UNIVERSITY + COMMUNITY RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

A NEW APPROACH

Pew Partnership
FOR CIVIC CHANGE

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The Pew Partnership for Civic Change is a civic research organization. Our mission is to identify and disseminate promising solutions to tough community issues. Solutions for America (1999–2001) was an action research initiative of the Partnership designed to pioneer a new model of documenting best practices and communicating results.

The Pew Partnership is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the University of Richmond.

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INTRODUCTION

Jacqueline Dugery, Director of Program Research
Pew Partnership for Civic Change

F*inding out what works*. That is how we at the Pew Partnership for Civic Change described what we set out to do in 1998 with our Solutions for America initiative. The task seemed straightforward enough. We would find an expert researcher and send him or her off to investigate the practices of the nineteen sites we had selected to take part in the project. In time, we would have amassed a collection of validated strategies and examples of what communities were doing to solve tough problems across the country. But something kept nagging at us: nearly all of the Solutions sites were located in communities that contained colleges and universities. Why then, we asked, were we planning to parachute in an academic researcher from outside those communities to examine local programs?

We backtracked and took a different approach in structuring the research. Instead of sending a sole researcher to each Solutions community, we decided to partner program staff at each site with academics from colleges and universities in their own backyards. We also asked two researchers from the University of Virginia, Kathleen Ferraiolo and Paul Freedman, to track these university-community research partnerships over the course of the project. Their findings are profiled in Part 1 of this report. The results of these local partnerships, we have found, are promising and exciting for all those involved: practitioners in the nonprofit and government sectors, researchers from higher education, and the funding community.

To help us place the findings from Solutions for America into a larger context, the Pew Partnership joined with the University of Virginia provost's office to convene a distinguished cross-section of individuals in October 2002 to discuss the potential for these university-community research partnerships. Representatives from higher education, the funding community, nonprofit organizations, and local government offered their reactions to the findings and grappled with a crucial question: What do these sectors need from one another in order to develop more effective university-community partnerships? The discussion was both reaffirming and inspiring. No longer working in isolation, academics and practitioners are forging effective partnerships, often with the help of the funding community. Nonetheless, there are still specific steps that will enhance these collaborative research ventures. The findings and recommendations from our discussion are summarized in Part 2 of this report.

We have learned much from our Solutions for America partners over the years, as well as from our roundtable participants. I hope that this report will prove equally valuable to you in your work.

PART I

Solutions for America: A Collaborative Research Model between Communities and Universities

Kathleen Ferraiolo and Paul Freedman
Department of Politics, University of Virginia

As part of its Solutions for America project, the Pew Partnership for Civic Change created a new model of assessment and evaluation for use by community organizations and local colleges and universities. Dubbed the "hub-and-spoke" model, the Pew Partnership commissioned Kathleen Ferraiolo and Paul Freedman to track the implementation and results of this model over a two-year period (1999–2001). These findings were presented by Professor Freedman at the **Building University-Community Research Partnerships** roundtable held in Charlottesville, Virginia in October 2002.

Paul Freedman of the University of Virginia

SOLUTIONS FOR AMERICA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Solutions for America was a two-year (1999–2001) national research initiative of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change to identify, document, and disseminate information about successful efforts to address tough challenges in communities across the country. Specifically, the initiative was designed to:

- document successful solutions to critical community problems;
- showcase the best of research and practice to national audiences;
- increase the access communities have to practical knowledge about what works; and
- increase the capacity of community-based nonprofit organizations and local governments to conduct their own research and program evaluation.

PARTICIPATING SITES

Nineteen community organizations representing a range of issues were selected by an advisory board to participate in Solutions for America:

Aiken, SC: Growing into Life (infant mortality)
Arlington, TX: Dental Health for Arlington (access to dental services)
Big Ugly Creek, WV: Step by Step, Inc./West Virginia Dreamers Project (rural youth empowerment)
Boston, MA: Boston Main Streets (commercial revitalization)
Brockton, MA: MY TURN, Inc. (job training)
Burlington, VT: Burlington Ecumenical Action Ministry/Vermont Development Credit Union (access to capital and credit)
Cedar Rapids, IA: Neighborhood Transportation Service (job transportation)
Charlottesville, VA: City of Charlottesville (downtown revitalization)
Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (youth mentoring)
Jacksonville, FL: The Bridge of Northeast Florida (youth development)
Jacksonville, FL: Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (community issue analysis)

