problem become more confident that they can make a difference in their own communities. If the process eventually leads to action, such as writing a letter to an elected official or organizing a meeting with that official, the participants begin to learn the rules of the game. In short, they are learning how to make a difference.

At an even more fundamental level, when CBOs empower individuals by enabling them to acquire skills or resources necessary to engage in effective political participation—for example, literacy, access to transportation, and computer skills—they help create a stronger, more participatory democracy. The Day Labor Center in the city of Pomona, California, illustrates how the creation of a community organization established to serve the needs of a disenfranchised group has enhanced their ability to partici-

pate in the larger community (see the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center case). Students experience the same development process and acquire the knowledge and skills attached to learning how to participate in the political process while they also develop a sense of empowerment and personal efficacy.

In sum, CBR partnerships provide what Ansley and Gaventa (1997) call "social capital" (p. 51), which they see as consisting of connections between and among groups and individuals through which various resources flow. It is such connections that enable grassroots organizations to develop linkages and relationships with others, in the community and on campuses, who control important assets that can have a tremendous impact on the social change and advocacy efforts of these groups. The collaborative teams of community members and academics that form around CBR can serve as important incubators of social capital (Ansley and Gaventa, 1997).

### Principles of Successful Community-Campus Partnerships

Now that we have considered the benefits of CBR to the community, answering the "why" question, we examine ten essential principles of successful CBR partnerships—the "how" question. We present them in a

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#### Pomona Economic Opportunity Center

The Day Labor Center of Pomona, California, was created from a participatory style of community-based research. It was established in response to a city ordinance passed in July 1997 that prohibited "the solicitation of work on any street or highway, public area, or non-residential parking areas in the city of Pomona." Those caught in violation of the ordinance would face a fine of up to a thousand dollars and six months in jail.

When the ordinance was passed, a group of Pitzer College students in Professor José Calderon's class, "Restructuring Communities," worked with various community activists to research day laborers, organize them, and pack city hall for demonstrations. With the help of this class, a funding proposal was written, and a nonprofit organization, the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center, was formed. Subsequently, the city council allocated fifty thousand dollars to this nonprofit organization for the purpose of developing a day labor center. The council also appointed a board of directors that included city commission members, representatives from the community, and students and faculty from Pitzer College. This campus-community collaborative has resulted in research on immigration, health, language, conflict resolution, and leadership development that involves the workers in all aspects of the decision-making process.

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more or less sequential framework (see Exhibit 2.1). The first three principles relate to the approach or perspectives that potential partners from both campus and community bring *into* successful partnerships. The next four help us understand the process of conducting CBR projects, with particular attention to the kinds of interactions that govern successful partnerships. The final three principles relate to the outcomes or desired results of projects and partnerships. Because all of these principles are interrelated, this framework should be viewed not as a rigid categorization but rather as a conceptual tool that can help us identify and understand some of the key features of successful community-campus partnerships.

### *Entering Partnerships*

The first three principles help us to understand more clearly what motivates community and campus partners to undertake CBR projects together and delineate some important orientations toward one another that successful partners either bring with them or develop jointly in the course of their work together:

1. Partners share a worldview.
2. Partners agree about goals and strategies.
3. Partners have mutual trust and mutual respect.

**PARTNERS SHARE A WORLDVIEW.** In successful CBR partnerships, the key players share important elements of a worldview, including basic philosophical assumptions about people, communities, society, and how they connect with one another. One such assumption, well articulated by Benjamin Barber (1984), is that “every human being, given half a chance, is capable of the self-government that is his or her natural right, and thus capable of acquiring the judgment, foresight, and knowledge that self-government demands” (p. 13). This idea—that we can and should trust ordinary men and women with power to make more decisions that affect themselves and their communities—dovetails neatly with CBR’s commitment to collaboration. Academic and community partners who share it will work more easily together to promote shared authority and the participation of community members in all aspects of the research process.

