

# Summary of Facilitated Roundtable Discussions At Community Conversations: Moving Our Community-University Partnerships Forward

February 25, 2016

## Coordination of Research Needs and Knowledge Across Community Partners in the Pursuit of an Integrated Community Research Agenda

### ***Key issues and opportunities:***

- Community use of existing university data is not measured
- Community organizations have limited research budgets
- Research needs of community organizations do not align with the research agenda of the university
- Lack of clarity/structure around how to get involved with the university, especially for smaller community organizations
  - Don't intuitively know how to get involved, what questions to ask, how to get access, or have enough time to think the relationship through
- Universities are in a strong position to disseminate knowledge
  - Community partners also need to be able to disseminate information and leverage spaces to make information known
- University administration may not understand the potential of community engaged work and the impact that it can have on the university
- Lack of high-level coordination on the University side
  - University silos can impede coordinated research projects
- General lack of clarity around university vs. community roles
- Need for more continuity with contacts on projects
- Grant applications can facilitate the direction and integration of long-term projects
- Larger coordinated projects have greater impact but can require more continuity, funding, planning
- Lack of 'big picture' thinking; community is not united behind one goal

### ***Key ideas and recommendations:***

- Faculty champion for community engaged work in each department to expose the importance of community engaged research at the institutional level
- Repository of research by themes to capture the work and research that has already been done (IE: Bibliocommons)
- Stronger communication between the silos of the university to allow work to be coordinated at the systems-level
  - Tapping into research expertise and facilitating long-term projects and relationships
- Increased accessibility to and awareness of the work coming out of the university that the community might benefit from
- Coordination across social service sector, especially smaller organizations
  - Deepening connections
  - Helping to provide access to the university
- Larger conversations about what it means to be a community with a university and a university within a community
- Evaluations to measure the impact of research
- Provide more general information about the university to the community
  - Increasing understanding of schedules, administration, and other barriers/factors contributing to community engaged work

## Scoping and Capacity of Community-University Partnership to Realize Mutual Needs and Benefits

### **Key issues and opportunities:**

- Need for increased knowledge exchange between the community and the university
  - Knowledge in the community could inform decisions and work at the university, but it is not clear how to share that information
  - Need for more accessible ways into the university
- There are often multiple projects between the university and a community organization
  - Can be challenging to see how one project fits into the whole
  - Quality of work varies between classes, level of students, etc.
- Partners may feel limited to personal connections or existing connections at the university, may not know the range of options available through the university
- Challenging to find the right 'fit' for the project
  - There may be an optimal fit that is being missed because the partner has taken the first opportunity presented
- Community research priorities are not always met; less important pieces may be expedited because of a suitable match
- Can be difficult to find an interested faculty member as community projects can be seen to lack legitimacy
- Need to move from one-off projects to long-term relationships
  - Scoping research projects that build on past research, even if students have moved on
  - Faculty can help by providing long term consultation/guidance, working to move projects forward

### **Key ideas and recommendations:**

- RFP process whereby community partners post an RFP for research needs (from a template) online, faculty check it, and provide matches
  - Leading to a larger range of possible solutions/perspectives
  - Ensuring that interest is part of the scoping process
  - Offering new opportunities for collaboration
- Offer project scoping training (for community and university)
- Scoping template for community partners to help them ask the right questions
  - Creating a plan with a set of outcomes
- Collaborative institution to broker university resources to community groups, community groups to university resources
- Expand the 'menu' of faculty who are interested in community engaged projects to facilitate new connections
- Stronger incentives for students to get engaged and stay engaged
  - Better understanding of the impact of the project
- Increase collaboration and communication between connected projects
  - Need for someone to take on the role of coordinating and planning
- Discuss the relationship of the university and the community, aiming to create a more reciprocal relationship
  - Shifting the way that university administration perceives CES
    - Practitioners seen as peers
    - Less as 'giving back,' more as a valuable resource to tap into with the potential for high impact

