

# President-to-President

## **MASTERING UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**



## **THE COALITION OF URBAN SERVING UNIVERSITIES**

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is a president-led organization committed to escalating urban university engagement to increase prosperity and opportunity in the nation's cities, and to tackling key urban challenges. The Coalition includes 39 public urban research universities representing all U.S. geographic regions. The USU agenda focuses on three priority areas for cities: creating a competitive workforce, building strong communities, and improving the health of a diverse population. The Coalition of Urban Universities (USU) has partnered with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (A•P•L•U) to establish an Office of Urban Initiatives, housed at A•P•L•U, to jointly lead an urban agenda for the nation's public universities.

## **THE ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC AND LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES**

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (A•P•L•U) is a research and advocacy organization of public research universities, land-grant institutions, and state university systems with member campuses in all 50 states, U.S. territories and the District of Columbia. A•P•L•U is the nation's oldest higher education association, with 218 members, including 76 land-grant institutions, and 18 historically black institutions. In addition, A•P•L•U represents the interests of the nation's 33 American-Indian land-grant colleges through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. A•P•L•U is dedicated to advancing learning, discovery and engagement. The association provides a forum for the discussion and development of policies and programs affecting higher education and the public interest.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Background</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Decision to Partner—or Not</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Which Partnerships Need the President’s Direct Involvement?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Presidential Leadership in Fostering Partnerships: Ensuring Commitment and Managing Expectations</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Key to Sustainable Success: Institutionalizing Partnerships Across the University</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Working with Different Types of Partnerships</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>USU Board of Directors 2011–2012</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>USU Member List 2012</b>	<b>24</b>



# Background

Working together, USU and APLU regularly convene the leaders of the nation's public urban research universities to articulate and pursue a vision for how higher education can respond to the opportunities and challenges facing America's cities and metropolitan regions. To leverage the full potential of the nation's public urban research universities, we need to work together to scale-up and extend successful models, create mutual learning opportunities to share what works, and track our progress over time.

In this vein, on July 17, 2011, USU and A•P•L•U organized a one-of-a-kind workshop to assist new and aspiring university leadership to understand the ins and outs of university–community partnerships. Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the workshop was designed to create a frank and open discussion of what actually happens at the leadership level within the university enterprise that either helps university–community partnerships to succeed or works to undermine them. Five respected university leaders engaged with their peers to dig deep into core issues including when universities should and should not partner, the circumstances in which presidential leadership is required to make a partnership work, how to institutionalize a partnership culture across the university, dealing with prior difficult relationships and commitments, and the particular challenges and opportunities that emerge from different types of partnerships.

This brief report summarizes the learning shared within that workshop. It is not meant to be an exhaustive work on the subject, or a literature review documenting the state of the field. Rather, it captures the shared experience of university leaders who have committed themselves to partnering in their community and what they have learned from the trenches that can be useful to others who chose to engage deeply in place-making.

To protect confidences, not all stories detailed in the report can be attributed.



# Introduction

The past few decades have seen a rapid growth in the number and types of partnerships between higher education institutions and the organizations and neighborhoods in the communities in which they are located. This is especially the case for urban-based research universities. This growth has been accompanied by research and reflection on the issues and challenges associated with forming, operating, and sustaining those partnerships. The result has been a rich and growing literature on aspects of that engagement.<sup>1</sup>

However, while much is known about effective creation and management of partnerships at the program level, less is known about leadership issues related to the partnerships at the enterprise level. One reason could be that, given their packed schedules, the officials involved at that level—presidents, chancellors, and provosts—focus on action, allowing limited time for reflection. Another reason is that, while seeking to build and sustain partnerships, it is difficult to openly describe the strategies and challenges of working with the participants in those partnerships. As a consequence, it can be difficult for others, including those aspiring to university leadership, to fully understand the challenges to and solutions for university-community partnerships.

As one step to address that gap, the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (A•P•L•U) organized a workshop with a set of presidents of urban research universities noted for their experience and leadership in advancing university–community partnerships. The workshop was sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and its aim was to provide a frank and open discussion of what actually happens at the leadership level within the university that helps partnerships to succeed, what makes them sustainable, and what tends to undermine them. To date, there have been few efforts to document that knowledge.

