PART II

What We Learned from Others in the Field: Key Findings from the Roundtable

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This section of the report summarizes the discussion from a roundtable on university-community research partnerships held in October 2002, in Charlottesville, Virginia. The event was co-sponsored by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change and the University of Virginia's Office of the Vice President and Provost (see Appendix 2 for list of participants).

Using the findings presented in Part 1 of this report as a springboard for discussion, the meeting began with comments from three panelists representing each of the sectors of the roundtable: higher education, nonprofit and government practitioners, and philanthropy. The panelists were Cathy Howard from Virginia Commonwealth University, Emily Haber of Boston Main Streets, and Stephanie Jennings from the Fannie Mae Foundation. Armand Carriere of HUD's Office of University Partnerships moderated the discussion. The panel was followed by small group discussions focused on a single question: What do these three sectors need from one another in order to foster more effective collaboration?

While participants were generous with their expertise, the findings that follow are those of the Pew Partnership.

Ira Harkavy of the University of Pennsylvania addresses the roundtable

FINDING NUMBER *One*

College and university faculty members reap multiple and unexpected benefits from engaging in community-based research.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Research relationships with community partners (as distinct from traditional activities that link universities and communities, such as service learning) hold tremendous appeal for faculty members. As one key benefit of applied research, participants cited the opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge to urgent real-world challenges, particularly those just outside their doors.

RE-EDUCATING THE EDUCATOR

While faculty typically engage in research tied to their specific area of expertise, community-based research projects often present opportunities to acquire new kinds of skills, both "hard" and "soft." For instance, partnerships with community organizations expose faculty to here-and-now research challenges that resist the controlled environment of typical academic research projects—thereby requiring nontraditional methods to succeed. They also present pedagogical opportunities to share specific research skills with community partners—such as agency program staff—as opposed to a solely undergraduate or graduate student audience. Finally, community-based research projects often overrun the typical two-semester timeline, challenging academic researchers to design research agendas that are responsive to a local program's long-term schedule and long-term objectives.

On the soft skills side, these partnerships have the potential over time to build the capacity of academics to effectively collaborate outside the walls of the university. Faculty gain valuable experience in developing trust and opening lines of communication between the university and the individuals or groups with whom they work in the community—people who far too frequently have not had positive experiences partnering with academic institutions. These soft skills were considered no less crucial or valuable by practitioners than the more specific research expertise.

EXPANDING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT—ONE PROFESSOR AT A TIME

Research partnerships can provide additional avenues for deepening the civic engagement of individual faculty members. Participants cited examples of faculty and the community agency continuing or expanding on the initial research focus of a particular project, even well after the original end-date had passed. Roundtable participants also mentioned examples of faculty members who expanded their partnerships in new ways, such as serving on an agency's board of directors, helping with grant writing, or connecting students with volunteer and service opportunities at the agency. Such opportunities only present themselves after a relationship of trust has been established.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR FACULTY SEE EQUAL BENEFITS

Senior and junior faculty members may glean different kinds of benefits from their local research partnerships. The opportunity to share their experiences and expertise in a different venue, with a different set of colleagues, resonates especially with senior faculty. Tenured professors also seem to appreciate opportunities to try something new, such as a different research technique or a more fluid research environment. For junior faculty, particularly those who may have arrived recently at a college or university, research partnerships present an entrée into the community and a way to get to know community players. These relationships often provide valuable connections for a new professor's teaching and research responsibilities, and there is growing evidence that colleges and universities are placing a higher value on community engagement when it comes to tenure and promotion decisions.

While it is clear that the relationships built out of university-community partnerships can evolve into long-term connections that go beyond pure research, for those new to community-based work the time-limited nature of research projects allows faculty an opportunity to "get their toes wet." To faculty embarking on a community-based research project for the first time, or partnering with a local agency for the first time, the task may appear daunting and unfamiliar. It requires leaving the university; going into a new community; working on unfamiliar terrain with a different set of colleagues.

In this context, a time-limited research project can serve as a focused, discrete opportunity to test the viability of the partnership on a trial basis.

NO SECOND COUSIN

In spite of community-based research being perceived by some as a poor second cousin to traditional scholarship, sufficient motivators do exist to draw faculty to the table. While the pressure to publish and gain tenure was acknowledged as a barrier to increasing faculty involvement in community-based research, meeting participants did not focus exclusively on the downside. In fact, many participants expressed the view that the cumulative effect of individual faculty members' involvement in community-based partnerships was having a positive impact at the departmental and university levels, contributing significantly to institutional buy-in across the board.