Another important element of a shared worldview is an understanding of what constitutes *community*. Who is “the community” whose interests the researchers represent and work for? Is it a geographical community—that is, one that is spatially bound, such as a neighborhood? Or is the community a more dispersed one, identified by shared status or identity or

## **Exhibit 2.1. Ten Principles of Successful Community-Campus Partnerships.**

### *Entering partnerships*

Community and campus partners

1. Share a worldview
2. Agree about goals and strategies
3. Have trust and mutual respect

### *Conducting partnerships*

Community and campus partners

4. Share power
5. Communicate clearly and listen carefully
6. Understand and empathize with each other
7. Remain flexible

### *Outcomes of partnerships*

Community and campus partners

8. Satisfy each other’s interests or needs
9. Have their organizational capacities enhanced
10. Adopt long-range social change perspectives

other interest? Community-based organizations typically address such core definitional issues as they are formed, so that their notion of the community they serve is captured in their mission statement or incorporation papers. From the campus side, this can be a bit more of a challenge. While faculty members and students entering a partnership assume the partner’s perspective regarding the particular community they serve, the issue might be more problematic at the institutional level. Here, the college or university—faculty members, CBR center staff, and administrators—must make some decisions about the community or communities with which they will work. Where should they commit their limited resources, and why? What are some of the political and ideological ramifications associated with working with some groups as opposed to others? The faculty at the College of Public and Community Service at the University of Massachusetts–Boston addressed this question by committing to work with groups “that do not have political power, or that have less economic power or fewer opportunities” than others in the Boston area (Kennedy and Stone, 1997, p. 120). As a result, teams of students work under the direction of professors to assist “under-funded, grassroots community, labor, and advocacy organizations serving the interests of low-income



communities . . . in the greater Boston area" (p. 124). The Washington, D.C.-based network of campus and community partners engaging in community-based research has adopted similar language for its CBR clearinghouse operations and is the basis of the meaning of *community* set out at the beginning of this chapter.

**PARTNERS AGREE ABOUT GOALS AND STRATEGIES.** Another important principle of a successful partnership is agreement about the desired outcomes of the joint endeavor, along with similar ideas about the best strategies for achieving those goals. At a minimum, all CBR partnerships seek to ensure that colleges and universities are a useful resource to local community organizations, and hence mobilize faculty, students, and other campus-based resources to complete research and planning projects that the community groups have identified. Somewhat more sophisticated than this *resource model approach* is an *empowerment or capacity-building model* (Reardon, 2000), when CBR partners share the additional aim of using the collaborative research process to build various capacities of community members, perhaps including both residents and staff from community organizations. Here they work to equip community members and organizations with new skills, tools, practices, and systems that make it easier for them to achieve their goals and gain control over their own neighborhoods.

Equally important are shared ideas about strategies to achieve those shared goals, including the different roles and contributions of members of the CBR team. A partnership committed to building the capacity of community members, for example, is likely to stress the participatory nature of CBR at every stage of the project and to work with the same group of community members over an extended period of time. Furthermore, if the goal of CBR is to empower communities, there must be a process through which community members shape and control elements of the partnership. Thus, our shared assumption is that the community must articulate the questions that the research will address, whereas the faculty members bring the expertise to address the questions. Similarly, the community organization determines the social change agenda that it will pursue, whereas the faculty and students align themselves with the change agenda with which they are most comfortable. This discussion of these larger philosophical issues must be an ongoing process among the partners, from the first discussion of the possibility of establishing a specific project partnership to a continuing conversation that becomes part of the partnership between academics and CBOs.

Sometimes conflicts of organizational policies or values make a partnership inadvisable. An example was when the Denver chapter of the Boy

Scouts of America contacted faculty members at the University of Denver wanting help in determining why such a small number of Latino boys were enrolling in their programs. Although several University of Denver graduate students were interested in and even had some research expertise around the issue of Latino participation in school-based and community programs, they determined that the Boy Scouts' gay exclusion policy clashed with the social justice orientation of the university's CBR initiative, and they declined to partner with the Boy Scouts.

This example illustrates the tactical and moral dilemma that exists when one chooses to partner with an organization whose policies conflict with the social justice principle of CBR. The University of Denver might have taken a different stance and accepted the CBR offer with the Boy Scouts in the hope of developing a partnership that over time might lead the organization to reconsider its stance on homosexuality and hence to advance social justice. Often there is no single answer to such dilemmas. A more common dilemma that several of us face in our work is partnering with social service organizations that may disempower community members through the treatment models they employ. In these cases, we may choose to work with such partners in the hope that an effective CBR project that insists that clients become participants in the CBR project may also open up the agency to more empowering practices.

**PARTNERS HAVE MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT.** Strong CBR partnerships exhibit and nurture trust among the participants in two important ways. First, each partner trusts that the other can be counted on to "do the right thing"—that the partner will know what that is and ultimately will make a genuine effort not to compromise the other's interests. Second, the partners share, or at least work to develop, a faith in the collaborative process itself.