Los Angeles, CA: Beyond Shelter/Housing First for Homeless Families (homelessness prevention)
Mankato, MN: Region Nine Prevention and Healthy Communities Network (teen drug and alcohol use)
New York, NY: Children's Aid Society/Carmel Hill Project (comprehensive neighborhood revitalization)
Richmond, KY: Kentucky River Foothills Development Council/ Women in Construction (job training for women)
St. Louis, MO: FOCUS St. Louis/Bridges Across Racial Polarization® (race relations)
Santa Ana, CA: Taller San Jose (job preparation for Latino youth)
Shreveport, LA: Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal (neighborhood revitalization)
Western North Carolina: HandMade in America/Small Towns Revitalization Project (rural revitalization)

RESEARCH DESIGN

As part of the effort to document successful community strategies, Solutions implemented an innovative "hub-and-spoke" research design. Each of the nineteen sites—the "spokes"—identified a local research partner with whom they worked over the two-year period of the project. Eighteen of the nineteen research teams included researchers from a local college or university. These local researchers, drawn from schools of social work, architecture, nursing, and from various social science departments, worked in concert with organization staff to design and implement a research strategy (see Appendix 1). The Pew Partnership contracted with each of the research teams, providing support for the local researchers, convening national meetings of researchers and program staff over the course of the project, and providing each site with an additional research fund to defray related expenses. The Partnership also designated the Center for Urban Policy Research (CUPR) at Rutgers University to serve as the research "hub," coordinating the work of the local researchers and overseeing centralized data-gathering tasks.

As a final component of the research design, Paul Freedman and Kathleen Ferraiolo of the Department of Politics at the University of Virginia under-took a longitudinal evaluation of the Solutions research process. Key program staff members from each site, along with their associated local research partners, were surveyed—by mail, phone, and over the Internet—in the fall and winter of 2000, in the fall of 2001, and in the spring and summer of 2002. This research provides the basis for the present report.

OVERALL EVALUATIONS

Assessments of Solutions for America by program participants were unambiguously positive. As early as the first survey of site staff in the fall of 2000, 91 percent of participants rated their overall experience with the program as "excellent" or "very good" and 94 percent said they would be willing to participate in the program again. Four out of five program staff surveyed, even early on in the research process, agreed that participation in Solutions "has improved my organization's ability to conduct research." Sites were particularly enthusiastic about their local research partners, whom they saw as committed to their programs, able to work well with program staff, and instrumental for providing guidance and focus to the research effort. Among the local researchers, assessments were similarly positive. Two-thirds of those surveyed rated their experience with Solutions as "excellent" and all others considered it "very good." By the end of the program, nine out of ten local researchers indicated that they would work with their local Solutions site again, and three-quarters of the Solutions sites have in fact continued their relationship with their local research partner since the conclusion of the initiative.

These positive assessments came despite the fact that for most participants, particularly the staff members at the nineteen project sites, the research undertaken as part of Solutions was a new experience. Not surprisingly, nearly three-quarters of staff members indicated that their organization had never participated in a project like Solutions, and for almost two-thirds working with a local researcher was a brand-new experience. Even for sites that had previously worked with an outside researcher in some capacity, both the ongoing relationship between the local researcher and site staff throughout the project and the participatory nature of the hub-and-spoke research design were new.

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Sites and researchers had distinct but overlapping reasons for deciding to participate in Solutions. For researchers, the opportunity to evaluate a local organization, to contribute to the local community in a new way, and to apply their research expertise to a real-world problem offered an opportunity to move beyond the regular confines of the university setting. "I was very interested in finding projects that formed a bridge between the university and the community," explained one researcher, "Solutions offered a great opportunity for this." Similarly, another local research partner said that, for her, one of the primary motivations was "greater involvement in the community surrounding my academic institution." Other local researchers mentioned opportunities to integrate the Solutions evaluation into their own research and teaching, and the opportunity to "do good" on behalf of their university.

For sites, the opportunity to have their work evaluated and validated by an objective party, particularly one with the prestige of the Pew Partnership behind it, constituted the most important motivation for participation in Solutions. Three-quarters of staff members surveyed indicated that the "opportunity to have your work validated by an outside organization" was extremely important in the decision to participate in Solutions (another fifth said it was "somewhat" important). Site staff recognized their own existing, but sometimes limited, capacity to collect data and conduct program evaluation, and in some cases considered such activities essential to service delivery. One staff member spoke of the "opportunity to conduct an evaluation of our programs," which "will help [the organization] improve services and better serve the community." From early on, the Solutions hub-and-spoke approach was designed to enhance the capacity of sites to conduct such program evaluation in a rigorous, objective fashion.

