IJRSLCE | International Journal of Research on Service-Learning & Community Engagement

Volume 7 | Issue 1 Article 10

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Jeffrey S. Bartel
Seton Hill University

David C. Droppa
Seton Hill University

Geoffrey L. Wood
University of Pittsburg at Greensburg

Recommended Citation:

Bartel, J. S., Droppa, D. C., & Wood, G. L. (2019). Improving academic–community partnerships: A case study of a project investigating attitudes about diversity. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, *7*(1), Article 10.

International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement
Volume 7, Issue 1, Article 10 | 2019 | ISSN: 2374-9466 | https://ijrslce.scholasticahq.com/

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Jeffrey S. Bartel
David C. Droppa
Seton Hill University

Geoffrey L. Wood
University of Pittsburg at Greensburg

Editors' Note: Lead author Jeffrey S. Bartel passed away in December 2019. Co-author David C. Droppa described Bartel as "a wonderful colleague, a detail-oriented writer, and a very curious researcher." We publish this article with gratitude for Jeff Bartel's scholarly work, and in his memory.

This case study describes a process evaluation of a successful academic–community research partnership that measured attitudes about diversity in a southwestern Pennsylvania county. While this is the first case study based on a process evaluation with an outside facilitator, the authors summarize three previous case studies of academic–community research partnerships. In keeping with previous literature, the authors focus on three primary areas: factors that promote partnership success, factors that hinder partnership success, and frameworks for successful partnerships. For each of these three areas, the authors summarize the literature, detail their own experiences, and note ways that their research contributes to knowledge of such partnerships. The authors include lessons learned and suggestions intended to benefit those who engage in similar academic–community relationships.

Keywords*: academic researchers, community, process evaluation, town–gown relationships*

Academic–community research partnerships have become increasingly common (Bowen & Martens, 2006; Powell, 2014; Strier, 2013), and there are a variety of types and foci of such partnerships. Some tend to be more academic, while others are more community-oriented. For example, in partnerships dealing with curriculum development in a university department, academic participants may play more of a leading role. On the other hand, community representatives may take more of a lead in partnerships dealing with community concerns such as diversity, public schools, or neighborhood issues. Suggestions abound for how to optimize such partnerships (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Martin, Smith, & Phillips, 2005; Ross et al., 2010). Although our project—a study of diversity centering on an academic–community partnership—incorporated many of these considerations, we still encountered significant challenges. With the goal of assessing how we addressed these challenges, our team conducted a detailed evaluation of the partnership process. This article summarizes the evaluation findings, including what factors of the partnership were helpful, what factors were problematic, and what lessons we learned. We believe that this information can inform others (i.e., researchers, communities, nonprofits, and foundations) about how to make similar academic–community research efforts more successful.

Review of the Literature

Previous literature on the ways academic–community partnerships function has focused on three main themes. First, researchers have reported on how well these partnerships work and what factors make for the most successful ones. Second, studies have examined the ways partnerships fail and what factors are connected to these failures. Third, an evolving set of studies has examined previous

and new models of structuring academic–community partnerships in an effort to strengthen drivers of successful partnerships and to avoid barriers to success.

Factors Promoting Successful Partnerships

One of the most important factors of successful academic–community partnerships is excellent communication (McWilliam, Desai, & Greig, 1997; Powell, 2014; Smith, 2015; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2004). Specifically, open lines of communication across each stage of any potential collaboration are critical to building rapport, respect, and trust (Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015; Smith, 2015), and when communication lines are developed early and are well-managed throughout the collaboration, opportunities for project success are enhanced.

Good communication leads to trust and effective interpersonal relationships in these partnerships (Nelson et al., 2015; Smith, 2015; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2004). McWilliam et al. (1997) argued that communication and trust are critical to overcoming negative perceptions of academic research. They contended that conflicts around priorities and plans for community research are often clouded by perceptions that the academics in the partnership are in control, a perception that can lead community partners to become less trusting and less invested in the partnership. However, well-established communication, particularly on the part of academics, can reduce the impacts of these negative impressions. Likewise, Powell (2014) suggested that improved group interpersonal dynamics are often helpful in reducing tensions related to power and control over time and resources that sometimes plague partnerships.