The panel comprised two USU presidents, Shirley Raines of the University of Memphis and Wim Wiewel of Portland State University; two chancellors, Charles Bantz of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis and Nancy Zimpher of the State University of New York system; and a key assistant, Monica Rimai, then with the State University of New York system. The discussion drew on their experiences in forming and sustaining university and community partnerships. President Raines served as moderator of the panel. Throughout this report, the university’s chief executive will be referred to as the president.

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzgerald, H., Burack, C., and Siefer, S., Eds. 2012. *Handbook of Engaged Scholarship: Contemporary Landscapes, Future Directions*. Vol. 1 and Vol. 2. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.



The panel discussed five questions:

1. What guides the president's decision to engage in partnerships within the community?
2. When should a president become involved in creating and directing a partnership?
3. What is the role of the president/chancellor in fostering productive partnerships?
4. What are the keys to sustaining productive partnerships?
5. What special issues in partnerships are common to urban-serving universities, including neighborhood, education, health based, and real estate partnerships?

Following is a report of the panel's responses.





# The Decision to Partner—or Not

By definition, Urban Serving Universities (USUs) must be deeply embedded in partnerships with their communities. Factors driving that need include:

- The USU's moral and political mission as an institution to address those communities' most intractable social and economic challenges. They are public institutions serving the public.
- The desire of many faculty members and students to make a difference in the community.
- The USU's educational role involving appropriate engagement with communities to enhance teaching, learning, and research.

Other factors may be linked to the immediate self-interest of the university. Partnerships may be necessary to create the type of physical and social environment the university campus must have to attract and retain students and faculty. Partnerships may be required to maintain political support for the university's operations.

Given all of these factors and forces, the first questions are whether and when to partner.

Some partnerships are not a matter of choice. They are so central to the educational mission of a university that the university simply cannot accomplish essential functions without them. Examples are partnerships with hospitals, health care providers, or schools to provide required practice training for health and education students. However, the process of negotiating these partnerships and the challenges of sustaining them are different from those of nonessential partnerships.

The workshop focused on highly important but not absolutely essential partnerships. In those cases, the choice to partner requires an assessment of the contribution of the partnership in relation to the costs, benefits, and risks.

## **ALIGNMENT OF MISSION, PRIORITIES, CAPABILITIES**

At the core of that assessment is the need to view the partnership as an exchange relationship. Each party contributes something of value to and receives something of value from the partnership. Therefore, the key in choosing to partner is alignment:

- Does the purpose of the partnership align with the mission, priorities, and capabilities of both the university and the partner?
- The closer and deeper the alignment on both sides, the greater the reason to partner and the greater the chance the partnership will succeed.

From the president's perspective, alignment should be the guide for whether to partner.





Alignment, though, does not mean that each partner must have the same interest in the partnership. A neighborhood group may want design ideas for a community building. An architecture department in a university may want practical studio design experiences for its students. While the primary interests of each partner in this case may differ, the project forms the basis for the partnership, and its importance to each will affect the appropriateness and likelihood of a productive partnership.

Early in the formation process, the university and the community partner should identify their goals. This forces both groups to be clear about the reason for the partnership and avoids wasting partnership time and effort later on. Especially for enterprise-level partnerships or partnerships that have significant consequences across the institution, this means the president must be directly involved at the beginning stage to ensure the partnership serves the purposes and interests of the university.

### **LENGTH OF THE PARTNERSHIP**

Deciding whether and how to partner involves a trade-off between the benefits and the risks. The length of the partnership can be a factor in that trade-off. Short-term partnerships commonly involve lower levels of commitment and fewer resources and require less effort to sustain. In contrast, long-term partnerships are often necessary for larger-scale efforts involving more resources. These can carry higher risks if projections are wrong or if there are changes in the environment affecting the performance of the partnership.

Therefore, large long-term partnerships require the president's special attention. The president must

- be very clear about the university's long-term goals in the partnership,
- thoroughly review the assumptions behind the performance projections of the project for which the partnership was formed, and
- foresee the long-term possibilities of the partnership and plan out as necessary, even over a 20-year period (such as in a real estate partnership).

