

Perceptions of Partnership

A study on nonprofit
and higher education
collaboration

Report By

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Campus Compact

Iowa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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Emily J. Shields has served as the Executive Director of Iowa Campus Compact since 2011 and as the Acting Executive Director of Minnesota Campus Compact since 2018, overseeing all operations and management of the organizations. She has served as the co-chair of the National Campus Compact Operations Committee for the past two years. Since 2015, she taught business and liberal arts courses as an adjunct instructor at Grand View University. Shields previously served as chief of staff for the Rebuild Iowa Office and as senate liaison and policy adviser to Iowa's governor. She has worked in field organizing and fundraising on statewide and national political campaigns and was the director of the 2006 Governor's Inauguration. Shields received a Bachelor's degree in journalism and political science from the University of Iowa and a Master's degree in philanthropy and nonprofit development at the University of Northern Iowa. She also served as an AmeriCorps VISTA member at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas.



Campus Compact
Iowa

Iowa Campus Compact

Founded in 2003, Iowa Campus Compact is a membership organization hosted by Iowa Western Community College. We strive to support our members in both curricular and co-curricular service learning and civic engagement activities through professional development opportunities, grants, research, student programming and a variety of other opportunities.

Learn more at iacampuscompact.org.



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More information is available at volunteeriowa.org.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community partnership has long been and continues to be a cornerstone of Campus Compact's work. Achieving higher education's public purpose requires partnerships with the community. These partnerships rely on the dedicated and talented staff of community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve as partners to higher education administrators, staff, faculty, and students. For this study, Iowa Campus Compact wanted to learn more about community-based organizations' perceptions of their partnerships with higher education in Iowa.

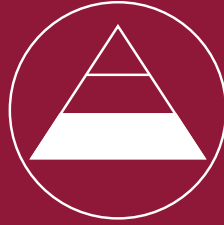
Many studies have increased our understanding of effective higher education-community partnerships (Community Campus Partnerships for Health, 2013; Council of Independent Colleges, 2003; Holland, 2001; Jacoby, 2003; Torres, 2000); this study seeks to add new depth and specificity, particularly for the state of Iowa. While we hope these findings can be broadly applied, we also hope they help higher education and community leaders in Iowa learn what is working and what can be improved.

This study includes the voices of hundreds of community-based organization staff from across the state. One of our first findings is that higher education (HED) partnerships are prolific: of the 310 CBOs that responded to the survey, 98 percent already partnered with HED and 70 percent partnered with more than one institution. While most of these partnerships focus on human capital (e.g. engaging students), they are highly varied in their scope, depth, and approach.

Through this study we learned that CBOs appreciate partnerships with higher education for a variety of reasons. While there are some wonderful examples of success for us to learn from, overall, HED fails to meet many of our aspirations for effective and equitable partnerships.

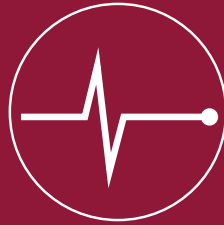
Our goal is that these recommendations spark conversations and lead to a stronger understanding of what higher education and community can achieve together. Leaders from both sectors can use this report as a guide for planning, professional development, and evaluation of current work. At Iowa Campus Compact, we will use these findings to consider how to better serve as a connector and capacity builder for HED and CBO partnerships and focus our programming and resources. We look forward to hearing ideas, reactions, and critiques to this study and exploring how we can continue to work together to meaningfully engage and impact our communities.

According to our study, **key components** for successful HED and CBO partnerships include the following:



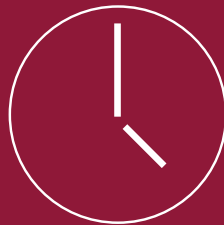
Successful partnerships require a solid foundation.

The first steps in building a partnership are critical to the process but are often neglected. We can ensure greater levels of success by taking more time in the beginning to evaluate possibilities and strategize for the long-term.



Effectively Managing student experiences is vital.

The human capital of student work is key to community impact and student learning. Providing structure for this work is needed to maximize outcomes and strengthen partnerships.



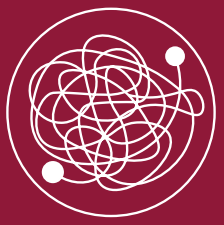
Investing time and capacity is difficult.

Effective partnerships require an investment of time that both HED and CBOs struggle to provide. This is important to acknowledge and plan for from the beginning.



Partnerships exist between individuals.

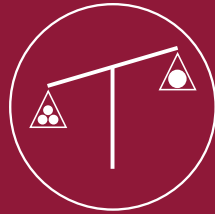
While partnerships are viewed as institutional, ultimately, individual relationships guide their success or failure. This means that individuals need to adequately prepare to engage in meaningful and effective partnerships.



CBOs have difficulty navigating the complexity of HED.

The complexity of higher education departments and roles remains a barrier to initiating and sustaining partnerships. Minimizing this complexity is important to creating equitable and impactful partnerships.

These findings led us to several **recommendations** for strengthening connections between campus and community.



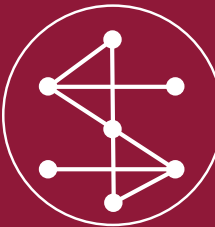
Focus on quality over quantity.

Less is more with partnerships: trying to meet all HED and CBO demands results in both partners being spread too thin to make any real impact.



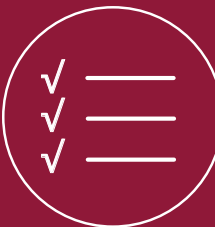
Move from reciprocity to co-creation.

While reciprocity ensures a balance of benefits, co-creation deepens those benefits and creates new possibilities.



Establish & sustain organizational infrastructure.

Successful partnership requires structure to define how the partnership can be initiated, maintained, and sustained.



Strengthen student preparation and accountability.