A number of desirable consequences follow from good communication among the team, resulting in enhanced academic–community research. These outcomes include knowing research partners better, integrating technology into research more effectively, clarifying budget and contract issues, and planning for more time to discuss conflicts (Begun, Berger, Otto-Salaj, & Rose, 2010). Begun et al. (2010) further contended that these partnerships should allow time for rapport building and planning for instrumental and emotive tasks, which are crucial to communication and trust. McWilliam et al. (1997) made a similar contention, concluding that communication and trust are damaged when perceptions between academic and community partners are not properly managed.

Factors Hindering the Success of Partnerships

While the previous section noted factors implicated in the success of academic–community partnerships, other scholars have examined factors that have had negative impacts. For example, Anderson et al. (2012) contended that incongruent goals, disparate power and access to resources, or different work or communication styles are the major cause of tensions in academic–community partnerships. They argued that there is perceived tension between good science and community research, and that this tension is based on misperceptions on both sides. Academic partners, for instance, may work diligently with a university's institutional review board (IRB) to gain approval of project protocols, but community partners may perceive this diligence as an attempt to control project parameters in an undemocratic way. Sometimes, this tension leads academic or community partners to try to manage research activities in order to reduce tension and keep the process on track; yet, this unilateral management can lead to breakdowns in communication and trust. Similarly, Martin et al. (2005) noted stereotypes of the "impractical and plodding" academic and the "sloppy and impulsive" (p. 2) practitioner that often take on a life of their own and erode interpersonal relationships.

Another issue that can have negative impacts on academic–community partnerships is not allowing enough time to deal with conflict, power struggles, organizational dynamics, and resource allocation (Anderson et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2010). Often, partnerships skip over communication and trust building to get right to managing project tasks. Taking time to plan for coalition, reflect on critical decision points, and sort through conflicts is critical to the success of partnerships. However, in the interest of advancing the project, opportunities to pause and reflect at crucial junctures are

oftentimes passed up in favor of moving the project to completion (Anderson et al., 2012; Eckerle Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, Mackeigan, & Farrar, 2011; Martin et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2015).

Frameworks for Successful Partnerships

Building on knowledge of potential pitfalls and likely drivers of success of academic–community relationships, several scholars have proposed models to guide those pursuing such partnerships. Weerts and Sandmann (2010), for example, highlighted the move by academics over several years to shift the conceptualization of such partnerships from service, a one-way activity, to community engagement, a two-way activity. They contended that the ability of community partners and university researchers to maintain a two-way dialogue is crucial to project success, and it is critical to this dialog that academics see themselves as true partners with community members in the research at hand. Indeed, conflicts in academic–community partnerships tend to be more frequent when the community partner is not actively engaged. Weerts and Sandmann believed that the complicated nature of interests, resources, and power in research collaboration is underreported in the academic literature and that it is necessary to focus on ways to work effectively across boundaries.

Such two-way dialog may be facilitated by employing one or more *boundary spanners*, individuals who work across organizational barriers to accomplish goals and objectives. Adams (2014) examined characteristics, motivations, and roles of boundary spanners in academic–community partnerships. She found that the early identification of people willing to work across the academic–community boundary made it easier to sustain partnerships. Thus, if a community boundary spanner can be located early in the partnership formation, it is likely this individual will be able to overcome barriers like entry into the community.

Other scholars have examined academic–community partnerships through a different lens. Bowen and Martens (2006), for instance, argued that a collaborative approach to data collection and analysis is crucial to the success of partnerships. They contended that using qualitative rather than quantitative measures across the partnership results in better acceptance and often has more meaning for community partners; therefore, they suggested that future models of collaboration should acknowledge this as a key point.

Previously Reported Case Studies

In sum, a number of researchers have offered suggestions for how to improve academic–community partnerships. However, there are relatively few case studies examining these principles at play in actual research partnerships. One notable exception is McWilliam et al. (1997), who reported a case illustration of a six-year health services academic–community research partnership. In addition, Nelson et al. (2015) provided an analysis of a partnership to create, maintain, and use a longitudinal multi-agency database. Finally, Bellamy, Bledsoe, Mullen, Fang, and Manuel (2008) reported on a research partnership to strengthen training in evidence-based practice in three social service agencies, working with researchers based in a school of social work. Based on our review of the literature, ours is the first case study of academic–community research based on a process evaluation using an outside facilitator.