### **WHEN TO SAY NO**

Some proposed partnerships are not appropriate even though they might be strongly supported by people inside or outside of the university. Several factors may make a partnership wrong:

- The partnership does not advance the university's instructional, research, outreach or service objectives. For example, a community may greatly need a particular service, such as social services and health services. Faculty, students, or staff may have the skills to provide that service, and it can be tempting for ethical reasons to provide it. But, unless that provision is connected to the objectives of the university, it is wrong to do so. Universities are not principally social service organizations. All partnerships must first serve the educational mission of the institution.

## **A CAUTIONARY TALE: Careful Assessment Could Have Saved a Partnership**

During a round of budget cutting at a USU institution, an interim college dean told the new president that a partnership with an industry group should be ended. Through the efforts of that group, the university had just been given state funds to buy equipment and to cover the first year of salary for a faculty member to serve the industry group's need.

The interim dean argued that there was little demand for graduates in the field and that the college did not have the money to support the faculty (not yet hired) after the first year. The president accepted the recommendation, since it avoided long-term costs without layoffs. He did check with the chair of the industry group, who saw no problem with that decision.

Immediately after the announcement, there was a serious reaction within the industry. It turned out there was a conflict in the industry group, and this project was a favorite of some members. It took the new president several years to repair the damage. A few more rounds of conversations early on would have brought these issues to light and allowed the state funds to be redirected to joint activities that worked for the university and the industry group.

- The university or the community partner might not have enough resources to support the partnership.
- There may be disagreement about the need for the partnership. If so, that fact should be recognized and clearly communicated in discussions about whether to form the partnership. Clarity on the front end avoids misunderstandings later on.

To assess a potential partnership with enterprise implications, a president should not say yes or no right away but should attend the initial meeting about the partnership and clearly identify the tasks the university must undertake in order to determine whether the partnership is feasible. If a proposal is not feasible, it may be possible to reframe it so that the university can assume a role that is practicable.

If a partnership is not appropriate, an option for a president is to simply not engage and to let the proposal fade away with time. If negotiations for the partnership are not moving forward, the president should drop out.



## DISSOLVING A PARTNERSHIP

If a university is in a partnership that is not working out as planned, it may be best to dissolve it. The president should:

- Talk to the people involved in the partnership and explain why the university wants to end it and how it may be dissolved.
- Keep a dialogue going with the partners. Listen, don't lecture.
- Listen to the partner's needs and reactions; acknowledge and answer them sincerely. Even if this partnership didn't work out, the university will want to preserve good relationships for the future.
- Periodically review partnerships that have previously been rejected. Circumstances may change and could make a partnership desirable.



## **ADVICE FOR NEW PRESIDENTS: Dealing with Inherited Partnerships—and Moving Toward Your Own Agenda**

It is not uncommon for a new president to find that poor relationships exist between the university and the community due to the failure of past partnerships or partnership attempts. Those memories can last a long time, and these hurts will have to be repaired before any new partnership can move forward. Rather than stressing the hurt or harm, the new president should identify the basic issue and quietly fix it.

A new president might inherit partnerships that involve commitments that cannot be met or should not have been made. There might be disappointment or frustration if one partner failed to meet the other partner's expectations—or if the university seeks to end or alter the partnership.

### **SEIZING THE MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY**

Any new president can expect to inherit expectations and commitments from the prior administration—as well as some staff who support the partnerships developed under the former president. And if the prior directions are appropriate, the right step is to make good programs better, rather than try to fix what is not broken.

As a new president, you should publicly acknowledge the debt owed to past leaders—even as you work to establish your own agenda.

A former president can be very helpful in identifying and recommending partnerships for the institution. For example, an exit interview with the predecessor provides an opportunity to seek advice about what partnerships to pay attention to and who the important contacts and partners are. Another method is to review the former president's networks to get a feeling for the direction of the university.

However, the important point is that the new president is in the driver's seat. As president, you should:

- Acknowledge but not worry about your predecessor.
- Set your own agenda. That includes developing a brand that characterizes your leadership.
- Take time to identify the boards and task forces in the community that advance your agenda and make strategic choices about which ones to join.
- Conduct initial discussions around your agenda, engage others, and lead.