When student-based projects are well-structured, students are held to a higher standard for their work and partnerships are more likely to succeed.



Build individual capacity for partnership.

While infrastructure is key, many individuals across organizations need to play a role in the success of partnerships. These individuals need targeted support and development that prepare them for this role.



Explore other forms of partnership.

Limiting partnership to student experiences may not be the best fit for HED or CBOs. Instead, identify untapped areas to build new or deepen current partnerships.

“In the last three to four years, we’ve really expanded our outreach into making connections with higher education institutions, and we’ve had a huge, huge benefit from it.”

Study Participant, 2018

BACKGROUND

Iowa Campus Compact provides leadership for the civic mission of higher education and seeks to strengthen the capacity of colleges and universities to prepare all students to become engaged citizens. This includes a focus on deepening partnerships between institutions of higher education and communities, enhancing student learning, and intentionally and effectively addressing community needs.

In 2018, we conducted a statewide study to explore how CBOs perceive their partnership with HED to better inform our work in the state of Iowa. Additionally, this study provides direction for Iowa Campus Compact strategies, including developing a non-profit affiliates program and AmeriCorps State and VISTA national service programs.

Literature Review

Higher education has a long-standing mission to advance society through knowledge generation and upholding democracy by educating students about civic and social responsibility. Recently, scholars have called for faculty to center civic problems and solutions in their teaching and research (Boyer, 1990; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Ward, 2003), and for colleges and universities to see themselves “as a citizen with a responsibility to its neighbors” (Maurrasse, 2001, p. 11). To realize these efforts, institutions must extend their engagement beyond campus through collaborative partnerships with organizations and people in the community.

Given the importance of these partnerships, many studies have been conducted to understand partnership goals, capacity, nature, and success. While most research done around community-campus partnerships focuses on student learning or community outcomes, researchers have begun to focus on the community-campus partnership as the unit of analysis (Cruz & Giles, 2000).

Multiple frameworks have been developed that offer a unique, though often overlapping, perspective of the characteristics of high-quality campus-community partnerships (Community Campus Partnerships for Health, 2013; Council of Independent Colleges, 2003; Holland, 2001; Jacoby, 2003; Torres, 2000). To synthesize the existing models into core concepts of effective partnerships, Holland (2005) identified six common themes:

- Partners need to clearly understand their own, and one another's, specific needs and expectations to develop a mutually beneficial relationship;
- Partners also need to recognize the capacity and limitations of each party to ensure realistic expectations;
- Partners should define success as measured by benefits to each partner and in relation to their collective effort;
- Sustained partnerships move beyond tasks and activities to emphasize the process of developing and maintaining a positive relationship;
- Partners prioritize shared control, including all voices in decision-making; and
- In addition to partnership outcomes, the relationship itself is continuously and strategically assessed.

Holland (2005) argues that despite the congruence among partnership frameworks, a lack of information exists on how to achieve those results. In 2003, Enos and Morton sought to create further distinctions by framing partners as being on a continuum from transactional to transformational partnerships. Later studies defined exploitative partnerships as those in which the costs exceed the benefits, where one partner holds all or most of the power (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010). In this study, we used these distinctions by adapting models from Himmelman (1996) and Austin (2000).

Table 1 - Characteristics of Transactional and Transformational Partnerships

Transactional partnerships	Transformational partnerships
exchanging information	enhancing capacity
low involvement, few resources	high involvement, significant resources
sporadic interaction	frequent interaction
minimal project scope	broad project scope
one-time/short-term projects	ongoing/long-term projects
peripheral to the mission	integral to mission

Adapted from Himmelman (1996) and Austin (2000).

Studies also recommend that HED prioritize deeper engagement between faculty and community partners. This includes recognizing community partners as co-educators and including them in planning and preparation, committing to long-term action, such as large community development projects, and developing infrastructure that supports these endeavors (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Stoecker, Tryon, and Hilgendorf (2009) developed a list of community standards that serves as a guide for both faculty and organizations involved in service-learning partnerships. This tool is organized into five categories: communication, developing positive relationships, providing an infrastructure, managing service learners, and promoting diversity (Stoecker & Tryon, 2007).

Partnerships are largely defined and impacted by interactions at the individual level (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009). To get a clearer picture of how these relationships function, the authors developed the SOFAR model. Rather than relying on the simple distinction of community and campus, SOFAR explicitly identifies the groups of individuals involved in any partnership: students, organizations in the community, faculty, administrators, and residents in the community.

“Some of those times where we rush that beginning of the relationship, we rush that dating period, it can cause issues long-term because we’re not really knowing what each other wants and needs.”

Study Participant, 2018

THE STUDY

This study and its recommendations build on this work: centering community-campus partnerships as the unit of analysis from the perspective of staff from community-based organizations. This allowed for new insight into characteristics of effective partnerships and how they are achieved. Participation was purposefully open to CBOs with varying degrees of partnership with higher education, including those who have an interest but do not have a current relationship with any college or university.

Rather than focusing on specific modes of partnership (e.g. academic service-learning), this study broadly defined the scope of partnership to be inclusive of the wide range of experiences CBOs have.

Our primary research question was: How do community-based organizations perceive their partnership with institutions of higher education?

The study was initiated with a short survey distributed to nearly 900 CBOs in the state of Iowa. Of the 310 people who responded to the survey, one-third of the group expressed interest in participating in follow-up focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted in three different locations across Iowa along with a fifth virtual option for those who could not attend in person. Of the 40 focus group participants, 39 organizations were represented.

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Study Participant, 2018

WHAT WE LEARNED

Higher Education Partnerships are Prolific

An overarching finding from both the survey and focus groups was that partnerships between higher education and community-based organizations are prolific. Of the 310 CBOs that responded to the survey, 98 percent already partnered with HED and 70 percent partnered with more than one institution. The first set of findings takes a deeper look at how CBOs described these partnerships with HED.