FINDING NUMBER *Two*

Faculty engagement leads to greater university-community collaboration at the institutional level.

WIDENING THE CIRCLE

Participants described a cumulative process whereby partnerships between individual faculty members and community agencies can develop over time into broader and more substantial university-community relationships. For example, one common outcome cited was for faculty to include undergraduate and/or graduate students in research activities—thus building in a civic engagement and experiential learning opportunity for students. Such work can serve as a precursor for more formal structured projects and initiatives that connect universities and communities. More faculty engagement equals more student engagement, which, over the long run, leads to university-wide engagement and, ultimately, sustainability.

MAKE IT A PART OF YOUR WORK

Establishing a curricular connection—such as designing and teaching a course—was cited as the key ingredient for sustaining research partnerships over time. One roundtable participant, the executive director of a local government initiative in Boston that works with twenty-one nonprofit neighborhood commercial districts, described how her agency's research partnership evolved over the years. Initially, the agency identified a sample of districts to study with the help of a professor at a local university. The professor began working with the agency in 1999 and tracked the sites for two-plus years.

About midway through the research process, the professor discovered two things. First, that the participating districts were stretched to capacity and that the data collection process would benefit significantly from additional manpower. Second, there was substantial interest among graduate students in economic development and urban design. The department at his university had decided to give faculty a fair amount of flexibility in designing courses, particularly those that were electives. This allowed him to pair up

with a doctoral student and design a graduate-level seminar on economic development and urban design. Students who enrolled in the class were placed at two of the districts to collect data throughout the semester. The process and results were so well received that the professor is teaching the same course again and the other commercial districts are applying to participate in the research. The personal relationship, the trust, that developed over this time between the professor and the agency proved to be crucial to their long-term success.

A LITTLE MONEY GOES A LONG WAY

This evolution was not a case of pure serendipity. Rather, effectively partnering students and program staff was facilitated by several specific supports. First, the professor played an important role in managing and providing the necessary coordination and oversight of the students. He also saw the pedagogical value of applied research. Second, the preexisting relationship that had developed between the professor and agency ensured that there was a sound understanding of program operations and this lent an additional level of organization and focus to the research process. Last, compensation for the professor's time and a small stipend paid to the doctoral student for his time provided a crucial incentive. Other participants pointed out that in this kind of environment—with students and faculty making use of existing university infrastructure (office space, telephones, computers, etc.)—a very modest amount of funding can go a long way. People do need to be paid for their time, but overhead costs are usually quite low.

FINDING NUMBER *Three*

Increasing the accessibility of colleges and universities to community practitioners is an essential factor in building successful partnerships.

KNOWING WHERE THE FRONT DOOR IS

At a fundamental level, the group defined accessibility as the ability of community partners to "know where the front door is" when attempting to build a research partnership with a local university. Participants pointed out that in spite of the wealth of assets and expertise available on university and college campuses, these are often perceived by communities as difficult and daunting systems to navigate. To the nonacademic local practitioner, gaining a firm understanding of how higher education institutions work, learning the various points of entry, and maneuvering through various academic departments and institutional bureaucracies is often a challenge at best. The problems multiply when community members seek to identify interdisciplinary resources to address a particularly complex issue. For example, elements of a job training program for at-risk youth may cut across various departments and schools including education, social work, and psychology. While a research agenda would likely benefit from the multidisciplinary expertise of faculty connected to various departments, these connections seldom materialize. More often than not, academic departments tend to operate as self-contained silos disconnected from one another. The result is that community members seeking to negotiate a college or university system do not know how or where to begin to identify appropriate faculty for their specific needs.

CAMPUS OUTREACH OFFICES CAN PLAY A BROKERING ROLE

Participants cited several strategies that institutions can adopt to improve their accessibility to potential community partners. At an administrative level, colleges and universities can provide a single point of contact for community members. For example, Virginia Commonwealth University's Office of Community Programs (OCP) serves as a one-stop shop that connects community members with student and faculty outreach programs.

Instead of having to approach a school or department cold, community members work with OCP staff to identify university programs that best match their specific needs. This "brokering" approach is a very efficient way to match community needs with academic research partners—if the institution has the resources and commitment to staff and maintain an office dedicated to this kind of work.