Trust among partners does not emerge instantly in a new working relationship. The community and campus partners start by sharing their goals and discussing the constraints within which they operate. Over time, an understanding develops about what the primary objectives are for each of the partners, which of the outcomes and processes cannot be compromised and which are flexible, and the contextual factors that will influence the dynamics. During the course of a successful collaboration, each partner comes to trust the other to act in good faith, keep in mind the interests of the other as well as their own interests, and refuse to sacrifice the other's important objectives in favor of one's own lesser ones.

Successful partners trust not only each other but also the process of collaboration. They have confidence in the partnership: that it will produce meaningful results even as it faces hurdles of various kinds along the way.



The partners share the often implicit assumption that although any particular short-term project may fall short of expectations in some way, the relationship is worth maintaining because of the promise of fulfilling important joint interests of the partners over the long term.

Lydia Santoni-Lawrence, the executive director of the Community Service Action Center (CSAC) in Hightstown, New Jersey, illustrates this sort of trust. In the midst of her first CBR project, it became clear that the research team of students from the local college was on track to deliver a mediocre product at best. The students had lost their focus, their professor was not engaged enough to alter their project trajectory, and the young agency staff member who was most directly involved in the project was proving to be too inexperienced to assert leadership to affect the process. As the unsuccessful project drew to a close, Santoni-Lawrence shared her concerns with the organizer who initially brought the team together. But she also added: "Don't get me wrong. I am committed to working with you to form these partnerships. I am convinced that these types of collaborations can have a substantial impact on our agency's efforts to improve the lives of the local immigrant population and the poor as well as on the students. And I know that we will eventually get what we need. This is just a natural part of the process." Since that time, Santoni-Lawrence has joined forces with a psychology professor who has worked with her students to complete two remarkable projects with the staff of CSAC. After the first project, this partnership has flourished as both community and campus partners have learned how to work together effectively.

Trust must be nurtured and sustained if it is to last. In the CSAC case, the campus liaison that brought the partners together in the first place spoke frequently with the community partner during the course of the project. In these conversations, he reiterated his commitment to the community's needs—that her agency would receive a quality product even if it meant finding another team (additional faculty members and students) to build on the work of the first group and complete the report during the winter break. (The significance of effective communication is examined in the next section.)

Mutual respect goes hand-in-hand with trust as essential orientations that campus and community partners bring with them to the CBR relationship. When all members of the CBR team recognize the value of each member's knowledge, mutual respect prevails, and the partnership is far more likely to be successful. Here, the respect is predicated in part on the assumption that in CBR, multiple sources of knowledge are both valid and essential to address community needs. To be useful, CBR projects must draw on both the expertise of the academics and the valuable exper-

iential knowledge of community partners and members. Thus, a professor's years of experience in survey research design are of little value without community members' insights about how to approach people and pose questions in ways that will secure their cooperation and participation. A graduate student's technical knowledge of how to measure levels of industrial pollution is only one piece of the knowledge needed to bring legal action against a company with a longstanding and complicated history in a community. Community members are indispensable sources of information about themselves, their lives, their community's history, and the workings of the local political and economic institutions. For their part, students and professors bring technical research expertise along with analytical and conceptual perspectives that can enrich community efforts in myriad ways.

### *The Process*

The next four principles describe some patterns of interaction that characterize successful campus-community partnerships:

4. Partners share power.
5. Partners communicate clearly and listen carefully.
6. Partners understand and empathize with each other's circumstances.
7. Partners remain flexible.

These patterns typically emerge over time. They also tend to be self-perpetuating, such that effective interactions among members of the CBR team fuel further effective interaction.

**PARTNERS SHARE POWER.** At the broadest level, this notion of shared power is akin to the assumption that all people, even the poor and marginalized, have the right to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. In the context of CBR, with its commitment to collaboration, shared power means that campus and community partners participate fully in shaping decisions about their work together. In general, the balance of power should tip toward the community when it comes to the most basic aspects of the CBR project, especially identifying the research question in accordance with community needs and shaping and implementing change strategies that might emerge from the research. When community members are afforded less authority than their academic colleagues, the research is likely to be of far less value to the community than otherwise would be true. Moreover, CBR partnerships that

mirror conventional notions of academic expertise and authority end up perpetuating the sort of inequitable power structures that they ultimately seek to challenge and change. This makes the goals of shared power especially compelling. There are cases, however, when the community may not be organized enough to participate in these decisions during the earliest stages of a CBR project. In such situations, an academic with effective community organizing skills may be able to bring together community members so that they can participate and take charge of the next stages of the project (Stoecker, 1999a; Brydon-Miller, 1993).