“In the last three to four years, we’ve really expanded our outreach into making connections with higher education institutions, and we’ve had a huge, huge benefit from it.”

- Study Participant

When asked how they would characterize their partnership with higher education on a continuum from transactional to transformational (Enos & Morton, 2003), 40 percent of survey respondents said *transactional or more transactional than transformational*, while 27 percent responded *transformational or more transformational than transactional*.

Partnerships are Varied in Scope, Depth, and Approach

In our focus groups, we learned that CBOs partner with HED in various ways but most commonly fall into three main categories:

- course-based experiences,
- individual student experiences, and
- group student experiences.

Course-Based Experiences

Course-based experiences include what is traditionally known as service-learning, “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5). For instance, a social science class could provide research to support a CBO’s grant application, a design class could create new organizational branding standards and updates marketing materials, or a finance class could assist a CBO’s

clients with tax preparation.

Course-based experiences also include individual students meeting requirements for their classes. A common example CBOs gave is being contacted by students whose assignment is to connect with a CBO and spend a certain amount of time volunteering at their organization. In some cases, instructors chose organizations for students and communicated with CBOs in advance so they could anticipate student requests, and in other cases, students had to find their own. Another example is when students work with CBOs to complete an advanced-level project, such as a senior capstone.

While these examples are all credit-bearing, experiential learning opportunities, they should not all be considered as high-impact community engagement due to the wide range of outcomes as well as investment and responsibility among everyone involved.

Individual Student Experiences

CBOs often interact with higher education through individual student experiences. These include formal experiences such as those that fulfill licensure requirements, internships, practicums, and AmeriCorps positions. Despite the common goal of developing students' professional knowledge and skills while also contributing to the work of a CBO, these experiences vary significantly in terms of level of engagement and impact.

This includes students doing general volunteer work. In those cases, students may have sought out or discovered a volunteer opportunity using a campus resource or they may have connected with the CBO on their own. Volunteering can be short- or long-term, sporadic or ongoing, and skills-based or not.

Group Student Experiences

Group student experiences include partnerships with student organizations. CBOs work with groups whose interest and mission are closely aligned to their own and those who have service requirements such as fraternities and sororities. While the relationship may be long-standing, these experiences are typically, though not always, shorter in time (e.g. a student organization helps with a CBO fundraiser every year).

Group experiences also refer to days of service programming. These might be initiated by the CBO (e.g. the Parks and Recreation Department makes a call for volunteers to clear a trail one weekend) or established by a college department. A common example of the latter is orientation programs that coordinate

service projects at multiple sites throughout the community for new students.

Other Experiences

Though not as common, CBOs partner with HED in ways that are not centered on student experiences. This includes research conducted by individual faculty rather than as part of a course, program collaboration (e.g. a long-term mentoring program between college and elementary schools), and initiatives that offer CBO's clients a chance to visit or get access to institutions of HED.

Human Capital is the Shared Resource

The primary resources study participants indicated receiving from HED partnerships were human capital (e.g. interns, volunteers, labor). The human capital they receive from HED partnerships is valuable because the educational purpose means individuals (students, faculty, and staff) offer unique perspective, expertise, and skills that can be leveraged to meet organizational goals and needs. Further, CBOs see a benefit from the energy and enthusiasm that students bring.

CBOs value having access to other resources through their HED partnerships. Some of those are more tangible, such as financial support, access to data, and the use of physical space. Others are less tangible, including knowledge and expertise, access to a new community, and time.

The primary things participants indicated contributing to HED partnerships centered around providing students with opportunities: real-world experiences, skill development, fulfill requirements, exposure to new communities and perspectives, access to mentors and a professional network, and career exploration.

In terms of resources given, participants frequently stated the time that goes into offering these opportunities to students, particularly when they prioritize making it a high-quality experience. While less common, a handful of study participants also talked about giving their HED partners access to future students (i.e. the clients their organization serves).

“That’s really the essence of the partnership. It is helping us, but it’s helping [the college] just to know that they’ve got that real life experience they can provide their students that they can check off the list.”

- Study Participant

In general, focus group participants expressed a sense of trust that their HED partners enter the relationship with good intentions, that their motivation is, as one participant stated, “Not a PR stunt.” They perceived genuine concern for community and interest in the CBO’s mission. However, CBOs were sometimes wary about how much time and effort they may have to give to the partnership for potentially minimal results.

There are other exceptions to this sense of trust. Sometimes CBOs are asked to help a student fulfill a certain requirement but have little or no involvement in deciding what the experience should entail. At times, instructors make students responsible for finding their own site, so CBOs know a course requirement is involved but do not have information about the course or any notice that they may be contacted by students looking for specific opportunities. Additionally, CBO staff might be asked to verify that a student met a minimum hour requirement without a full understanding of expectations. These situations made it difficult for study participants to act as partners in the experience.

At times CBOs perceive that people on campus (including students, faculty, and administrators) have the mindset that HED has something to offer the community, without acknowledging the benefits they stand to receive. Participants wanted to be considered partners in broader contexts, not just places for colleges to fulfill academic needs or meet community service requirements.

In addition, CBOs expressed hesitancy to say no to requests from HED even if the opportunity was not a good fit; fearing that it would close the door on future opportunities. CBOs want to be viewed as good partners, so that they have access to future benefits of HED partnerships.

“We have had a lot of relationships with colleges and universities. Some are great, and some are not so great.”

- Study Participant

CBOs in our study shared a wide variety of experiences and perceptions. Participants shared examples of the partnerships they would like to emulate and those they would like to avoid. A common first answer to many questions was, “It depends.” In general, CBOs participated in the study because the good outweighs the bad, and their goal is to improve and further develop their HED partnerships.