# Which Partnerships Need the President's Direct Involvement?

A president does not have time to be directly involved in all of the university's partnerships, but there are a number of circumstances that might require personal participation:

- The funder may require the president's direct approval and engagement.
- An issue may be so important to the community that the president's involvement may be necessary to ensure that the university responds to and engages with the matter.
- The prestige of the partner or issue may require the president to be involved. Or the president's involvement may be necessary to confirm the importance of the partner.
- Political demands from government and other sources may lead a president to become involved in a partnership.



# Presidential Leadership in Fostering Partnerships

## ENSURING COMMITMENT AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Presidential leadership is essential at all levels if the university is going to thoroughly embrace community partnerships. It is important that the president recognize her/his role as a steward with responsibilities to the university and to the community. One conception is that the university has an almost fiduciary relationship to the community and its leaders. As a result, the partnerships are not about the president but about the university and the community.

The president cannot simply voice support for partnerships; he/she must stress a personal commitment and:

- Articulate a vision for the university as a whole regarding the importance of partnerships and of specific critical partnerships;
- Engage the range of potential partners in the planning process;
- Create a process for engaging those constituencies in the conversation about partnerships. This means being prepared for and appreciating candid discussions;
- Make clear to investors what they are getting for supporting the partnership;
- Provide the direction and rationale for community partnerships; and
- Communicate a commitment to the community by strategic participation on local boards and committees.

### **BUILD ON SHARED VALUES**

Productive and sustainable partnerships are built on shared values around the purpose of the project. Shared values provide the incentive for faculty to participate in the partnerships and administrators to support them. When dealing with the community, the university and its leaders should take the high road and focus on the important values. As a result, the community will often see the university as a neutral party in community affairs and expect the president to be a “convener” on important community issues. (As convener, the university brings groups together and sits at the table on significant community issues.)





## MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Community partnership agreements tend to be long term, so, in order to avoid disappointment, the university leadership must:

- be careful what it promises;
- be as clear as possible about who will do what and what constitutes success;
- clarify goals and roles upfront; and
- develop a method of public reporting to build accountability into the effort.

It is critical for each party to identify its own goals and develop clear expectations for what the partnership is to achieve and what each of the partners is to receive from the partnership. Achieving clarity on expectations is sometimes the hardest and longest part in forming a partnership and often requires a significant time commitment up front.

## AVOID DISAPPOINTMENTS

Often, the community may see the university as a source for funding or resources that the university does not have. Alternatively, the university and its faculty are often a cottage industry of partnerships, none of which are capable of treating any major social ill. In fact, they may represent narrow faculty interests or individual pet projects, rather than comprehensive solutions to urban challenges. For either reason—too little funding, too small a scale—failure of partnerships to demonstrably mitigate those problems can lead to community disappointment with the university.

To avoid disappointment, leaders need to figure out how to invest in the partnership in the long run. If a partnership is built on a grant and the partnership dissolves because that money disappears, the community will remember and harm will have been done. If a partnership rests on shared interests and the university does not meet expectations, harm will have been done. That is why alignment is critical. Whatever circumstances brought about the partnership, the purpose must carefully align with the university's interests to sustain it and to avoid doing harm.

## CHANGE LOW EXPECTATIONS

A different issue in managing expectations is that business and public sector partners sometimes have low expectations of university involvement in a city or regional partnership. For example, a mayor may not think to include the university in city efforts, even when the university has resources to contribute.

Local governments are important players, but often their interaction with university partnerships is episodic, depending on changes in local leadership and local priorities. To counter this the president must:

- understand local political and power structures and build the working relationships necessary for creating and sustaining government partnerships; and
- effectively articulate the capacity of the university to all potential external partners, public and private.



These presidential actions are essential to external partnerships.

#### DETERMINE WHAT MEASURES SUCCESS

Each partner may define success differently. The key is for both the partnership and the individual partners to achieve their articulated success measures. Remember that, given the scale of many of the issues that partnerships seek to address, the university cannot take on sole responsibility for solving them. Some solutions require multiple partners and are hard to replicate.