Finally, just as researchers sought to move beyond the university, site staff appeared eager to look beyond their own programs, both through their work with their local researcher as well as through the contacts made at national meetings and other Solutions-related activities. One staff member pointed to the opportunity to "get outside our own small world" in addition to the "credibility [and] opportunity for validation/evaluation in an objective manner," as important motivations for participating in Solutions. Similarly, reflecting on his experience at one of the national Solutions meetings, one site staff member commented, "I think what we really brought back was that there are people out there like us working to resolve a serious issue, even if it's not the same as ours, and we felt encouraged by that."

BENEFITS TO SITES AND LOCAL RESEARCHERS

There was a strong connection between the sites' motivations for taking part in Solutions for America and the benefits they experienced from their participation. The validation that the research could confer upon the program, the learning of new research skills, and the prestige of being associated with a national initiative were listed both as considerations in the decision to participate and as benefits of participation. To a great extent, Solutions lived up to participants' expectations and filled critical organizational needs.

Site-specific benefits. First and foremost, participation in Solutions helped to enhance the sites' research capacity. In part, this capacity building was brought about through the creation and fostering of a "culture of inquiry"† among sites. Solutions required sites to engage in a sustained process of data gathering and empirical analysis: through their work with the local researcher, through the demanding reporting requirements coordinated by the CUPR hub, and through the national meetings organized by the Pew Partnership. These activities served to enhance or inculcate a mindset in which research and evaluation were seen as integral program functions. By the end of the project, 83 percent of site staff indicated that they themselves and their organizations had developed positive attitudes toward evaluation research and had become convinced of its value. These attitudes were not merely concentrated among a few highly involved staff members, but trickled down (and up) throughout the agency. One staff member noted that Solutions had led to a "paradigm shift within our organization from the experience of integrating evaluation into our day-to-day practice."

Beyond such attitudinal changes, participation in the Solutions research

† The term "culture of inquiry" is borrowed from Georgiana Hernández and Mary G. Visher, *Creating a Culture of Inquiry,* James Irvine Foundation, 2001. www.irvine.org.

yielded tangible informational gains as well. Nearly 85 percent of program staff agreed that the Solutions research revealed new information about their program, and more than three-quarters of staff members surveyed agreed that the Solutions research helped them implement new data collection methods and improved their organization's ability to conduct research. Survey respondents reported a high level of involvement in planning or designing the research and providing data to the research partner throughout the Solutions project.

Many staff members found the research to be helpful in validating their prior expectations about the effectiveness of their work. This "validation" by Solutions was seen both as a source of motivation and inspiration for staff members and as a tool organizations could use in seeking out new funding. More than 80 percent of staff members surveyed reported that "the research process has confirmed what my staff and I already knew about the program." One interviewee said that the research not only confirmed what the site staff had suspected, but it also reminded them to keep doing what was working. Several staffers noted that the research findings would be used to demonstrate to funders that "their money is well spent." Another interviewee indicated that his organization's participation in Solutions and the results that emerged from the research were "like getting a Good Housekeeping seal of approval that would allow us to go to funders, to go to our supporters … and say that we have been looked at and have been found worthy."

Other staff members reported that the Solutions research helped lead to improvements in existing data collection and analysis efforts, as well as to the introduction of new data gathering systems. For some organizations, participation in Solutions helped facilitate improvements in client survey administration, and in focus group sessions; others reported advances in tracking program and client information. More important, these new data are not gathering dust, but are being put to good use. One program staffer explained that, at the conclusion of Solutions, the evaluation process had become more standardized and that he and his colleagues were "much more proactive about building in documentation" to ongoing program operations. Another staff member noted that the tools acquired through Solutions helped his site in "gathering data that's meaningful to the volunteers that we work with." "We're collecting better data, and we'll be able to use it better," explained another, who described how his organization had always collected data in some form, but because of Solutions was now asking "new questions" and tracking responses to those questions longitudinally. For other sites, Solutions demonstrated what was particularly effective about program operations, and in some cases this new information helped lead to changes in program practices, such as adding new components to service delivery operations or expanding services to a wider group of clients or geographical area.