CAMPUS RESEARCH CENTERS RAISE VISIBILITY OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Specialized centers on campus were also touted as an effective and visible tool to connect university and community needs. Such centers can take a variety of forms. The following are just a few examples of how such campus-based centers can operate in a variety of communities.

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO / PRAG

Loyola University of Chicago provides the institutional home and acts as a central clearinghouse for the Policy Research and Action Group (PRAG), a group of Chicago community leaders and university-based researchers who are building a collaborative network to bring community knowledge and perspectives to the research process. Founded in 1989, PRAG brings together staff from more than fifteen community nonprofits and faculty from four urban universities; it then supports ongoing research relationships between them. In every case, community and university function as equal partners in the research process, minimizing power struggles and leading to actionable results. www.luc.edu/curl/prag.

VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY / CRSC

Valparaiso University's Community Research and Service Center (CRSC) is a model for how a small private college can combine human assets (faculty and students) with private funding to have an impact on its community. CRSC provides research assistance and other services to government and nonprofit organizations in northwest Indiana, and engages undergraduate students in central roles in the

process, giving them practical work experience while building theoretical knowledge and analytical skills. www.valpo.edu/polisci/center.html.

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT / CENTER FOR RURAL STUDIES

A true "research shop," the University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies offers fee-for-service research and consulting to nonprofits, governments, and businesses throughout Vermont and the United States. Pairing academic researchers with clients working in five broad categories, the center addresses social, economic, and resource-based problems of rural people and communities. http://crs.uvm.edu/.

A KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

Regardless of its exact shape, participants stressed that establishing infrastructure—whether human or physical—to support connections between higher education and the larger community is a strategic investment. When such support exists, it goes a long way to sustaining partnerships over the long term. Given that partnerships do not emerge overnight, but rather make take years to take root, coordinating entities on campus play a vital role. Furthermore, they also go a long way in demonstrating the institution's ongoing commitment to working with the community.

FINDING NUMBER *Four*

There is a demonstrated need for new networks to connect people working in the field of university-community research.

HEIGHTENING VISIBILITY OF COMMUNITY WORK

Meeting participants, particularly those representing higher education, were quick to point out the scarcity of opportunities to interact with others doing similar work. This isolation operates on two levels: there is a lack of communication among faculty members working on the same campus; and among colleges and universities in general. On many campuses, faculty dialogue related to community-based research simply doesn't exist. The emphasis on specialization within academic disciplines and the pressure to "publish or perish" were both cited as deterrents to faculty participation and broader campus dialogue. A strong national network composed of academics working in community research could also help build a consensus behind alternative reward structures—if not to break the "publish or perish" cycle, then at least to heighten the visibility of community work in academia. Not to mention the wasted potential that results from not having organized means of connecting faculty engaged in community-based research with those who might benefit from such work.

CAMPUS-TO-CAMPUS NETWORKS

On a macro level, participants lamented the relative lack of formal networks to interact with researchers from other colleges and universities doing similar work. In addition to providing opportunities for peer learning and exchange of information, such networks could act as valuable advocates and proponents for community-based research. Participants also thought that networks would be an effective means for garnering increased recognition ("bragging rights") for universities engaged in such work. In addition to drawing attention to the issue, establishing networks of community-based researchers could be an integral step toward building the political will necessary to sustain research efforts in tough budgetary times.

INTRACAMPUS NETWORKS & FACULTY MENTORING

There is also a need to create faculty mentoring opportunities on college and university campuses—whether within a single department or university-wide—matching faculty members who are seasoned in community-based research with junior faculty who are just entering the field. A great deal of potential is lost as a result of no formal (or even informal) incentive for knowledge-sharing between and among faculty researchers. Funders interested in maximizing "bang for the buck" in support of campus/community research partnerships could do worse than to invest in faculty mentoring programs.

NATIONAL NETWORK MODELS

A number of general networks currently exist related to the civic engagement of higher education. There are also some specialized networks for certain niches within the academic community. The service-learning movement, for example, has developed an effective network of support, with various organizations operating nationally to provide resources for faculty training, host conferences, provide mini-grants for projects, and offer technical assistance materials. Other examples that have an emphasis on fostering research partnerships include:

COMMUNITY-CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTH

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions that improve health professions education, civic responsibility, and the overall health of communities. www.futurehealth.ucsf.edu/ccph.html.