The findings highlighted here are overarching themes that emerged from the survey and focus groups. Knowing the wide range of how partnerships function, the results should be considered in multiple contexts rather than narrowly focusing on one type of relationship or experience.

“That’s really the essence of the partnership. It is helping us, but it’s helping [the college] just to know that they’ve got that real life experience they can provide their students that they can check off the list.”

Study Participant, 2018

KEY FINDINGS

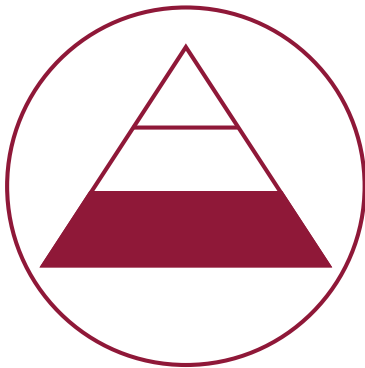
What works?

Quality and impact vary significantly given the numerous types of partnerships. We can learn a lot from what is going well and what is not. In terms of building a successful partnership, we discovered two key findings:

- **successful partnerships require a solid foundation and**
- **effectively managing student experiences is vital.**

The other themes that arose can be categorized as barriers to achieving effective partnerships:

- **investing time and capacity is difficult,**
- **partnerships exist between individuals, and**
- **institutions of higher education are complex to navigate.**



Successful Partnerships Require a Solid Foundation

As CBOs told their stories of partnerships, a common theme emerged: successful partnerships require a solid foundation. All partners need to be able to clearly identify and understand one another's goals and expectations early in the process. This includes both partners being able to answer the question: What does success look like for this partnership?

While HED must consider how its work contributes to existing efforts of its community partners, they must also be explicit about their goals and desired outcomes. CBOs find the partnership to be much easier and more efficient to manage when their HED partners are forthcoming and can clearly articulate their own needs and motivations.

“I think sometimes [higher education leadership] think that all we’re looking at is, you know, what are they going to be giving us.”

- Study Participant

A solid foundation also requires creating a clear structure for the partnership so that each party understands the commitment they are making and what they can and should expect from the project and each other. Some steps in the process include identifying and

agreeing on the scope and duration of the project, determining what needs to be done and who is responsible, and establishing check-in points to maintain consistent communication.

Paradoxically, one reason a structure is so important is that it enables flexibility. CBOs recognize that even with a clear plan in place, there are times when it is necessary to evaluate how things are going and redirect a project. This is a less complicated process when the groundwork has been laid out and next steps can simply be adjusted, rather than having to rethink the entirety of the project.

Building a solid foundation takes time and commitment from both partners, and the degree to which this relationship works depends on the capacity of each partner. Without a foundation and structure in place, HED and CBOs can still achieve reciprocity in benefits, but the relationship is shallower and leads to more transactional than transformational partnerships.

When asked, study participants often struggled to be visionary about their partnership. This could mean that current partnerships do not have strong foundations in place for CBOs to think bigger or that CBOs have not been asked to truly co-create. For those with more established partnerships, the vision tended to include long-term, sustainable programs and full-circle, student-led initiatives (i.e. students designing, implementing, and sustaining a project or program). In some cases, those partnerships were building a stronger pipeline for the CBO's field. The rest of the group tended to be vaguer in its vision, identifying simple aspects like more established relationships, a clearer inroad to higher education, and improving existing partnerships.



Effectively Managing Student Experience is Key

Much of CBO's partnerships prioritized student experiences. As such, the success of the partnership is contingent on how well CBOs and HED manage those experiences. Student preparation and accountability are critical but, in many cases, are not accounted for because CBOs and HED have assumptions about who is responsible for this aspect of the partnership.

Study participants described student preparation as needing three components:

1. general professional etiquette,
2. an orientation to the organization and the work it does, and
3. having the knowledge and preparation to meet expectations and carry out the tasks for which they are responsible.

CBOs find value in clearly understanding what faculty and staff are expecting from students so they can more effectively provide feedback. Participants shared experiences of working with students who were fulfilling class requirements at their organization, but the CBOs had little or no communication with the course instructor. As a result, they could not determine if what they were asking the students to do aligned with course expectations.

For those CBOs who experienced exploitative relationships (Clayton et al., 2010), where the costs exceed benefits, generally described the partnership in the context of student experiences. More specifically, CBOs in these situations explain that students do not meet their expectations because they were not adequately prepared for their work with the CBO or held accountable by professors or project leaders. That dynamic was present in multiple scenarios including for-credit and not-for-credit experiences. Relatedly, CBOs carry more responsibility for preparation and accountability when their partners are student organizations; these groups offer a unique challenge in that they have less formal oversight on campus.

“I have seen very successful partnerships that I’m really excited about, and I’ve seen areas where sometimes it’s like we have community-engaged learning students that need 10 hours, and it ends up being a huge drain on our staff and really difficult financially for us to support.”

- Study Participant

There was consensus among CBOs that an hours-based requirement was not a useful tool for accountability or evaluation and often led to more time and work for the organization with little benefit. This is particularly true when the requirement is a minimal amount of time. CBOs identified many circumstances in which the hour requirement for students was 25 or less, which, without a larger structure, was not enough for either side to gain intended benefits.

Further, CBOs recognized that not all students are ready for the same kind of experience, so they must consider the level at which the students are operating. There is a spectrum of student ability: from those who are primarily recipients of an experience to those who are true partners in the experience. Having some understanding of what a student will be able to contribute to the organization is important in establishing realistic expectations.

Despite some negative experiences, study participants acknowledged that the outcome of students' work is going to be inconsistent because it is a learning experience. They see this uncertainty as part of working with HED and students. While they did not use the term, the CBOs most satisfied with their partnerships saw themselves as co-educators who were brought into the educational mission of the institution. They understood their role in helping students learn and were, therefore, more likely to accept varying outcomes.