Sites have gone on to use the research findings and their participation in Solutions in a number of other concrete ways, including organizational strategic planning sessions, fundraising activities, and sophisticated public relations efforts. One year into the Solutions project, over three-quarters of project staff indicated that the research had helped stimulate dialogue and reflection among staff, board, and volunteers, and nearly 85 percent of staff believed that Solutions was helpful in clarifying program objectives. Since the conclusion of the program, nearly three-quarters of site staff members report that their organization already had or was planning to make use of their participation in Solutions and the research findings in fundraising efforts. It is clear from these reports that the research findings are not sitting on bookshelves, but rather that programs are applying those findings to their work and disseminating them both internally and externally.

Researcher benefits. For their part, the local researchers seemed to find their work with the Solutions sites to be challenging, but engaging and ultimately satisfying in precisely the ways they had anticipated. As noted earlier, these researchers were eager to participate in real-world projects that got them out of the university setting and into the community. Participation in Solutions provided just such an experience. Beyond this, many of the researchers were able to use their Solutions funding to hire research assistants; in all, eleven of the nineteen research teams employed one or more RAs, frequently graduate students working with the local researcher. Additionally, several researchers were able to incorporate their Solutions experience into their teaching. "The comprehensive nature of this project was challenging and a great learning tool," one researcher explained. "I tend to talk about my research activities in my research and community practice classes, which helps make them relevant and alive to students."

Finally, Solutions sites and researchers together benefited from the funds available for research purposes. Five of the sites used these funds to invest in computer hardware, new software, or training for staff. Twelve sites used Solutions funds to defray costs associated with new data gathering tasks, such as survey interviews, focus groups, and data entry. Other sites used the funds to prepare and disseminate their research findings.

CHALLENGES

At times, the Solutions project was as demanding as it was innovative. Clear challenges emerged throughout the research process: staff members and local researchers alike identified a series of hurdles that needed to be overcome, the most pressing of which were the availability of sufficient funding and staff time to devote to data collection and working with the research partner. In closed-ended questions asking site staff members about research challenges, more than half of respondents agreed that "it was difficult to identify manageable methods of collecting data on program operations." In part this was a question of expertise, and it was precisely this that the local researchers were able to provide. However, making data collection and analysis manageable also requires sufficient resources to conduct critical tasks such as client interviewing, data entry, and the preparation and dissemination of research reports. Here, the local researchers—particularly when aided by research assistants—were again able to subsidize some but certainly not all of the costs.

Staff time was clearly the most pressing challenge for many organizations. Several sites expressed a desire to have had access to additional funds to either compensate existing (often overworked) staff for their work on the research or to hire a new staff person specifically for the purposes of data collection and analysis. These concerns seemed most pressing at the beginning of the research process; one site staff member indicated that "we did not have adequate staff for database design and data entry. We wasted time in the beginning on nonessential data issues." All told, more than a third of respondents disagreed with the statement, "there was sufficient staff and local researcher time available to implement the research process."

Some interviewees suggested that the challenges of evaluation research are felt differently by administrative and field staff. As one individual put it, "personally, for me, [the research] is a joy, but I don't have to collect all the data." Usually the staff is "pretty overwhelmed" with their day-to-day activities, this interviewee reported, and some of them consider the data collection to be a burden "they could live without."

These challenges, however, tended to be mitigated by the strength of the relationship between the sites and the local research partner. A large majority of researchers (at least 80 percent) agreed that site staff understood their role in the research effort; that they worked well with site staff; and that site staff were intellectually committed to the research effort. For their part, at least 80 percent of program staff respondents agreed that the research partner understood the organization's work, worked well with staff, and provided direction and focus to the research effort. One of the reasons that these partnerships appear to have worked so well is that each group brought a unique set of skills to bear. Local researchers who participated in Solutions were more intimately involved in analyzing and interpreting data and preparing reports, while site staff members reported more involvement in providing data to researchers. There seems to have been an informal division of labor between researchers and site staff, with each party more involved in completing some tasks than others. University researchers tended to be more involved in designing the research, analyzing and interpreting the data, and preparing reports for Solutions. Site staffers, in contrast, were more involved in data collection and staff training.

That researchers and staff members tended to agree on the nature of their relationship and that they overwhelmingly tended to work well together suggests that the parties experienced joint ownership of the research process and outcomes. However, in several cases such joint ownership was absent, communication between the researcher and program staff was poor, and in a small handful of cases sites and researchers got off to a rocky start and never fully recovered.