Moreover, grassroots organizations often do not have the capacity to address some types of issues. Bigger organizations often do not have the interest or empathy to do so. As a consequence, rather than taking full ownership, the university's role is to stay the course and to convene the parties to work on the issues. Only by applying the wide-ranging resources of the community can large issues be tackled comprehensively and at sufficient scale and scope.

#### **SUCCESS STORY—BUT DO NOT ATTEMPT ALONE**

Some solutions require multiple partners and are hard to replicate. The Harlem Children's Zone in New York City is a partnership that serves children in a 24-block area and provides a comprehensive network of programs. It has a record of demonstrated successes—and it also has an FY 2012 budget exceeding \$75 million—well beyond the capacity of any one higher education institution.



# Key to Sustainable Success

## INSTITUTIONALIZING PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

Institutionalizing partnerships, that is, embedding them within the organization, is one of the largest and most important challenges for sustaining productive university–community partnerships. Unless a partnership is institutionalized, it tends to begin and end with the person who started it. The resulting lack of university commitment causes harm and creates a sense of betrayal in the community. Strategies to institutionalize partnerships include the use of structures, processes, and data.

### **INSTITUTIONALIZING THROUGH STRUCTURE: CURRICULUM, INCENTIVES, AND “PORTALS”**

#### CURRICULUM

This is the deepest way to institutionalize partnerships and rests on three strategies:

- Design and adopt courses and programs of study based on partnerships;
- Train and hire faculty adept at integrating partnerships into their instruction; and
- Build the partnerships needed to support that curriculum.

Each of these steps requires time and commitment. Granted, the process is cumbersome, but once the engagement is built into the curriculum, it is also cumbersome to change.

#### INCENTIVES

These take three major forms:

- Recognizing engaged scholarship and service learning in merit and promotion and tenure;
- Strategically directing base budget funding to assist the formations of curricular partnerships; and
- Targeting faculty hiring and investing in talent.

#### CREATE A PORTAL

This can be a center, institute, or position (e.g., vice president for research and strategic partnerships) that receives, reviews, and initiates partnerships and is charged with building and sustaining them. Alternatively, a particular college might include community partnerships in its mission. For educational partnerships, the portal would be the provost.



## CHALLENGES TO GRANT-FUNDED PORTALS

A word of caution about creating a center or institute for partnerships that is based solely on grant funding: If that funding disappears, the center, its programs, and its partnerships also disappear. If the center is an important link to the community, its closure can undermine the trust created over the course of years. Think long term when creating structures. If the plan is to rely on grant funding, make clear that commitment to the program will only last through the period of the grant. Or be prepared to provide base funding if the center is important to the community and to the mission and responsibilities of the university.

## INSTITUTIONALIZING THROUGH PROCESS

How the university goes about forming and behaving in partnerships can affect the performance and sustainability of the partnership. If the whole partnership is driven by the university, it is not a true partnership; it is a university endeavor. True partnerships based on reciprocity are more likely to succeed and survive.

### STRESS CO-OWNERSHIP, EQUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Real partnerships are made up of equal contributions of in-kind resources and include co-leaders and co-convening to ensure a mutuality of interest and co-ownership. All engaged parties need to invest in some way but not always in the same way. For universities and their leadership, this means shaking off an old *noblesse oblige* mindset, where the more powerful deign to help the less fortunate. A partnership is one of equals.

University leadership also should watch out for false steps—things that appear partnership-oriented but may mask a university power play. For example, putting a community organization on a university board can serve to make them “of the university,” not a partner, and thus can represent a form of co-opting rather than engaging.

### STRESS THE IMPORTANCE TO THE UNIVERSITY

University leaders can help sustain partnerships by taking steps outlined below that underscore the importance of those partnerships to the institution.

- Communicate the importance of the partnership in achieving the university’s mission.
- Make the partnership and its importance to the university highly visible. Campus forums on partnerships provide one means to do this.
- Provide organizational capacity for sustaining partnerships. That requires investing in talent development across the university. There might be people who are already



doing community partnership work. Sometimes new staff positions must be created and filled with strategically targeted appropriate hires.