Description of Our Partnership's Research

In April 2013, a collaborative team of researchers and members of the community began a study of diversity in a rural county in southwestern Pennsylvania. The project, "Confronting the Challenge of Diversity in Westmoreland County," was conceptualized by a local community organizer who served as the project coordinator. She launched the project with a small grant from a regional organization that promotes workforce diversity, and she acquired subsequent donations from other organizations. The project coordinator recruited the research team leader from a small, private Catholic university with close ties to the community, and the team leader recruited several members of the faculty to

assist in study design, data collection, and analysis. An additional non-academic research team member was a representative of a county-wide community action group. The project coordinator also worked with a local community-organizing group to build a guiding coalition, in which a broad cross-section of stakeholders represented various sectors of the community, in order to provide input into the design and implementation of the research.

The goals of the research were to identify and measure attitudes about racial diversity in the county and to make recommendations and initiate strategies to help strengthen the cultural and commercial fabric of the region. Following an initial literature review during the summer of 2013, the research team organized and conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with representatives of the community—reflecting, to the extent possible, different strata of socioeconomic and racial characteristics based on county census data—with structured questions related to race, ethnicity, and racial and ethnic inclusion.

After compiling and analyzing the data from the focus groups, the research team began constructing a survey that would be administered to residents and county employees. The goal of the survey was to assess opinions about racial diversity, distinguish perception from fact about diversity, note correlates and health consequences of racial intolerance, and identify what could be done to make the county and its communities more welcoming. Although primary distribution of the survey was electronic, a paper-and-pencil survey was also available for those without access to computers. The survey was active during the entire month of June 2014, and members of the research team completed primary analysis of the survey data over the summer of 2014. The project coordinator shared results of the survey with community stakeholders through a multimedia presentation and a handout with findings and recommendations for change, with the goal of increasing the community's commitment to welcoming diversity, thereby strengthening the cultural and economic fabric of the county. This article does not further describe the diversity research itself but rather focuses on the process by which the academics and community representatives conceptualized and carried out the research and analyzed and reported the results.[1] The goals of the present study, then, were to analyze the process involved in our study of diversity to (1) compare the extent to which our process mirrored the processes of other academic–community partnerships, (2) uncover additional unique interpersonal drivers of success as well as factors that hindered our success, and (3) build upon others' proposed frameworks for successful partnerships in ways that benefit those who engage in similar partnerships in the future.

Method

The process evaluation used an exploratory design. The evaluation was initiated through a three-hour discussion among research team members that occurred in 2015 after the team had analyzed the primary data from the community survey and drafted a summary report. Members of the research team solicited the assistance of a faculty member from another university who, as a disinterested observer, facilitated the evaluation. All research team members attended the process evaluation discussion except for one member who was unable to attend due to an injury (but provided input digitally into the report of the process evaluation).

The process evaluation was completed in three phases: (1) The facilitator led a discussion and provided a summary report; (2) the project coordinator and research team leader reviewed the summary report, provided some additional context, and made factual revisions; and (3) the rest of the research team reviewed and revised the updated report, in some cases contributing thoughts that had not been expressed in the facilitated session. Though the team reached consensus on the final product, there was not unanimity on each point, which reflected several key characteristics of the process evaluation. First, because individuals often perceive the world differently based on their own biases and unique personal experiences, the acceptance of points that differed from one's own experiences and beliefs indicated the team's tolerance for disagreement. Second, our methodology for the process evaluation used consensus rather than majority (or plurality) rule voting or surveys in

which only the most frequent responses were accepted. One team member had proposed that the facilitator conduct individual interviews with team members as a strategy for capturing more frank observations about the process, but this suggestion was ultimately rejected by the team in favor of a whole-team meeting because of a desire to have a conversation in which perceptions and misperceptions could be discussed with others.

We used guided group discussion, an optimal format for gathering perceptions and learning reasons for individuals' actions (Patton, 2002). The facilitator used open-ended, semi-structured questions as well as direct and closed questions. He was mindful to keep his probing within the focus of assessment of the process (Cooper & Schindler, 2003) and followed Creswell's (2003) recommendation to use relatively few semi-structured questions to elicit each project member's perception of factors that contributed to success or failure. There was no monetary compensation for participation in the process evaluation.

The facilitator asked for information about and perceptions of the six phases of the project: project formation, IRB approval for the focus groups, conducting the focus groups, survey construction and administration, data analysis, and academic–community interface. The main points of discussion are presented in that order in the following sections. The facilitator took notes during the discussion and generated a written report, which was then reviewed by all team members, who had an opportunity to add comments. The report was then analyzed to identify factors contributing to and hindering success of the partnership, lessons learned, and recommendations for further study.