Shared power could mean that all parties participate equally in making decisions that govern every stage of the research project: identifying the research question or topic, designing the research, collecting data, analyzing the data, formulating the report, and taking action on the findings. In reality, such uniform power sharing across every step of the project is neither achievable nor always desirable. Community partners may prefer not to be involved equally, or even at all, in decisions about such matters as sample selection, instrument design, or analysis strategies because they have more limited expertise in those areas or because such discussions require time away from their other obligations. Students do not always participate in decision making about what projects will be undertaken and what the research question might be, also because of their relative lack of expertise or—in many cases—because such decisions must be made by the professor and the community partner prior to the beginning of semesters when the work will be completed. And some discussions about the research might well occur in settings such as coalitions or staff meetings when no one from the academic side of the partnership is present.

Deciding which decisional points each party will control requires common sense as well as ongoing frank and friendly give and take about everyone's particular interests, strengths, and weaknesses. This is where trust and mutual respect become crucial: each member of the CBR team must be comfortable deferring to others in the interest of improving the project, respecting each other's commitments, and supporting the wider aims and principles of community-based research.

Sometimes issues emerge about which compromise is impossible. One issue may have to do with standards of practice that cannot be compromised without jeopardizing the results of the study. From the community side, such an issue might be related to protecting the rights and dignity of community residents. Here, again, patterns of openness and honesty in interactions among members of the research team mean that these sorts of claims will be articulated, understood, and respected.

As partnerships evolve, they may involve sharing of significant resources, such as grant funds. Presumably, a partnership that has reached this point will have developed patterns of shared decision making that are well grounded in trust and goodwill. However, some partnerships have also developed concrete mechanisms that facilitate this sharing of power and resources, among them memoranda of understanding, legal agreements, or representative steering committees charged with making key decisions. (These are discussed at greater length in Chapter Three.)

**PARTNERS COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND LISTEN CAREFULLY.** Community-based research brings together people from very different worlds—the academy and the community—and requires that they engage in a series of conversations aimed at carrying out a challenging and complex task: designing and carrying out a collaborative research project that meets a community need. To accomplish this, both partners must work to avoid the dangers of what Paulo Freire calls “alienating rhetoric.” He observed that educators and politicians often “speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address” (1970, p. 77). When academics speak in abstractions, rich with disciplinary jargon and institution-driven imperatives, they not only exclude community members to whom the jargon is unfamiliar but also run the risk of sounding cold and dispassionate, thereby alienating community partners. Similarly, from the community side, communication rife with blame, “guilt-tripping,” and staking out the moral high ground has the potential to alienate faculty and students. To be understood, all participants must avoid the inaccessible language of their discipline or community, take care to clarify meanings and assumptions that may be obscure to outsiders, and otherwise work to develop a common discourse that will ensure inclusive and fruitful subsequent interactions among participants.

The second and equally important element of effective communication is careful listening. Professors are used to having captive audiences—for fifty to ninety minutes or more at a time—and as a result, their listening skills may be underdeveloped. Recently, one of our community partners asked us to intervene and cancel a meeting with a local professor. She sent us an e-mail saying she could not waste any more time with him: “He does not listen.” For their part, community partners accustomed to “rallying the troops” through public speaking or running woefully understaffed agencies that never allow them to have a real conversation may also be challenged when it comes to good listening skills. Students occasionally

report a similar experience with community partners. One group of traditional-age female undergraduates came back from a meeting of the local coalition for the homeless complaining that "they didn't seem to care about anything that we had to say." The effective dialogue that CBR requires relies on clear communication and good listening on all sides.

**PARTNERS UNDERSTAND AND EMPATHIZE WITH EACH OTHER'S CIRCUMSTANCES.** Some communication problems in campus-community partnerships are the by-product of bringing people together from dramatically different professions and institutions. And just as successful partners learn how to communicate with each other across these sociocultural divides, they also learn how to recognize and work around the various institutional constraints that affect their partners and may stand in the way of accomplishing the group's goals.