CAMPUS COMPACT

Campus Compact is a national coalition of close to 850 college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education. To support this civic mission, Campus Compact promotes community service that develops students' citizenship skills and values, encourages partnerships between campuses and communities,

and assists faculty who seek to integrate public and community engagement into their teaching and research. www.compact.org.

CONSORTIUM FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION (CAPHE)

CAPHE, an operating unit of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), is a grantmaking organization that assists corporations and foundations stimulate meaningful reform in private colleges and universities for the benefit of higher education and society. Founded by funders to strengthen the contributions to society of private colleges, CAPHE designs and administers competitive grant competitions; offers technical assistance to funders; and disseminates ideas resulting from its programs. www.cic.edu/caphe.

NONPROFIT ACADEMIC CENTERS COUNCIL (NACC)

NACC is a nonprofit organization comprised of the directors of academic centers focused on the study of nonprofit organizations, voluntarism, and/or philanthropy. Housed within the Independent Sector, one of NACC's goals is to develop creative approaches to researcher-practitioner collaborations. www. independentsector.org/nacc.

While these models were cited as worthy examples, there seemed to be a sense that these networks were not sufficient. Rather, practitioners of community-based research need a more specific entity that addresses their needs and issues.

FINDING NUMBER *Five*

Building research relationships with faculty members yields multiple benefits for nonprofits and local governments.

INCREASING DEMAND FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Nonprofit and local government agencies are driven by a keen desire to improve the quality of life for individuals, their families, and communities. Programs are designed to deliver crucial services to address a range of complex problems from health care to employment training to emergency aid. However, the current operating environment for these programs can pose formidable challenges, including reduced financial support, competition from for-profit firms, rapid technological change, ongoing questions of legitimacy and trust from the public, and a workforce prone to burnout and frequent turnover. Add to this list the increasing requirements by many funders to effectively demonstrate program results as well as to provide information about program theory, impact, and cost effectiveness.

To respond to this increasing demand for program evaluation and research, national organizations such as the United Way, the Aspen Institute, Development Leadership Network, and parent organizations of local programs such as the Boys and Girls Clubs have devised a range of strategies and tools to equip programs to better document their work. For example, Development Leadership Network in partnership with the McAuley Institute launched the Success Measures Project. The project was initiated out of a recognized need to develop outcome measures for community development programs. The Success Measures Guidebook is a tool specifically developed for practitioners who want to initiate program evaluation, and must first decide what type of information will adequately measure the success of their programs. Another tool is the United Way of America's Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach. This step-by-step manual is designed to help health, human service, and youth- and family-serving agencies identify and measure their outcomes and use the results.

These efforts and tools are ambitious, timely, and designed to be user-friendly. However, practitioners often have little experience when it comes to

designing a research agenda, implementing it, and incorporating it into day-to-day operations. Consider the tasks related to simply getting started—identifying research questions, data sources, clarifying program outcomes, figuring out how to analyze data—and it is easy to imagine how program evaluation research can be placed on an agency's back burner. These tasks are precisely the skills that academic faculty have spent years acquiring and honing. Applying their technical expertise to the specifics of a nonprofit or local government program is a logical extension. Participants specifically mentioned the role that faculty researchers can play in assisting agency staff in identifying and prioritizing their true research needs. Researchers are particularly effective in this role because of their outside perspective on the program. Unlike program staff who work daily in an organization, researchers bring a fresh perspective that can translate into a well-designed research plan.

CHANGING A BURDEN INTO A BLESSING

When the research is designed and implemented in a participatory manner, research partnerships can create a powerful hybrid of knowledge that blends practitioners' "on-the-ground knowledge" with the objective "outsider" perspective of the researcher. The advantages of this combination exceed those of a typical research relationship. First, by including input from program staff, it generates information that is both practical and relevant to their work. It also stimulates dialogue and reflection—two often scarce commodities in the organizations. Partnerships also create an opportunity for program staff and researchers to collaboratively create knowledge and thus may increase the role that the research plays within the agency. Lastly, the partnership serves an important function in building or enhancing practitioners' research capacity. By providing program staff with a more individualized, intensive, and sustained learning experience, researchers offer tangible opportunities to build or enhance research skills.