Results

This section offers an analysis of the research team's discussion regarding the process of the academic–community partnership's research on diversity in southwestern Pennsylvania. In the following subsections, each of which represents a major stage of the research project, we address key decisions and lessons learned.

Project Formation

As noted earlier, the faculty member who headed the research team recruited the team members from the university's social science and business faculty. One critical decision was to include the two community representatives as members of the research team. The team favored this approach over the research team meeting separately and then communicating with the community representatives through meetings of the team leader and the project coordinator, since this would encourage close and continuous collaboration between the academics and the community representatives.[2]

As the research team began working together, members expressed excitement about, and investment in, the project. The team attended two meetings of the guiding coalition, led by the executive director of a prominent local community-action group, to help develop and enhance a relationship between the two groups, to explain research strategy, and to solicit suggestions and assistance from guiding coalition members.

The research team agreed to meet as needed to decide on the specifics of the project, including what data would be collected. In the second meeting, the team decided to focus the study on race and ethnicity instead of other types of diversity such as sexual orientation and religion. The team thought that an effort to encompass multiple dimensions of diversity in this study would not be feasible within the scope and timeframe of the project. This was a critical decision in that it focused the project topic going forward.

IRB Approval for the Focus Groups

The IRB approval process created major points of tension for the community representatives. Specifically, approval of the focus group plans and questions (a) took longer than they had anticipated and (b) required the team to communicate to the IRB the wording of recruitment flyers

and the specifics of participant selection. While two of the academic team members had significant IRB experience, both with submitting research proposals for review and as members of university IRBs, the community members on the team were less familiar with the process. While the timeline for response by, and the requests for modification from, the IRB were, in the eyes of the academics, fairly typical, the community members were frustrated by the amount of time the IRB approval process took and by the federal requirements for participant protection. Another issue related to IRB approval arose when the team prepared the submission of the focus group plans. While the project coordinator believed that focus group members could be recruited using a word-of-mouth process—including the recruitment of individuals from groups with which she had some relationship—the IRB ruled initially that, to ensure participant privacy, the focus group participants should be recruited only through flyers distributed around the community. However, the academics' experience with research was helpful in communicating with the IRB, and they were able to convince the board that word-of-mouth recruitment was appropriate and should be permitted. When this was accepted by the IRB, the community members' worries about recruiting sufficient participants decreased.

Conducting the Focus Groups

After the IRB granted approval for the team to continue the project, one of the members of the research team led an orientation for the focus group facilitators. The project coordinator recruited the focus group participants, some through personal contact and word of mouth and others through various forms of outreach in the community. Due to a lack of responses from potential focus group members, the implementation of the focus group phase became a logistical challenge. Recruitment of other minority groups, including Latinos, proved difficult, due in part to a fairly small number of minority groups in the county. Nonetheless, despite a relatively small number of African Americans in the county, this minority group was well represented in the focus groups, perhaps suggesting that the team's difficulty recruiting Latino participants was unique to this ethnic group and not to minority group members more broadly. Although this issue was specific to our study and perhaps less generalizable, we have chosen to include it here as it may be helpful to researchers conducting academic–community research in which diversity is an important consideration in focus group design. Finally, the team expressed that the strategy of conducting focus groups with same-race group members proved wise because it allowed for more candor from participants than had the focus groups been diverse in terms of race.

Survey Construction and Administration

The development of questions for the community survey, based on themes generated from the focus groups, was a major area of tension for the entire project team. The issues were twofold: (1) differences about what content was germane to the project and (2) issues related to question bias as well as validity and reliability of measures. The community representatives valued the collection of different information more than the academic team members. Generally, the academics sought measures (e.g., of racism) that had been validated by prior research and were accepted in the literature. Further, in order to demonstrate to regional policymakers the negative effects that both lack of diversity and racism have on the populace, they emphasized finding both explanations and consequences of racism rather than merely demonstrating the extent to which racism existed in the county. By contrast, community representatives on the team were more concerned with learning about the existence of racism in the community as well as other unwelcoming aspects of the county's environment. This tension between the community representatives and academics sometimes manifested as mistrust. Because the team as a whole had agreed that the length of the survey should be short to increase the likelihood of participants completing it in its entirety, and because the measures proposed by the academics necessarily increased the length of the survey, the different goals of the academic and community members could not be completely satisfied.