Community organizations and colleges and universities are very different institutional structures in terms of factors such as the size of their operations (for example, staff and budgets), the degree of financial stability and cash flow, internal organizational structure and accountabilities (for example, academics at universities are separated by discipline on campus and rarely work together), levels of bureaucracy, interorganizational relations (for example, CBOs in the same community that work on the same issue seldom coordinate efforts), schedules, and reward structures. All of these can frustrate the growth of strong CBR partnerships.

Among these institutional incompatibilities, the differences between academic and community calendars are perhaps the most fundamental. The community partner may operate from the assumption that a true partnership means that both parties are available for each other on an as-needed basis—and in particular when an urgent need arises—because that is how the organization itself operates. That means that many projects are put together without extensive planning and continue based on the schedule of the problem they address. In addition, the community organization may need the report in time for some political hearing, media event, or other external purpose that does not coincide with the end-of-semester due date. In contrast, academic schedules are sometimes planned a year or more in advance, and students schedule their classes months in advance, often making them unavailable to pick up a last-minute project. In addition, most faculty members and students are not on campus during midsemester breaks, holiday weekends, and between semester breaks. Faculty members need to turn in grades for students at the end of the semester, so projects must be ready to be evaluated at that time, regardless of any complications that may have interfered with the project's schedule.

In the next chapter, we detail some of the strategies to facilitate this cross-institutional understanding and to work around the potential conflicts that different institutional constraints produce. Here, again, partnerships that are built on trust, honesty, and mutual respect—and in which partners are informed and empathetic about each other's institutional constraints—are able to work around such constraints for the benefit of the CBR project. Also, creative solutions are more easily forthcoming when parties remain flexible, the principle to which we turn next.

**PARTNERS REMAIN FLEXIBLE.** In successful CBR partnerships, the partners are flexible. Flexibility is a crucial element given the challenges of discovering how to begin to work together. There are important tensions in such partnerships, and an array of challenges and constraints exacerbates these tensions (Nyden and Wiewel, 1992). The need for flexibility is implicit in much of what we have discussed thus far. Here, we raise a few additional points about why flexibility is prerequisite to strong campus-community partnerships.

One of the inherent tensions we note is that the partnerships are product oriented, meaning that they are committed to producing a research product by a certain date (usually the end of the semester). At the same time, these partnerships are developmental; they are designed to promote student learning and, often, to build capacity of community members as well.

The tensions created by these different goals may be exacerbated by other constraints imposed by both the campus and community members of partnerships. We have already noted the problem of fluctuating intensity—the result of incompatible schedules that make students and faculty members unavailable during academic breaks. Staff and residents on the community side live in an environment that is far less predictable than the typical college campus, which means that they, too, may have shifting priorities that require flexibility on the academic side of the partnership. An example of this occurred when the Central American Center, a long-standing partner with one of our universities, was preparing a grant proposal and a report on the impact of a local piece of legislation on the city's immigrant population. The professor involved, new to CBR but knowledgeable about the community, met with the center staff and worked out a plan with them to have a group of his students work with the staff in doing background research for the grant proposal.

During the course of the semester, the priorities of the center shifted, requiring the group to focus more of their energy on completing the report in a timely manner and to defer their work on the grant proposal. Because of inadequate communication between the professor and the staff,

staff asked students to help work on the report, whereas the professor insisted that his students complete the draft grant proposal, as originally planned for the students' group project. Both the professor and the center staff were upset, and the students were caught in between, pleasing neither the professor nor the staff. Only at the end of the semester did the changed situation at the center—and the need for flexibility—become clear to the professor. During the ensuing semester break, he agreed to help the staff by working on the report, writing a summary for the report, and editing the draft for the center.

**OUTCOMES OF PARTNERSHIPS.** The final three principles of an effective partnership have to do with desired outcomes or results of partnering that go beyond producing useful research:

8. Partners satisfy each other's primary interests or needs.
9. Partners have their organizational capacities enhanced.
10. Partners adopt long-range social change perspectives.

**PARTNERS SATISFY EACH OTHER'S INTERESTS OR NEEDS.** Beyond its central goal of producing a high-quality and relevant research study, CBR typically brings together campus and community partners whose needs and interests diverge in some important ways. Recognizing and helping each other meet these differing needs is important to strong CBR partnerships.