“In most respects, I think a higher ed partnership is about enhancing learning, real-life experiences for students, so I think when you get to that level, you kind of know where you stand. It adds a nice dimension to what we’re trying to do.”

- Study Participant



Investing Time and Capacity is Difficult

In terms of barriers to achieving effective partnerships, a lack of capacity and time for both partners was the root of many challenges. This situation is not a unique problem, particularly in the non-profit and education sectors, but needs to be addressed for partnerships to flourish.

Establishing a solid foundation is especially time and resource intensive. Focus group participants acknowledged that, on both sides, this stage is often neglected. Each partner has their own goals and objectives and their own processes and procedures to navigate. Working through this initial stage is often skipped for the sake of moving on to the next step. The result is two partners operating separately and neither partner understanding the other's expectations and responsibilities.

“Some of those times where we rush that beginning of the relationship, we rush that dating period, it can cause issues long-term because we’re not really knowing what each other wants and needs.”

- Study Participant

Similarly, effectively supervising students requires a significant amount of personnel resources. CBOs have a lot to gain from students, and their organizational capacity can grow as a result. To do so, however, supervisors must invest their own time and energy into the students’ experience, in addition to their own responsibilities. That capacity does not always feel realistic. In many cases, CBOs acknowledged a desire to have more transformational partnerships with higher education, but a lack of capacity for both partners means most remain transactional.



Partnerships Happen Between Individuals

Study participants typically described their HED partnerships as relationships with individuals (i.e. students, staff, or faculty) rather than institutions. In describing what they get from the partnership, CBOs most often referred to people (e.g. volunteers, interns, advocates). In terms of transactional versus transformational partnerships, CBOs often referred to how transactional or transformational a partnership is for individuals (e.g. students, clients being served at their organization, CBO staff) rather than their organization.

Most relationships between CBOs and HED are initiated between two people and begin with chance encounters. When those initial connections naturally lead to others, deeper partnerships emerge.

Participants considered their partnerships to mostly be with students. That said, many relied on relationships with faculty and staff to establish those connections, while others worked directly with individual students or, more commonly, with student organizations.

“I would say the majority of my daily interaction is with the students, followed closely by faculty and staff. They’re kind of my initial touch point, and then from there they push the students to do whatever it is they need to do.”

- Study Participant

Participants cited strong, valuable relationships as a benefit to partnering with HED. These relationships not only contribute to the work of an organization but also to the work satisfaction of CBO staff. The flip side is that negative interpersonal experiences can have a disproportionate influence on the partnership.

Additionally, individual relationships mean there might be less organizational structure to support and sustain the partnership. Individuals at HED institutions approach community partnerships in different ways and are not always trained or equipped to do so effectively. CBOs have had to learn to navigate those differences in order to make the most of their partnerships.

Perhaps most notable is the significant impact that turnover and structural changes have on partnerships. These are both common occurrences at CBOs and in HED and can create disruptions to the partnership that are difficult to overcome.

“I think that’s one of the huge things that can either hurt or help you. We have those connections, we have a couple faculty that are super about our services, so they invite us to all the events, but, if those faculty members left, we’d have to start all over.”

- Study Participant



Institutions of Higher Education are Complex to Navigate

For many reasons, CBOs perceive institutions of higher education to be complex organizations and many find them difficult to navigate. The survey asked CBOs how simple or difficult it is to initiate partnerships with higher education, one-third answered that it is very or moderately difficult.

“I have just started to kind of understand the network and who to talk to. Three years in, I feel like I’m still a long ways out from understanding how to efficiently work with that whole web of people.”

- Study Participant

For anyone outside of HED, knowing who to contact for what is challenging. This is, in part, because of the sheer size of colleges and universities as well as their unique organizational structures. Although CBOs understand how one campus operates, it does not mean that knowledge can be applied to another campus. Partnering with multiple institutions means navigating different structures, which takes time and resources.

Even within smaller institutions, departments are siloed and the ways they function and interact with one another are not obvious. While HED is very disciplinary, CBOs are often unaware of the distinctions as they work with individuals in different departments; yet, they are cognizant of a lack of communication across campus. As one participant stated, “The right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing.” This makes collaboration more difficult. The complexity also requires CBOs to differentiate who their contact is for each project or initiative and maintain the individual relationships that keep each partnership going.

Participants valued campus infrastructure that actively supported partnering with the community and the communication necessary for that to happen. This structure offers a place for partnerships to build in a formal way rather than relying on informal relationships and includes having a designated point of contact. This individual or department is responsible for having a working knowledge of what is happening in the community and on campus and can then connect individuals accordingly.

“I can’t say enough about the office of engagement. The person who kind of sees the bigger picture—knows the departments, knows faculty that are looking to connect with communities or looking to connect with certain types of projects—that role is so important.”

- Study Participant

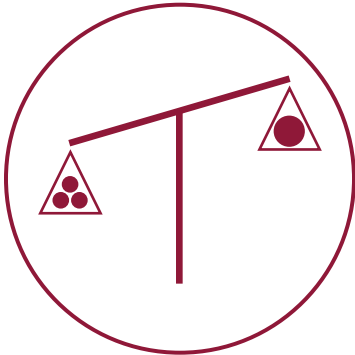
**“In most respects,
I think a higher ed
partnership is about
enhancing learning,
real-life experiences
for students. So I
think when you get
to that level, you kind
of know where you
stand. It adds a nice
dimension to what
we’re trying to do.”**

Study Participant, 2018

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study largely align with findings from other research about community-campus partnerships; however, those studies lack information on how to achieve better results (Holland, 2005). To create more effective partnerships, CBO and HED staff at all levels should consider these recommendations together. Iowa Campus Compact will use these recommendations as a guide for our work to support capacity for stronger partnerships and outcomes. For each recommendation, we have provided an accompanying example of how our organization plans to implement them.