Another source of tension in the survey construction phase related to two of the academics with

expertise in social psychology and survey design feeling that their expertise was sometimes ignored or under-valued by the community members. They felt had to fight for the values—both personal and professional—they believed were important to express in the project. While the project coordinator had strong opinions about both the content and structure of the survey instrument, these two academic team members felt that they were brought onto the team to contribute their expertise only to see that expertise subsequently dismissed. Similarly, the community representatives felt that their expertise with respect to knowledge of the community was less valued by the academics. At times, it seemed as if there were two separate parts to the project: the community representatives' part and the academics' part, each representing competing rather than compatible interests. The academics felt that they were including the community representatives but that the academics' part was being resisted and misunderstood, despite attempts to explain it. The mistrust was exacerbated by certain email communications from the academics that one community member viewed as cold and impersonal.

An example of the tension between the preferences of the academic and community members of the team occurred in relation to questions about participants' health. As mentioned earlier, some academics wanted to use survey questions designed to highlight physical and mental health correlates of experiences with racism. This desire was buttressed by their awareness that research in similar populations has shown a strong connection between experiences of racism and mental and physical health issues (Anderson, 2013; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008). Community representatives, on the other hand, thought that adding these questions would make the survey too long and that respondents would not understand why these questions were being asked, resulting in a lower response rate. The project coordinator felt strongly that the health-related questions should be asked in a separate study, but the academics did not believe that a separate study was realistic. While these academic team members believed it was unnecessary that participants understand why each element of the survey was included, the project coordinator felt strongly that the opposite was true. In addition, the academics wanted to place the health-related questions at the beginning of the survey so that answers would not be contaminated by the questions about prejudice and experiences with racism. However, the project coordinator wanted the questions to appear at the end of the survey so that if participants ended the survey early, the health-related questions would be the ones left unanswered. Ultimately, because neither side would capitulate, the research team leader decided to place a smaller number of health-related questions at the end of the survey. Community representatives felt betrayed by the academic team members' insistence on retaining the health-related questions at all and by the fact that the decision to retain them was made in a meeting that included academic team members but not community representatives. Academic members remained frustrated by a perception that what they believed would have been an improvement to the survey was being thwarted by individuals with less expertise both in survey construction in general and the academic study of prejudice in particular.

Another issue that arose at the same time regarded the name to use in solicitations of potential participants for the survey. The community representatives pointed out that the study was named "Confronting the Challenge of Diversity in Westmoreland County," and they believed that, in an effort to face the issue head on, this title should appear on all recruitment materials. Yet, two of the academics believed that including the word *diversity* might cause some participants who were not proponents of diversity to avoid completing the survey altogether, thus creating problems of generalizability of the results. Nonetheless, the project coordinator was adamant that excluding *diversity* from the survey title would be a resignation to the fact that the survey was about something other than diversity (recall that inclusion of the health-related questions and other questions about causes and consequences of prejudice were already seen as tangential); and because of her insistence, the research team leader negotiated with the two academics to keep *diversity* in the title.

Another issue of frustration for the community representatives centered on the timeline drift that occurred at various points in the academic calendar, when academic team members were less available for task completion or communication. Time pressures, the need to make decisions quickly,

and an ambitious schedule increased tensions within the team. At times, some of the academics believed that their work on the project, which was pro bono, was devalued, especially when community members claimed that the academics were involved in the project only so they could benefit personally by publishing the results. Conversations about these issues did not surface in team meetings but instead were shared in private communications, becoming the elephant in the room.

Finally, scheduling project team meetings became increasingly challenging, and because of time pressures for some team members, meetings sometimes were rushed in an attempt to make decisions before someone had to leave for another commitment. Additionally, some team members avoided addressing tensions during meetings for fear of derailing the (seemingly) more important decisions related to the project itself rather than evaluating the process as it unfolded.