On the academic side, the priorities are to offer students an effective learning experience and, in some cases, to produce publishable research that can advance the faculty member's career. The campus partner may also look to CBR partnerships as a way of improving the image of the college in the community, helping students identify postcollege career opportunities and contacts, bolstering the institution's experiential learning opportunities, or improving recruitment and retention of students. Community partners who are sensitive to all the different needs of their academic partners might help out in a variety of ways. They are sensitive to students' limitations, assume the role of teacher at appropriate times and in patient and effective ways, and are understanding of instructors' need to conform to academic requirements and restrictions. They may attend and even speak at college-sponsored events where they vouch for the value of campus-community collaborations and for the quality and importance of the work that students and faculty members do. At institutions where faculty members are required to produce publishable research reports, a community partner might support such efforts by being generous with permission to use data that the research produces; providing agency data,

records, and other information that support the professor's goals; and otherwise sympathizing with the multiple demands on faculty members as they juggle the teaching, service, and scholarship aspects of their CBR work.

Similarly, a good campus partner appreciates that the partnership must produce a concrete benefit for the community agency and perhaps even for the individuals with whom they are working. Reports have to be of sufficient quality and usefulness to advance the agency's social change agenda. In addition, strategic or program recommendations must make sense in terms of where the organization is and what it is capable of doing. This ensures the continuing support of administrators and funders for the partnership and the agency staff involved in it. Campus partners also must be cognizant of more subtle interests, such as inter- and intra-agency politics and issues related to funding and outside funders.

**PARTNERS HAVE THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES ENHANCED.** A common shared goal of CBR partners is to enhance the capacity of community partners to undertake additional collaborative work and use whatever is gained from the partnership to improve the effectiveness of the organization. The most successful CBR partnerships, however, are those that increase the skills and knowledge of participants on both sides of the partnership—campus and community—so that everyone is better prepared, at the end of a CBR project, to make subsequent partnerships even more productive.

When both CBR partners work to strengthen the capacity of the other party, they find it easier to continue working together over time and increase the likelihood of successful subsequent collaborations. This is true for faculty and students who, as they acquire familiarity with the community and technical skills, are able to do more and better work on their next project. Similarly, community organization staff members who develop a solid understanding of the research process and learn various strategies for working effectively with students can use that knowledge gained to make the next CBR project even more successful. Some partnerships have gone far beyond individual CBR projects to a program of capacity-building activities.

The Trenton Center for Campus-Community Partnerships, a citywide consortium of four higher education institutions and nonprofit agencies, is a good example. After limiting its activities to small CBR projects for their first two years, the consortium developed a series of capacity-building workshops by tapping into the expertise within its own network: professionals and nonprofit staff who offered seminars and training sessions on strategic planning, advocacy, participatory neighborhood planning,

indicators of success measures, geographical information systems, and a number of other topics. During the first day of workshops, nonprofit staff led four of the six seminars, and a number of academics joined other community workers as students.

This sort of mutual capacity building can also be brought to bear on financial issues, as some successful partnerships have found ways to collaborate in raising funds to support CBR (see Joint Development of Fundraising Capacity Financing case).

Another technique that has been widely used is for CBR teams to engage in collaborative grant writing. Successful grant getting can provide substantial support to the ongoing operations of the CBO and CBR-related infrastructure of the university.

**PARTNERS ADOPT LONG-RANGE SOCIAL CHANGE PERSPECTIVES.** Finally, an important principle of a successful CBR partnership is developing and sharing a long-term perspective. Certainly an important incentive for this work in the short term is the hope that the research can be used

#### Joint Development of Fundraising Capacity Financing

CBR can be an area where competition and conflict prevail. However, campus and community partners can both gain by working together to identify and nurture sources of financial support for their collaborative work. In one case, the Perth Amboy (New Jersey) Housing Authority decided to pay the Trenton Center for Campus-Community Partnerships six thousand dollars to conduct a survey of its residents. The staff was influenced by the fact that the center's seed grant was about to expire. If it ran out of funds, it could not continue its CBR work with local nonprofit organizations. Because the housing authority had funds from a grant, it decided to pay for the survey in order to support the center's overall operations.