FOCUS ON QUALITY OVER QUANTITY



A core barrier to building effective partnerships is that they require considerable time and staff capacity, which are often scarce resources for CBOs and HED. Knowing this, all parties must first acknowledge that the ability to achieve overarching goals and outcomes correlates with the quality of the partnership and then take steps to focus resources.

Although branching out when new opportunities present themselves or trying to meet all needs and requests can be enticing, COBs and HED need to identify and place boundaries on partnerships to ensure organizations stay true to their core purpose and values. As such, it is important for HED to partner in ways that are aligned with CBOs' mission and strategy, and it is important for CBOs to be actively involved and invested in the educational mission of HED.

To be more effective partners, HED needs to specifically identify and communicate its motivation and goals, beyond serving the community or engaging students. Strategic plans for community engagement can narrow the focus to specific neighborhoods, issue areas, or student outcomes, thus deepening the impact and offering a means of determining a core group of partners to devote more resources to.

CBOs should use planning processes to strategically focus their partnerships and engagement with volunteers, particularly with respect to partners from higher education. Further, CBOs should not feel obligated to respond to HED partners' requests. If an opportunity or idea is not in line with a CBO's mission, or if the organization does not have the capacity to take on a new initiative, the CBO should feel comfortable saying so without fear of missing out on future opportunities. HED should ensure mission alignment is part of the conversation rather than expecting CBOs to bring up concerns.

Iowa Campus Compact's commitment to focusing on quality over quantity

In 2015, Campus Compact Member Presidents created a Civic Action Statement recommitting to the values that founded the organization. Presidents from across the country signed on to this statement, which included a commitment to create a Civic Action Plan. Since that time, more than 100 institutions nationwide have made their Civic Action Plans public. Iowa Campus Compact and other affiliates have supported these efforts with planning institutes, consulting, and networking to help campuses complete a robust planning process.

In many cases, these plans have resulted in greater clarity about the campus' goals and purposes of community engagement and led to greater focus on specific partners, issues, or geographic areas. Planning efforts like these give everyone on campus a better understanding of how to focus and make clear where institutional resources will be spent. Because the plans are public, and often community members are engaged in creating them, they also send a clear signal of that focus to potential interested community partners.

For Iowa Campus Compact, this recommendation means focusing time, energy, and resources on specific programs and projects that build capacity in the areas needed. One key example of this strategy is the new Summer Reading AmeriCorps program. In the process of exploring HED and CBO needs, study participants stated that there is a lack of summer reading program infrastructure and of high-quality college student opportunities over the summer. This new program will provide libraries and other CBOs with funding for full-time student support in running high-quality summer reading programs, while also offering students a significant, paid community summer experience in a way that most member institutions are not equipped to offer. This community partner study will serve as a model to further identify community needs in which Iowa Campus Compact can help HED invest resources and build capacity.

MOVE FROM RECIPROCITY TO CO-CREATION



In order to establish high-quality partnerships, our findings clearly indicate CBOs and HED need to spend time early in the relationship building a solid foundation. As one study participant stated, “Don’t rush the dating phase.” While some stakeholders entering into these partnerships understand that, many lack a clear sense of how to navigate this part of the process and how much time it will take.

One framework for understanding how this time can be spent moves beyond the concept of reciprocity to cultivating partnerships as a space for co-creation. A partnership focusing on reciprocity typically begins with one or both partners bringing their pre-established goals and ideas to the table, looking for a fit. Co-creation means developing goals together that serve each partner’s mission and needs. For example, faculty and community partners write syllabi and design course assignments together, students and community members collaboratively generate research questions, or staff from each organization go to a funder together to propose a new idea.

For both CBOs and HED, co-creation means starting the planning process much earlier than is typically expected. This type of long-term planning might not be realistic for student-led projects or organizations. In those cases, a faculty or staff advisor must play a larger role in project design and structure, or both partners need to agree that the project will remain more transactional.

Established processes can play a useful role in developing effective partnerships. There is value in building memorandums of understanding to guide dialogue between partners at the outset of a new program or initiative. A widely accessible system for collecting the resources and needs of all partners enables individuals to more efficiently identify opportunities and connections. Both CBOs and HED should be included when these processes are established. It may even be possible to consider streamlining processes across multiple institutions in the same geographic area to support collaboration and reduce burdens on CBOs.

While the early stages of forming a partnership are critical, it is equally important that CBOs and HED make plans for regular, in-person communication to ensure the foundation remains strong and challenges can be addressed as they arise. Further, partners should intentionally close the loop when an initiative comes to an end. At this stage, collaborative evaluation and reflection should not be neglected. Just as students need to reflect throughout a project for learning to take place, those involved in a partnership must also do so.

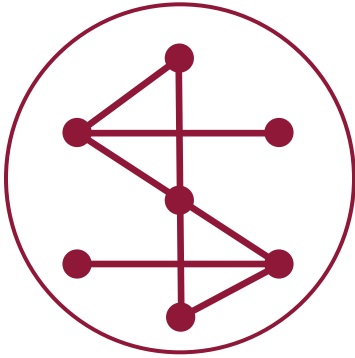
Iowa Campus Compact's commitment to moving from reciprocity to co-creation

In 2016, Iowa Campus Compact began delivering the Engaged Faculty Institute curriculum. Developed by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health and Campus Compact, the institute supports faculty in designing high-quality, community-engaged courses. Staff first worked with the University of Northern Iowa to pilot the two-day faculty development experience. In that pilot phase, community partners were also invited to participate in parts of the institute. Faculty members applied to the institute with a specific course that they wanted to add or enhance a community-engaged experience; they were then matched with community organizations. A large part of the institute was devoted to faculty members meeting with their community partners to design the course experience. Faculty members were encouraged to share and be open to changing their course objectives, and community partners were encouraged to be forthcoming about what they would need for the partnership to be successful.