Data Analysis

The data analysis phase also did not go smoothly. One of the academics, who had computed frequencies and descriptive data, had agreed to write up an analysis of these frequencies and descriptive statistics and to further analyze the data. After several months, this academic reported to the team that these tasks had turned out to be much more time-consuming than she had initially anticipated, and that in the face of teaching and related activities, she could not complete the additional analyses. The project coordinator expressed frustration about the amount of time that had gone by with no report on the data analyses and about the failure of the academic team member who had taken on this task to communicate earlier about being unable to complete it. It quickly became clear that due to the size of the project, competing obligations, and (for some team members) lack of experience with statistical software, no single team member could commit to conducting the analysis. As a solution, one team member proposed that the report be parceled out to members of the team; however, this was rejected by the other members, who believed that the resulting product would be disjointed. The project coordinator proposed engaging and paying a consultant researcher, with whom she had worked previously and whom she viewed as qualified and capable, to write up a draft of a narrative summary report of the results provided to her by the academics and perform a small amount of data analysis. The team agreed. Some members of the academic team were confused about why funds were available for a consultant when they had been working pro bono and when the project coordinator had suggested on several occasions that perhaps a small stipend for the academics' work (which never materialized) might be available at some point. On the other hand, there were even more intense feelings on the part of the project coordinator that had the academics finished the analysis sooner, there would have been no need to engage a consultant.

Unfortunately, the outside consultant strategy proved unsuccessful. The consultant was not able to focus her efforts appropriately, and the academic team members believed the consultant had failed to complete the task for which she had been hired (i.e., writing up a report of the descriptive analyses that the academics had provided to her) while seeking to revisit decisions already made by the research team. The consultant became increasingly abrasive toward the academics for not designing the study as she would have, while the academics did not believe they had to justify the months of planning and decision making that had taken the research team to that point. This conflict with the consultant increased tensions between two members of the academic team, the research team leader, and the project coordinator. The two academic members thought that the research team leader should have pulled the consultant off the project, and they stopped participating in communication with the consultant as the consultant's comments escalated from abrasive to, in their opinion, insulting. The project coordinator eventually stepped in and removed the consultant from the project, but the two academic team members were frustrated by the time it took to make this decision and by the fact that the research team leader did not make it. (He expressed that he believed the firing of the consultant needed to come from the project coordinator, who had hired her, a point he had communicated with the project coordinator but not them.) Clearly, this episode reflected issues of how and when impressions and decisions were communicated within the team.

Academic–Community Interface

As indicated previously, there were several areas of tension, mistrust, and stress experienced among some of the team members. This tension sometimes led team members to misperceive others' intentions. For example, the project coordinator indicated that being labeled a "community organizer" and being referred to as "the community" felt offensive, though members of the academic team responded that they did not intend to be disrespectful. Additionally, although the initial role of the academic team members was to collaborate on the research, the community representatives thought that the academics at times overreached their authority around design decisions. Thus, the confusion surrounding whether the academics were advisors on the project or true collaborators resulted in frustrations for both community and academic members of the research team.

Discussion

While the previous narrative highlights areas of conflict and tension, there were numerous aspects of the project that the research team members agreed were successful. Indeed, despite conflict sometimes taking center stage in team discussions of our process, our successes far outweighed our struggles. In the following subsections, we discuss factors we believe promoted the success of the partnership in conducting the diversity research, along with factors we believe hindered our success.

Factors Promoting Our Partnership's Success

There were a number of factors that helped our partnership succeed. First, our team had a shared vision about the importance of this work, what we would learn, and the potential impact on the community. Although there were differences of opinion regarding how to go about reaching the goals, there was strong agreement among team members about the importance of the project for the community. Because team members were in agreement about the basic mission of the project, we were able to overcome conflicts that tended to focus on how best to complete the project rather than what the project should ultimately accomplish (Smith, 2015).

A second factor resulting in project success was our team decision making. While we have highlighted a few examples in which the research team leader stepped in and made a decision when consensus could not be reached, for the most part, the team avoided hard feelings by discussing contentious issues, attempting to persuade those who disagreed, and building consensus—all of which have been recommended in the literature for successful group functioning (Begun et al., 2010).

Designating clear leadership roles (i.e., project coordinator and research team leader) to individuals who were able to carry their authority while investing and believing in a collaborative process was also helpful. As noted earlier, in those instances when consensus could not be reached, it was important to have a team leader who could break a stalemate (as suggested by Nelson et al., 2015). Similarly, the ability of the project coordinator (a community representative) and research team leader (an academic) to disagree and hash things out between them was helpful. They directly discussed disagreements—which otherwise could have gone underground and sabotaged the project—so that solutions could be considered. Had the community members not been a part of the research team, this would have been much more challenging due to a likely reduction in opportunities for communication (Powell, 2014)