In another example, Georgetown University's Partners in Urban Research and Service-Learning participants discussed funding opportunities and identified some tensions over the community partners' concern that the university was soliciting grant funding from local foundations that were already funding the CBOs' programs. To complicate matters, in order to apply for several different national foundation or federal grants, the university needed to be the primary applicant with demonstrated community partners. What they created over time is a symbiotic relationship through which the CBOs serve as the lead agency and fiscal agent for grant applications sent to local funders, whereas the university tends to be the lead agency and fiscal agent for national level grants. This arrangement has prevented the partners from competing with each other for limited funds in a particular pool and has instead expanded the possibilities for funding for both community and university partners.

to bring about some improvement in the quality of life of the community in the near future. This is a particularly important motivator for students, who nonetheless are typically not around long enough to witness even the short-term benefits of their CBR efforts. Effective long-term partnerships are the ones that keep a collective eye on long-term goals and recognize that each short-term CBR project can make an incremental contribution toward the larger goal of changing social arrangements in a more fundamental way.

CBR promotes long-term change in three areas. The first is higher education, where the aim is to help colleges and universities become more relevant to the wider community and society and to make more effective their preparation of students to be engaged citizens. The second area of long-term social change is in the balance of power in local communities, to help traditionally marginalized groups gain more influence than they currently enjoy. This captures a central aim of CBR: to empower community groups so that they become better-organized and more proficient advocates for themselves and their constituents, as well as better able to control the resources that will contribute to their further development.

The third area of long-term social change is in society at large. CBR partnerships are sustained and empowered by the shared faith in democracy: the commitment to the belief that the more people who are engaged in the process of shaping the larger forces that influence their lives, the better off we all will be. CBR models participatory democracy in a powerful way. Moreover, every successful partnership and project helps to create—in students, community members, faculty members, and other participants—citizens who are both predisposed and equipped to be active, engaged, and effective. Thus, although the concrete and somewhat more immediate aims of CBR projects are to effect changes in policies, programs, or practices in local communities, a longer-term aim is realized when participants carry their knowledge, skills, and commitments to other projects, organizations, classes, jobs, and communities throughout their lives.

There are practical and more immediate arguments for assuming a long-term change perspective as well. One is that to expect institutional, let alone societal, change in the short term is unrealistic and leads to frustration and burnout (Marullo, 1996). Also, many community groups wish to partner only with others who adopt a long-term perspective for more practical reasons. *In a cost-benefit sense, it is not in their best interest to invest the time and energy in a partnership that promises to produce only one project; that is not a large enough return on their investment. When the college or university is willing to make a long-term commitment, community groups are sometimes far more willing to invest scarce resources.*

## Summary

In this chapter, we have addressed the two important questions about campus-community partnerships: How can they benefit communities? and What are the features or principles of successful ones? CBR partnerships can be of value to community-based organizations by helping those organizations access new resources and better mobilize the ones they have, enhance their capacity, and contribute—in a long-range sense—to a democratic political system. The benefits of such partnerships for both parties depend in large part on the strength of the partnership. Strong partnerships are those in which partners—both when they enter the partnership and over the course of their collaboration—share a common worldview, goals, and trust and mutual respect. Successful campus-community partnerships require that partners, in the course of their work together, share power, communicate clearly and listen carefully, understand and empathize with one another's circumstances, and remain flexible. Finally, the most successful partnerships have outcomes that satisfy both partners' primary needs or interests, develop the capacity of both partners, and contribute to longer-range social change. In the next chapter, the focus expands from examining benefits and principles of strong partnerships to considering how these principles can be turned into effective practices.

## 3

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

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IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, we examined the benefits of community-based research partnerships and principles that govern successful partnerships. We now move to the nuts and bolts of CBR partnerships, or how to turn the ten principles of successful partnerships into practice: strategies to establish productive partnerships, practices that lead to successful outcomes, and processes that contribute to the long-term sustainability of effective partnerships for social change.

## Finding and Starting a Partnership

The first two principles—sharing worldviews and agreement about goals and strategies—concern fundamental characteristics of the two potential collaborators that are not likely to change in the short run. Thus, our practical suggestions concern finding the right partner for collaboration. The element of trust grows as a result of partnering effectively, starting with clearly articulating interests, operating with openness and transparency, and establishing good communication. We thus focus here on how to find and select partners—from among the potentially large number that exist in any community—with the greatest possibility for developing into an effective CBR collaboration.

There are two basic approaches to finding a CBR partner. The first, and in some ways the more desirable, is to build from an existing campus-community partnership and expand that relationship to include one or more community-based research projects. This approach is especially useful for academics who are forming CBR partnerships for the first time.