SHOW ME THE MONEY, OR, THE RESEARCHER NEXT DOOR

Research partnerships also produce findings that support programs in their fundraising efforts. As funding agencies tighten their demands for reliable

information about program outcomes, practitioners know that demonstrating results with the imprimatur of an independent expert, such as a university faculty member, can be particularly convincing. It also demonstrates willingness on the part of the agency to strengthen accountability and improve program delivery.

Having access to and partnering with locally based faculty also affords unique benefits that do not accrue to the traditional "parachute" model of evaluation and research. The proximity of both parties can create a much easier and more cost-effective research process. For example, face-to-face meetings and conversations with local researchers are easier to arrange, not to mention less expensive, than those with researchers who may be based elsewhere. Local partnerships were also valued for providing an opportunity to interact more frequently on a personal level and for making it easier to build trust and mutual understanding, which, as Solutions for America has shown, are crucial components of a successful collaboration.

FINDING NUMBER *Six*

Supporting collaborative research relationships between community agencies and university faculty has clear benefits for funders.

Universities and practitioners, left to their own devices, may seldom initiate research partnerships as described above. Foundations and other funders can serve as catalysts for university-community research partnerships and at the same time, further their own grantmaking goals.

STRATEGIC SELF-INTEREST

Roundtable participants from the various sectors were quick to acknowledge that investing in university-community partnerships is in the best interest of funders. At a fundamental level, supporting such partnerships ultimately generates quality research for the grantor about their investments in a particular organization and/or program strategy. Thus one of the end products—the "fruit" of the partnership—is information and knowledge that helps funders better understand the impact of their investments. Armed with such information, funders are better able to understand the dynamics of their grantmaking and its effectiveness. Participants noted that for foundations, good research functions in the same way that sound program evaluation research informs program staff about their work: it builds their knowledge about their results and supports their need to be accountable to their investors.

In addition to shedding light on the impact of their dollars, credible research also informs future decisions about grantmaking. Specifically, research becomes an even more valuable commodity to the funding community when the funder is at a crossroads about whether or not to scale up a particular program. In the face of such a decision, good data are essential. Furthermore, to the degree that one foundation may be considering investing in a similar program strategy, sharing research findings within the funding community multiplies the impact of the research. In an era of particularly scarce resources, sound research helps investors and communities make smart decisions about allocating resources.

CAPACITY BUILDERS

Beyond meeting the need for good information about program outcomes, research partnerships offer opportunities for building the research capacity of the nonprofit community. As detailed earlier in this report, collaborations between the nonprofit practitioner and the academic produce real gains in terms of transfer of specific research skills. Roundtable participants described two additional potential spin-offs of the research process. The first is one in which the nonprofit organization becomes so invested in the research process that over time staff actually become vocal advocates for research and the partnership itself. Second, numbers talk. Information gathered in research partnerships can generate new knowledge that in turn can shift the power dynamics between grantor and grantee.

FUNDERS CAN STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Funders are more than beneficiaries and/or end-users of research findings. In fact, they are the sparkplugs in the process of building and enhancing university-community research partnerships. There are myriad roles that they can take on in developing the kinds of collaborative research relationships described in this report. Roundtable participants suggested several options.

First, as an intermediary, funders can stimulate and support dialogue between higher education and the nonprofit sector in communities. As an initial step in building partnerships, dialogue between the two parties brings key players to the table, builds trust, and can lay the groundwork for future collaboration. Second, funders can build momentum and local support for research partnerships by identifying and supporting the early adopters who already exist in communities. Ideally, such attention and support would raise the profile of existing partnerships and motivate others to consider how they might engage in similar work. Third, funders can structure grants so that dollars encourage research partnerships. Specifically, program grants could include designated dollars for research such as program evaluation and defray the costs associated with the research. Grants could also be structured in a way that would encourage cross-disciplinary connections among researchers at a college or university. Fourth, to bolster the field in general,

funders might consider commissioning specific research about university-community partnerships and disseminating a catalog of best practices for communities. Last, and by no means least, participants reiterated the importance of even minimal funds to make the research process "break even." People (faculty, student assistants, program staff) do need to be paid for the time they put into a research project, but given the existing infrastructure (offices, phone lines, computers, meeting space) on campuses, and the fact that there are no travel expenses involved, this kind of research is a relative bargain for funders.