The perspectives and talents of research team members also contributed to the success of the project (Begun et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2015). Having a project coordinator who grew up and lived in the area and had deep connections in the community helped in recruiting focus group participants, obtaining support of the guiding coalition (a large group of community partners with access to diverse email lists), and gaining credibility in the community, which was especially helpful for participant recruitment. On the academic side, having academic team members who were willing to both work pro bono and to commit considerable time to the project because of their value of

diversity and connection to the community were essential to the success of the project (Begun et al., 2010; Smith, 2015). Their research experience was particularly helpful in two areas: Their IRB know-how expedited the process of IRB submission and helped to explain to community members why the process worked as it did, and their item-construction/questionnaire design expertise was a benefit as measurement issues, such as validity and reliability, were accounted for during survey construction.

Finally, our use of online data collection for the bulk of the questionnaires increased our access to participants, decreased costs associated with reaching those participants, and significantly reduced the time it took to enter data into our statistical analysis software (Nelson et al., 2015).

Factors Hindering the Success of Our Partnership

Our initial timeline was, perhaps, too ambitious, given the demands of a teaching-focused institution on the academic members' time. Particularly in a teaching-focused university, the academic schedule and related pressures can overtake the best intentions of academic researchers. The teaching demands are inflexible: Papers have to be graded, exams administered and graded, and mid-semester and final grades turned in on time; research deadlines, although important, may not be perceived as inflexible to the same degree. This may be truer of academics who work pro bono and who have "personal" research projects/labs or other forms of professional development that consume a large portion of their non-teaching time. It may be helpful for community representatives to be aware of this and for academics to communicate to community representatives when—and why—timelines cannot be met so that new timelines can be renegotiated.

In hindsight, the research team should have built in more time for IRB approval and communicated more clearly to the community representatives about the process of getting research approved by an IRB. Our experiences in this regard mirrored challenges found by others who have examined academic–community partnerships (Anderson et al., 2012; Begun et al. 2010; Nelson et al., 2015; Powell, 2014; Smith, 2015).

As noted earlier, while the entire research team agreed with the overall mission of the project, there were some specific areas, such as the "health questions" and the nature of the questions that would be asked, where academic and community members disagreed. While people who have different backgrounds will likely have different areas of expertise, development of a survey with a team that includes community representatives and academics may require special awareness of, and attention to, issues of trust and intimidation. Community representatives know the community, and they may come to the table with specific focused questions that they would like answered; academics know the literature better, and they are likely to identify questions and measures that are supported by previous research as valid and important to the current project. Within the expression of what is "important," academics may communicate in a way that community representatives feel is not respectful of their opinions, while academics may think, "You came to us to do research, but our expertise isn't being respected." This tension may be inevitable in academic–community research, but being open and mindful about opposing goals may allow for more open communication (Anderson et al., 2012).

Because the initial funding for this project was so limited, the project coordinator had to raise additional funds to meet needs as the project unfolded, such as for the multimedia presentation where final results were presented both to the guiding coalition and to the community at large. While some might conclude that project leaders should anticipate needs and plan better, in the perspective of one of the authors, who has many years of nonprofit administration experience, if all of the funds required for programs or projects had to be committed before they started, most would not get off the ground. Nonetheless, a project leader who can project financial requirements and who also has the passion and skills for fundraising may be essential for success, especially for smaller projects (Begun et al., 2010; Powell, 2014).

Finally, in order to fully process issues, changes of plans, and tensions that arise, meeting time is

needed to address not just instrumental tasks but also emotive concerns. When the availability of team members is limited, otherwise manageable problems loom larger. Further, because meeting time was at a premium for research team members, meetings focused almost exclusively on instrumental goals (i.e., discussing tasks that needed to be completed). As a result, time was not set aside to discuss tensions that developed within the team dynamic. In retrospect, it would have been beneficial to set aside some time to clarify goals, intentions, and feelings of team members before tensions escalated. It is not clear, however, whether agreement could have been gained, and what additional time this would have taken. The tension between getting the work done and processing team dynamics is typical in high-performing work teams, and there are no easy answers, but the question could and should have been raised as to whether to try to do both (Begun et al., 2010; McWilliam et al., 1997).