## Working With Students: Challenges and Opportunities

### **Key issues and opportunities:**

- Inherent risk with student work; can't guarantee that it is going to meet community needs
  - Variable capacity of students to do research
  - Variable quality/depth of student work
- Student interest and commitment to a project is variable
  - Having an element of choice often leads to higher interest and commitment
  - Importance of finding the right match for the student - of organization and project
- Students may find community engaged work intimidating
- Lack of knowledge exchange between the community and the university
  - Students may not understand why they are doing their work, or what impact it has had/will have on the organization or the people the organization is serving
- Working with students is a way of investing in the future
  - Allowing students to learn, immerse themselves in the community is valuable in itself, though it may not always produce a useable product
- Student expectations of the impact of their work may be discouraging
  - Low impact doesn't necessarily mean the work was not high quality
- Time commitment and mentorship of students can be overwhelming
  - Having a faculty member involved often alleviates this stress, provides a singular point of contact
- Tensions between the pace at which work moves in the community and the slower pace of academic work
- University struggles to understand what is too much of an imposition on community partners
- Limited by academic calendar and existing academic structure

### **Key ideas and recommendations:**

- Invite the community to offer their specialized knowledge and skills to students more efficiently than one-on-one
  - Infographics
  - Presentation skills
  - Plain language writing
  - Working with community members
  - Professionalism (phone calls & emails)
- Create a bank of community expertise with contact information to bring more community members into classrooms with specific expertise
- Ask partners about their preferred level of involvement and communication with students
  - Alleviating concerns of over-taxing the partner and defining clear expectations
- Host weekly meet-ups for students to discuss their community-engaged experiences, collaborate, solve problems
- Follow up after project completion with a set series of questions to gauge student experience and improve future interactions
- Highlight courses with a community engaged component in the academic calendar
- Develop a collective on campus to discuss range of community engaged projects taking part on campus, share which partners they are working with
- Create a unit responsible for brokering projects, tying pieces together across courses, semesters, structures for a more continuous relationship

## Mobilizing Academic Knowledge: Opportunities for Community to Access Existing Research Knowledge

### **Key opportunities and challenges:**

- Knowledge mobilization is a way of bringing research to life; making it real and accessible to a large audience
- Barriers are two-fold:
  - Need to make knowledge available, accessible
    - Lack of access to academic literature for community members is an ongoing issue
    - Difficult to navigate the university; who's who? Need for awareness, brokering
  - Need to make knowledge understandable and usable:
    - Transformed or applied to concrete ideas to make it tailored and useable for the community
    - Present research as a support to inform concrete projects and ideas
- Need for tools and spaces to create connections between knowledge users and creators
  - Physical and virtual
  - Creating links between those interested in specific thematic areas
- Diverse skills are needed in order to mobilize knowledge effectively
  - Need capacity-building
- Physical spaces can hinder knowledge mobilization
  - Lack of movement between community and university environments
- Need for broad appeal, but risk of over-simplifying
- Challenging to choose effective knowledge mobilization methods
  - Need to understand the audience and their needs

### **Key ideas and recommendations:**

- Teach specific skills related to knowledge mobilization, especially to students
  - Networking
  - Facilitation
- Make research profiles and thematic publications more accessible to the community – possibly by putting them online
- Provide community access to a directory with current information on who is who at the university
  - Leading to new, more diverse relationships
- Facilitate connections between all knowledge producers and users
  - Virtual: use software like Bibliocommons to create thematic networks of individuals and products
  - Physical: host forums or brokering fairs, which offer opportunities for people (both research producers and users) to pitch what they are working on, why people should care – help find partners.
- Establish a broker position with a central function at UofG to provide connections
- Explore why it is challenging to attract people (researchers and/or community members) to existing events
  - Wrong need?
  - Wrong medium?
- Look at and offer research in a layered way with various “levels” of accessibility
  - Providing links to more complex layers
  - Building engagement to suit different needs and capacity