In the last three years, more than 120 faculty and community partners have participated in institutes. Iowa Campus Compact has secured funding to compensate them for their role as co-creators and co-educators. The Engaged Faculty Institute has resulted in enormous success in achieving student learning and community organization outcomes, as well as encouraging long-term partnerships.

For Iowa Campus Compact, this recommendation means providing more training and development opportunities to staff and faculty alongside our community partners. Specific opportunities include facilitating the co-creation of service projects for AmeriCorps members and Principal Community Scholars serving in the community.

ESTABLISH AND SUSTAIN ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE



To support and sustain partnerships, HED must intentionally establish and build on infrastructure. This step includes a clear organizational structure that names community partnerships as a priority and identifies a long-term plan for support. Given that many CBOs find institutions difficult to navigate, HED should designate a front door for the community and goals and parameters for partnerships to make HED more accessible.

Infrastructure can include designating campus staff or departments that are responsible for supporting community partnerships. To be effective in that role, those individuals, collectively, need to have the professional knowledge, skills, and experience to develop positive working relationships both on- and off-campus, serve as a bridge-builder between campus and community, design and facilitate developmentally appropriate student-learning experiences, and evaluate and assess the impact and success of partnerships. The workload of those individuals needs to take into account our first recommendation, acknowledging that time and resources are finite and the quality of partnerships is more important than the quantity.

Infrastructure is also needed to ensure long-term sustainability of successful partnerships. The findings demonstrate that partnerships are between individuals. While personalized relationships bring many benefits, they also mean turnover and role changes can jeopardize partnerships. To minimize this impact, infrastructure can include people and systems to document processes to be carried forward in the event of staff changes. In cases where student organizations are involved, staff and faculty infrastructure should support continuity in partnerships as students transition.

Within this infrastructure, partners need to recognize and address the inherent limitations of academia. Outside of campus, the world neither operates in disciplinary silos nor functions on a semester calendar. It is necessary to identify the opportunities that realistically exist within the academic structure, and HED needs to be willing to reconsider some of the organizational norms that prevent high-impact, innovative partnerships from happening. For example, HED could work on projects beyond the semester or academic year and incentivize interdisciplinary and interdepartmental work.

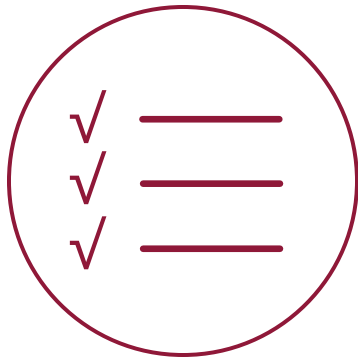
CBOs have a role to play in creating infrastructure as well. Nonprofit organizations often experience high employee turnover and often lack resources to invest in volunteer management. Programs like Service Enterprise through Volunteer Iowa, the state commission for volunteer engagement, provide ways for organizations to create the structure and strategy needed for successful volunteer engagement. This structure and strategy can provide specific ways in which the organization seeks to engage college students as volunteers and clarity on what the organization seeks to gain from HED collaborations overall.

Iowa Campus Compact's commitment to establishing and sustaining organizational infrastructure

The Iowa Campus Compact VISTA Community Corps has been in operation for more than 10 years. The program uses grant funding through the Corporation for National and Community Service to provide full-time, capacity-building positions to enhance community-campus partnerships in ways that reduce poverty. In recent years, the program has shifted focus to building the capacity of nonprofit partners rather than higher education institutions, specifically CBOs focused on education and economic opportunity.

For Iowa Campus Compact, this recommendation means investing in projects to understand the many networks that Iowa communities use to partner in order to meet local needs. This includes networks such as the Volunteer Centers of Iowa, which supports volunteerism in specific communities in Iowa. Our organization can use AmeriCorps positions to complete internal capacity building projects that may identify future opportunities to support the infrastructure of higher education in Iowa. Where HED often serves as a match-matcher between students and CBOs, IACC can serve as a matchmaker between networks and communities.

STRENGTHEN STUDENT PREPARATION & ACCOUNTABILITY



With students at the center of most partnerships, the preparation and support they receive has a significant impact on results. Partnerships must establish what students need to know and be able to do to be successful, who is responsible for their preparation, and how they will be evaluated and held accountable to expectations.

As study participants recognized, there are many facets to student preparation and each depends on the nature and goals of the experience. Students need to understand worksite and course or program expectations, the CBO's mission and work, what they will be held responsible, and how they will be evaluated. This requires well-structured experiences with CBO and HED partners agreeing on who is responsible for each component of managing students.

Not all students are capable of the same level of work. This points to a trend in higher education to create scaffolded experiences for students that more intentionally build knowledge and skills throughout their college experience. Scaffolding learning requires educators to provide higher levels of support early in a student's experience and then progressively move toward the student taking more ownership and working independently. Both partners can have an active role, but HED should utilize its knowledge of student development and familiarity with its students to guide this process.

Recognizing HED's responsibility to prepare students to be effective in the community, study participants also acknowledged shifts in their own organizations could contribute to students' ability to be successful. CBOs could embrace a volunteer culture that empowers students to take on higher levels of work and be partners with the organization rather than passive participants. Again, this kind of supervision requires more time and resources but could ultimately result in greater outcomes.

While not as significant in participants' discussion, a key area for student preparation is working across difference and culture. Some experiences require students to interact with people from backgrounds and lived experiences different than their own, and not all students will be prepared for these interactions. HED staff and faculty can help students explore and reflect on their own identities and lived experiences in ways that build their knowledge of themselves and their community. Minnesota Campus Compact offers support for this with their civic agency

exercises, which are free, online resources for reflection activities. Most of the civic agency activities take less than one hour and can easily be achieved in a class period or a meeting.