Lessons Learned

The primary lessons learned from this process evaluation of the academic–community partnership are summarized briefly in the following list. We view these items as essential to the success of research relying on a partnership:

1. Developing shared vision is important.
2. Making decisions as a team also is important.
3. Assigning clear leadership roles is necessary, with clarity about when decisions should be made by consensus and when leader authority must be used.
4. Conflict is to be expected, and resolution of disagreements should be swift and decisive. Conflict should be expected between community and academic team members about what to measure, why to measure what, terminology, and stereotypes of community members and academics.
5. Take time to focus on the process and on the emotive needs of the team, not just strategies and strategy decisions. For example, although compromise is essential, we realized that often, in compromise, someone loses something that they believe is precious, and resulting feelings may need to be expressed and heard.
6. The project leader should have deep roots in the community and be able to span the boundary between the community and the academy.
7. Researchers, especially those working pro bono, should commit to completing the project. Time pressures should be anticipated, especially during the semester, both in terms of task completion and time needed for team meetings.
8. Community partners should be very informed about the realities and timelines of IRB approval.
9. Fiscal needs and fundraising skills should be anticipated.
10. Formation of, and communication with, a broad advisory group of community representatives can be helpful.

Connections of Our Project to the Literature on Successful Partnerships

Several of the factors contributing to successful partnerships reported in the literature helped our project succeed. Of primary significance was the decision to include community representatives as members of the research team, a decision that facilitated open communication and collaborative decision making (Martin et al., 2005; Strier, 2013). Although Nelson et al. (2015), Smith (2015), and Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2004) believed that trust leads to better interpersonal relationships, our experience was the opposite: Development of interpersonal relationships and open communication built trust. There was also an essential balance of power, with the project coordinator in charge of the entire project and representing the community, and the research team leader having both role and task authority and using this authority effectively (Anderson et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2010).

Some pitfalls noted in the literature were avoided. The goals for this project were congruent, and conflict was managed to keep the project on track. Other factors hindering success, however, included frustrations surrounding the IRB, stereotypes about academic and community members, and not allocating enough time to deal with conflict (Anderson et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2010).

The project reflected learning that contributes to the literature on model building and refinement. Not only did the community approach the university to work on the project, but decisions were made at almost every step to maintain two-way engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). It is our view, however, that regardless of whether the community or the academy initiates a collaborative project, any venture of value must be two-way, drawing on the expertise of each partner.

Our project probably would have failed without the boundary spanning described by Adams (2014). The project coordinator bridged the academy–community boundary in several ways, and her connections to the community facilitated participation in both focus groups and survey completion.

Our experience is consistent with Strier's (2013) view that tension in such partnerships is not only inevitable but can help develop trust. We agree with Ross et al. (2010) and Anderson et al. (2012) that negotiating and renegotiating decisions is essential to the success of any ambitious project, and, ideally, more time should have been built in from the start to address tensions and conflict. We also agree with Begun et al. (2010), Nelson et al. (2015), Powell (2014), and Smith (2015) that support for community research by the academic institution is very helpful to these partnerships. We were fortunate that our academic institutions value community research and permit faculty to use community research reports as evidence for promotion and tenure. Projects that require considerable time over multiple years, as this one did, may not be possible for faculty to commit to unless their institution takes this position.

Recommendations for Further Study

Areas for further research include continued exploration of issues of authority and power in academic–community research, including dynamics of race and gender. Case studies are helpful but are, of course, limited in external validity because they focus on one type of collaboration and study. A study analyzing academic–community partnerships of varying types and across multiple projects would be valuable.

Conclusion

Our experience leads us to believe that managing power and authority dynamics, although tricky, is essential to the success of more-complex projects. Clear roles and boundaries are essential, and sometimes positions must be taken that increase conflict, but without the strategic use of power, partnerships can fall apart unexpectedly. We encourage others in both the academy and the community to take risks in working to learn together and create solutions to important problems. We hope that this case study is useful to others engaged in or contemplating such ventures.

Notes

1. This process evaluation does not offer details about the diversity study itself; a report is available from the authors upon request.

2. The term *community representative* was frequently used as a convenience to differentiate non-faculty from the academics on the team, although, in truth, the academics saw themselves as intimately connected to, and part of, the community as well. The research team included the five academics and the two community representatives. When the five academic researchers are referred to, the term *academics* is used.

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About the Authors

Jeffrey S. Bartel was Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Seton Hill University.

David C. Droppa is Associate Professor and Director of the Social Work Program at Seton Hill University.

Geoffrey L. Wood is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Applied Research at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David C. Droppa at droppa@setonhill.edu.