Be aware, however, that faculty may come to fear that engagement will replace research. It is important to address that fear early on. Link research with strategic partnerships so that research is directed to support the work of the partnership rather than being separate or competing. Stress the degree to which engagement leads to research.

#### CLARIFY THE UNIVERSITY'S APPROPRIATE ROLE

A university's function in a community is to offer intellectual and human capital. Its continuing and sustainable role is in providing instruction and research. It is not a social service agency, a K–12 instructor, or a host of other roles that may be involved in partnerships. Thus, while a university may take up some of these functions in delivering a service at the start of a project, it should hand off those responsibilities as the project develops. Otherwise, the project and partnership will drift away from the mission of the university and not be sustainable.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZING THROUGH DATA

A frequent challenge for partnerships is lack of a shared understanding and common language regarding the problem. Data constitute a critical tool for creating and maintaining partnerships. Data that focus on the substance of the problem can bring people to the table and help identify common concerns. Data are also integral to managing partnerships. They can measure the impact of the partnerships and show the impact the university has on improving the quality of life of the city. That information leads to support to sustain the partnership.

Overall, data collection, analysis, and dissemination are central to getting the message out during all phases of the partnership.



# Working with Different Types of Partnerships

The USU's work has three strands:

- Develop human capital and create a workforce ready to compete in the new economy of the 21st century.
- Strengthen neighborhoods and increase economic development.
- Reduce health disparities and improve community health

The workshop concluded with a discussion of partnership issues specific to these areas of focus.

## EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

### DEFINITION

Education partnerships are any projects in which the university engages that focus on improving the education system from Pre-K–12 through the higher education system, ideally within a cradle to career framework.

### MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Education partnerships are long term, with multiple moving parts. University roles can change over time and include convener, researcher, investor, and/or manager, among others. Working with education is complex and marked by the following challenges:

- Urban public schools systems are highly bureaucratized and thus lack a leader who can really solve the problems.
- Most communities have trouble facing failure. In particular, suburban parents whose kids are doing well do not understand the true failure of urban schools and what it really means. No one really owns urban public education.
- The corporate and education reform community does not include higher education, unions, or the school board. They also tend to focus on one-shot, silver bullet solutions.
- Foundations often implement a spray-and-pray approach to investment, lacking evidence-based decision making. They also are reform weary, tired of fixing the education problem.
- Faculty members have a cottage industry of education partnerships but cannot deliver real reform to the system, where it is needed.
- There is no codified relationship between the college of education and schools. There is no link between teaching and practice.





- There is a lack of civic infrastructure. The Harlem Children’s Zone costs \$75 million per year and is hard to replicate.
- Grassroots organizations often don’t have the capacity to undertake these programs, but the corporations and bigger organizations don’t have the empathy to work well and effectively with grassroots organizations.

#### KEYS TO SUCCESS

The key to success is to repurpose the existing civic infrastructure to accomplish goals, using data driven decision making to accomplish positive change. That means getting everyone to the table and measuring success and failure via data. Foundations need to get on board, and every CEO needs to be at the table.<sup>2</sup>

For educational partnerships, the university president needs an implementer, and that must be the provost. Academic Affairs oversees the partnerships, research, and community service. At project level, the faculty must be committed and engaged. The main involvement of the education team at the university is teacher preparation.

#### THE STRIVE SUCCESS STORY

USU institutions are involved in Strive, an effort to improve student achievement throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. More than 300 leaders of local organizations participate, including the heads of influential private and corporate foundations, city government officials, school district representatives, the presidents of eight universities and community colleges, and the executive directors of hundreds of education-related nonprofit and advocacy groups. Strive focuses on five “Conditions of Collective Success,” a common agenda, shared measurement systems for accountability and to track success, mutually reinforcing activities through coordination, and a backbone support organization to facilitate the collaboration. Early successes include improved high school graduation rates, reading and math skills, and the number of preschool children prepared for kindergarten.