For the most part, experience demonstrates that students who are adequately prepared and understand their expectations will do whatever they can to meet them. Yet, for times when this is not the case, accountability measures are needed to ensure goals are met as much as possible. Achieving accountability requires strong communication throughout the project. Partners should agree to a regular schedule of communication, particularly if students will be serving without a leader or faculty member present to observe their work. CBOs should be encouraged to provide feedback and use formative assessment, a powerful way for students to learn and grow, and dismiss students who are not meeting expectations. Feedback can happen through formal reports or informal conversations about performance and improvement.

Iowa Campus Compact's commitment to strengthening student preparation and accountability

Iowa Campus Compact's AmeriCorps Program was founded more than a decade ago and offers students the ability to lead campus-community partnerships through part- and full-time national service positions. These individuals, mostly current college students, are given a clear position description that makes their role in partnerships key and has outcomes they are expected to report on and achieve.

For Iowa Campus Compact, this recommendation means providing greater support in ensuring students receive an onsite orientation to their service site. This may mean offering training to higher education staff and faculty on how to co-create orientation, develop a workplan, or other volunteer management best practices. Additionally, as we work to build equity into the program in more intentional ways, we are exploring ways to support CBOs in engaging students from diverse backgrounds in their programs.

BUILD INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY FOR PARTNERSHIP



A key finding of the study was that partnerships happen between individuals. This means that even the best infrastructure on campus will not be able to meet all needs. Individual students, faculty, and staff will still be the face of the institution's partnerships in most cases. The same is true with CBOs. Even with strong volunteer management, individual program staff and volunteers will still determine the success of partnerships. As a result, CBOs and HED must go beyond infrastructure to build the skills and capacity of many individuals to engage as effective partners.

Given the lack of time and capacity that most in HED and CBOs face, time to develop skills can seem like a daunting challenge. However, relatively small changes can make a big difference. Short presentations to faculty, staff, and student leaders can cover the basics of effective partnerships. Checklists can help everyone involved in a project understand the best practices in ensuring success. Coupling this development with the need for a solid foundation, core staff can play a stronger role in getting partnerships started by setting up agreements and putting initial plans in place. With this critical early work in place, individual partners can continue to build the relationship from there.

Iowa Campus Compact's commitment to building the capacity of individuals for partnership

Iowa Campus Compact offers multiple opportunities for individuals to build their capacity for partnership each year. This includes webinars, communities of practice, workshops, conferences, and more. Each of these events has some focus on work with community organizations. Nonprofit conferences and other events offer similar training opportunities to CBOs.

For Iowa Campus Compact, this recommendation means increasing focus on training a larger number of individuals on community partnerships. This could include developing training modules specific to partnership development that can easily be delivered in a variety of contexts. All program participants would be given the same solid, common foundation.

EXPLORE OTHER FORMS OF PARTNERSHIP



In building high-quality partnerships, it is important to ask the question: What does each partner uniquely bring to the table? Colleges and universities are sources of knowledge generation and access to opportunity for social mobility. When these institutions try to do too many things, they are unable to offer their greatest resources and assets, which are more than a group of individuals who can provide time and labor.

To build on their greatest assets, community-campus partnerships should give more attention to community-based research, with scholars conducting research in response to the community's priorities and the barriers they face. In doing so, both societal needs and academic missions can be met. This kind of research could raise the level of outcomes for all involved and increase each partner's ability to invest significant time and effort. For partnerships that involve faculty, there is pressure to spend time producing scholarship. By aligning courses with scholarship goals, partnerships would have the potential to provide more benefits to the faculty member, greater outcomes for community partners, and even deeper learning for students.

Community-campus partnerships should go beyond the teaching and learning mission of higher education and consider the whole institution as an area of opportunity. A subset of our study participants had a primary goal of partnering with colleges and universities to increase access to higher education for their clients. Further, even among CBOs who had built relationships with institutions through faculty or student engagement experiences, there was a desire for the people they serve and their access to education to have a more significant role in the partnership. This could mean that even if the focus of the project is not college access, partnerships consider it as a secondary goal. For example, a student project could be focused on building marketing materials for an after-school program and those students also visit the program to talk about their college experiences. It could also mean arranging campus visits for clients or otherwise increasing their comfort level with and access to higher education.

Iowa Campus Compact's commitment to exploring other forms of partnership

For three years, Iowa Campus Compact has recruited a cohort of faculty annually for the Engaged Scholar Research Fellowship Program. This program supports community-engaged scholars that help move higher education community engagement and service-learning efforts forward. Each scholar receives support for completing and publishing their research. This includes professional development, connections to journals, and other resources. This program has resulted in several new publications, all focused on making higher education community engagement more effective. While small in scope, the program is an example of the resources and support needed to help faculty explore these other forms of partnership.

For Iowa Campus Compact, this recommendation means finding more ways to focus programs, events, and support on helping HED and CBOs consider and learn how to implement other forms of partnership. A greater focus in this area means encouraging more research partnerships. These partnerships help connect the knowledge-generation mission of higher education more directly to work happening on the ground in communities. We can do more to support community-engaged scholarship that is co-created with community as well as scholarship about community engagement.

“I can’t say enough about the office of engagement. The person who kind of sees the bigger picture, knows the departments, knows faculty that are looking to connect with communities or looking to connect with certain types of projects. That role is so important.”

Study Participant, 2018

CONCLUSION

This study has several limitations. While a wide variety of CBO staff were engaged, it did not reach community members outside of these organizational roles, including those in more informal leadership positions and the clients of these organizations. These could be important areas of future study. There are also many equity issues inherent in these partnerships that were not fully explored, largely because it was not emphasized by participants in the focus groups.

Despite these limitations, this study offers new insight into how higher education institutions and community-based organizations can work together to build better communities. These insights and the recommendations they produced have the potential to deepen student learning, generate key knowledge, and create a sustainable future for the state of Iowa and beyond.

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