Despite the challenges the Solutions sites faced during the research process, in general most did not find the process to be overly burdensome. A number of factors enabled agencies and local governments to meet challenges successfully: the involvement and enthusiasm of organizational staff and board members; a high level of preparation and organization in the early stages of the research; the availability of the research fund provided by the Pew Partnership; and a hands-on, engaged local researcher all helped to ease the burden of conducting program evaluation research. As a result, in each of two surveys, at least two-thirds of program staff reported a very low burden associated with participating in Solutions, and 84 percent of program respondents disagreed that "the data collection was too ambitious for my organization."

When it comes to mainstreaming evaluation research—i.e., continuing what began under Solutions—the related concerns of funding and staff time are paramount. As one interviewee put it, "finding the kind of resources that we had under Pew" will be a challenge to continuing the Solutions research. Another interviewee explained that, although he wanted to continue the work, he did not have the time or a staff person to devote to the research process. There are, therefore, critical questions relating to the post-Solutions transition that remain to be addressed. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that, as noted earlier, nearly 94 percent of site staff members indicated that they would participate in Solutions again, and that three-quarters are continuing some form of collaboration with their Solutions research partner.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Can universities, foundations and funding agencies, local governments, and nonprofit organizations work together to mainstream research and evaluation while improving program operations? The lessons from Solutions suggest that the answer is yes, but challenges and questions remain.

The hub-and-spoke model has real potential to bring together researchers and service providers from a single community. Together, these teams can foster a culture of inquiry, develop new and improved mechanisms for data gathering and analysis, and generate new information that serves to stimulate dialogue within organizations, improve program operations, and provide critical feedback to funders and other community stakeholders.

Local researchers are the key to the hub-and-spoke model, but it is important to recognize the collaborative nature of the enterprise: the local researchers were not air-dropped into the sites in order to gather data and report back to the hub. Rather, they worked hand-in-hand with program staff to integrate evaluation research into the regular operations of the agency. In most cases this process is ongoing, as witnessed by the three-quarters of sites that are continuing to work with their local researcher in some capacity.

Funding agencies should recognize the potential for the local research partnership to provide valuable insight into program operations. Whether or not such partnerships are embedded in a full-blown hub-and-spoke model, funders can realize significant "bang for the buck" by building evaluation research into program operations with the help of a local, university-based researcher. The clear need in this regard is not only to support the efforts of the researcher, but to provide ample staff, time, and resources to conduct the data gathering and analysis.

Colleges and universities stand to gain by fostering collaboration between faculty members and community organizations. Certainly academic institutions can facilitate such research through salary support, but there are other steps that may be equally critical. Course load reduction is one important step that universities can take, as is the opportunity for faculty to combine this kind of research into pedagogical activities, such as graduate research seminars. Universities can also foster less tangible (but no less important) incentives, such as counting this kind of community-based research as service when it comes to tenure and promotion, and promoting such work within the institution. Just as practitioners need to develop a culture of inquiry that values empirical research, so universities may need to adopt and communicate to faculty the position that this kind of research is valued within the institution.

Panelists Armand Carriere of HUD's Office of University Partnerships (left) and Catherine Howard of Virginia Commonwealth University

PART II

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

Jacqueline Dugery and James Knowles
Pew Partnership for Civic Change

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.

CONCLUSION

University-community research partnerships can be forged in any community. To realize their potential, the general consensus from the Pew Partnership's experience and the larger field is that we must do a better job connecting local organizations with higher education and vice versa. Specifically, we believe there are three steps that must be taken to further these partnerships. They are increasing access, increasing rewards, and increasing visibility.

Access. Connecting faculty and practitioners will rarely occur without deliberate and conscious efforts to knock down the barriers between the university and the community. Increasing access is the first step toward building effective collaborations.

Rewards. Practitioners and faculty can easily be lulled into focusing on their own day-to-day work, ignoring the latent potential of collaboration. Incentives such as stipends for community research, acknowledging the value of community research within the higher education community, and providing resources to defray the costs of research for community-based organizations will go a long way toward catalyzing such partnerships.

Visibility. Successful models exist for connecting higher education and communities around research. However, what is often lacking is visibility that spotlights the potential of these partnerships and inspires stakeholders to launch their own partnerships.

There is no doubt that developing stronger university-community partnerships will take time, investment, and hard work. But the payoff is real and worthwhile: to collaboratively build knowledge that in turn improves practice—and ultimately translates into stronger communities overall.

APPENDIX 1:
*Solutions for America Program Staff and Local Research Partners**

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