2 Kania, J and Kramer, M. 2011. “Collective Impact.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter, Vol. 37

## REAL ESTATE PARTNERSHIPS

### DEFINITION

Real estate partnerships are any real estate-related projects in which a university engages that occur off campus. If they occur on campus, they are by definition university projects even if other partners are involved. Presidential leadership is essential for these to succeed.<sup>3</sup>

### MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Real estate partnerships are long-term projects. There are a lot of successes with large real estate deals, but they take a long time and require maintaining good relations with a lot of people. They are marked by the issues summarized below:

- This type of effort can be either a partnership or a university project. In either case, universities often do development themselves. The key is clarity. As long as those relationships are clearly understood and voluntarily accepted by both parties, it is all right if this type of effort is organized as a university project with the university in charge.
- All land, even vacant land, has history, and with that history come preexisting relationships and associations. The university leadership must understand these factors in any real estate endeavor.
- University real estate projects rarely fall apart. Universities are often committed to doing the deal and thus are rarely willing to walk away from the table.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

The key to success is how university and private motivations are balanced. Core differences between the two are decision-making speed and financial focus. Universities have to manage a complex decision-making process, which makes them slow partners to work with and can hamper a university–private deal. Developers are market-focused, where speed is an important component of competitiveness. Universities also tend to be budget centric when making decisions, while private sector players/developers are finance centric. Furthermore, university budgets are often constrained by annual decision-making schedules.

As a result of these differences, universities may give too much away because they are committed to the deal and unwilling to walk away from the table. From a purely monetary point of view, they may give away a lot. Private partners focus on financial goals. Universities are commonly trying to meet a number of additional goals that can complicate the negotiations and may lead universities to positions that can increase the cost of the project.

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3 Perry, D., Wiewel, W., Eds. 2005. *The University as Urban Developer: Case Studies and Analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy; Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.





## NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIPS

### DEFINITION

A neighborhood partnership is any project in which the university engages that centers on achieving a goal in a defined neighborhood.

### MAIN CHARACTERISTICS<sup>4</sup>

- Neighborhood groups are part of the partnership mix.
- The need is to broker competing expectations, especially with multiple, diverse partners.
- When the economy is down, partnership deals are always in play.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

The key is to manage the expectations of the diverse parties toward a productive end. In successful partnerships, the parties bring their expectations into the open and ensure they are mutually understood. To underpin this understanding, the parties identify criteria for knowing when things have to happen and what success looks like. Managing competing expectations requires the development of a handful of indicators of success that all partners agree upon. This is the hardest part to accomplish and takes the longest time, usually upfront.

It is crucial to understand that it is not enough to articulate the goals of each partner. The need is to reach a meeting of the minds and have agreed-upon goals. This agreement drives success or failure, even more than the financial plan. Therefore, it is not surprising that failed projects are often marked by the following problems:

- Competing goals of the partners were not articulated.
- There was an absence of discussion on campus about how the university would define success of the partnership.
- The university board did not understand the return on investment.

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<sup>4</sup> Maurrasse, D. 2010. "Standards of Practice in Community Engagement." In Fitzgerald, H, et al. *Handbook of Engaged Scholarship: Contemporary Landscapes, Future Directions*. Vol. 1 and Vol. 2. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press. pp. 223-233.



## HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

### DEFINITION

Health partnerships are any projects in which the university engages that focus on improving the health of the community.

### MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

- The price tag on health within the university is huge and not comparable to any other cost on campus.
- The range and magnitude of issues within health care are enormous. Topics range from the actions of a single person (e.g., a person dies due to error) to the total aggregate health issue.
- The rate of change in health care is rapid. Medical personnel have an enormous cultural impatience with the rest of the university because in their world, they are required to make immediate, potentially life and death, decisions.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

The issue is scale and developing the values to drive it. When something is clearly the right thing to do, people accept the value of the partnership right off, and this helps facilitate its development, for example the creation of a medical magnet school.



# Summary

The workshop began with a series of questions. What guides a president's decision to engage in partnerships? When should they become directly involved in creating and directing partnerships? What is their role in fostering productive partnerships? What are keys to sustaining partnerships? What are the special issues in the types of partnerships that are the focus of the USU?

## **WHAT GUIDES A PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO ENGAGE IN OPTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS?**

The key guiding factor is alignment with the mission, priorities, and capabilities of the university. The closer and deeper the alignment on both sides, the greater the reason to partner and the greater the chance of success. It is critical that each party's expectations be clear from the outset.

It is important to recognize the red flags that indicate a partnership may not be the right choice:

- It may not be the right fit with the university's mission or priorities.
- There may be insufficient clarity about expectations.
- The university or the partner may lack the capacity to fulfill the expectations.
- The university or partner might lack the resources/capacity to fulfill expectations.
- Both partners may not be committed deeply enough to the success of the project.

An incoming president is likely to inherit partnerships from prior administrations. Some may be failing or may not fit with new directions in the university. In those cases, identify and fix issues that can be repaired. Otherwise, explain the change in direction.

If the decision is to dissolve or disengage from a partnership, the president must try to keep the dialogue with the partners open and preserve good relations for the future. Also, review rejected partnerships occasionally to see if circumstances have changed making a new partnership feasible.

## **WHEN SHOULD PRESIDENTS BECOME DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN CREATING AND DIRECTING PARTNERSHIPS?**

The president could become directly involved in the partnership under several circumstances:

- A funder may require direct presidential involvement.



- An issue could be so important to the community; or the presidential involvement may be necessary to ensure that the university responds to and engages with the matter.
- The prestige of the partner could require the president's involvement; or that involvement could be necessary to confirm the importance of the partner.
- Political demands from government and other outside sources might require the president's involvement.

## **WHAT IS THE PRESIDENT'S ROLE IN FOSTERING PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS?**

The president should see him/herself as a steward with responsibilities to the university and community. That means being clear about his/her commitment to partnerships and consistently and visibly supporting them.

A key function is to manage expectations. At the beginning of the partnership, it is critical to clearly set out the expectations of each partner. Those expectations must be within the bounds of the capacity of all of the partners.

Sometimes, when local government or businesses underestimate the possible contributions of the university, the president must communicate the university's interest in and ability to develop partnerships.

The partnership should make clear what it can achieve in relation to the whole issue or problem. Or, if more capacity is needed, the partnership should be enlarged.

Funding is a major factor in managing expectations. If funding for the partnership is based on a grant, and the commitment period is limited to the life of the grant, this should be understood by both parties. If the commitment is to extend beyond the period of the grant, resources for continuing that commitment should be identified on the front end of the partnership.

Managing expectations also includes determining what success will look like. The key is for both the partnership and the individual partners to achieve their articulated success measures.

## **WHAT ARE THE KEYS TO SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS?**

The key to sustaining partnerships is to institutionalize them through structures, processes, and data.

Institutionalize through structure:

- Embed partnerships within the curriculum, placing them at the core of the function of the university.
- Provide incentives to staff.





- Create a “portal” (individual or group) for receiving, reviewing, and initiating partnerships.

Institutionalize through process:

- Stress reciprocity and co-ownership. All parties must be invested in the effort.
- The president must continually communicate the contributions of the partnership to the campus and to the institutional mission.
- Provide the staff needed to sustain the partnership. Invest in developing talent and hire new staff as necessary.

Institutionalize through data:

- Use data to create a shared understanding and common language regarding the problem.
- Use data to define the problem, clarify the expectations for the partnership, track the contributions of the partners, track the progress of the program, and assess its successes, need for changes, or need to end the arrangement.

### **WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL ISSUES IN THE TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS THAT ARE THE FOCUS OF THE USU?**

Most urban challenges require substantial resources for meaningful impact:

- **Education partnerships** tend to be long term and particularly complex, with multiple partners. A president must be careful to set realistic expectations for the partnership.
- **Real estate partnerships** also tend to be long term but with different goals among the partners. The focus of private partners is on profit, as well as on financial viability; a university’s interest in real estate commonly involves other goals. A president’s responsibility is to be aware of and seek a balance between the partners’ objectives.
- **Neighborhood partnerships** depend on reciprocity. Given the differences in power and resources between universities and neighborhoods, reciprocity can be a special challenge. A president should ensure that each of the partners is a real contributor to the collaboration. Clarifying expectations on the front end of the partnership is particularly important to avoid disappointment and harm.
- **Health partnerships** share many characteristics with education partnerships. The challenges are huge in relation to resources. A president must encourage multiple partners and temper expectations to address large health issues within the limits of the resources of the partnership.

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