

**ACHIEVING THE PROMISE OF
AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY-HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS:
A COMMUNITY PARTNER SUMMIT**

April 24-26, 2006 - Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, WI
Executive Summary

Partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions as a strategy for social change are gaining recognition and momentum. Community-based participatory research partnerships, for example, are increasingly viewed as key to understanding and eliminating health disparities. Despite being formed with the best of intentions, however, authentic partnerships are very difficult to achieve. While academic partners have extensively documented their experiences and lessons learned, the voices of community partners are largely missing. If true partnerships are to be achieved, community partners must harness their own experiences, lessons learned, and collective wisdom into a national, organized effort.

With guidance from a planning committee of community leaders, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health convened a Community Partner Summit in 2006 with funding from the WK Kellogg Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies and the Johnson Foundation, along with support from the Community-Based Public Health Caucus of the American Public Health Association, the National Community-Based Organization Network and the National Community Committee of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Prevention Research Centers. A diverse group of 23 community leaders, each with years of experience in community-higher education partnerships, engaged in a purposeful national dialogue that emphasized lessons learned and generated recommendations and action steps that participants are taking individually and collectively.

Outcomes

Summit outcomes are listed in bold type below, followed by a brief summary of what emerged.

Developed and gained clarity on the current state of community-higher education partnerships from a community perspective: In recent years, a “community engagement buzz” and increased interest in these partnerships has developed among the higher education, government, and philanthropic sectors. However, the predominant models observed are not genuine, authentic partnerships; on the other hand, community partners are learning from each other and becoming more sophisticated, resulting in their increasing ability to expect and achieve authentic partnerships.

Uncovered community perspectives on the key insights and ingredients of effective, authentic community-higher education partnerships: Forming the basis of “**what is working**” in these partnerships, they include:

- Strong relationships of trust, honesty, transparency, respect, equity
- Mutual benefit of all partners
- Shared ownership of the partnership, its projects and products
- Clear roles and expectations of all partners

- Support from a funding agency that understands how authentic partnerships are developed and sustained
- Community partners are valued and compensated for their expertise
- Community and academic partners gain transferable skills
- Community peer networks are established for mentoring, learning and sharing of best practices

Built the case for the importance of community-higher education partnerships: By bringing together the real-life wisdom and expertise of communities with the theoretical and research-oriented expertise of academics, community-higher education partnerships have great potential as agents of social change. For *community members*, engaging in authentic partnerships with higher educational institutions can provide jobs, technical assistance and training; allow them to share their knowledge and expertise with students and colleagues in the academy; and create a larger platform for them to document and voice their concerns regarding issues affecting their communities. Participating *academics* can gain opportunities to apply their expertise and skills for the greater good, fulfill personal values and beliefs, and cultivate external funding and new areas of scholarship. *Higher educational institutions* that value and institutionalize these partnerships can benefit from improved community relations and accountability, meeting of accreditation requirements, increased student recruitment and retention, increased alumni giving, and positive public relations.

Compiled a diverse collection of case stories from Summit participants reflecting upon key lessons learned from community-higher education partnerships: In an effort to increase the number of resources available for community partners written from a community perspective, Summit participants wrote case stories of their experience engaging in community-higher education partnerships, with a focus on key messages and lessons learned.

Created a framework for increasing the number and effectiveness of community-higher education partnerships and ensuring that communities are involved in dialogues and decisions about these partnerships that affect them: The framework for authentic community-higher education partnerships has three essential components:

(1) *Quality processes* that are relationship focused...open, honest and respectful...trust-building...acknowledging of history...committed to mutual learning, sharing credit

(2) *Meaningful outcomes* which are tangible and relevant to communities. For example: eliminating health disparities, affordable housing, education and economic development.

(3) *Transformation* at multiple levels, including:

- Personal transformation, including self reflection and heightened political consciousness
- Institutional transformation, including changing policies and systems
- Community transformation, including community capacity building
- Transformation of science and knowledge, including how knowledge is generated, used and valued and what constitutes “evidence”
- Political transformation, including social justice

Reached these conclusions:

- Community-higher education partnerships are vehicles for advancing community health and social change
- The predominant community-higher education partnership models currently observed are not authentic
- Relationships between campus and community partners are rarely equal; moreover, they are largely based on individuals and are not institutionalized
- Community capacity building is often not a major priority of community-higher education partnerships
- While many communities still do not have the time, resources, or access to knowledge about how to participate in these partnerships on their own terms, community partners are learning from each other and becoming more sophisticated over time, resulting in the increased use of best practices to develop and assert equal partnerships
- Most government agency community-higher education partnership funding programs are not structured and designed to equalize the power differential between higher educational institutions and communities
- There are tangible benefits for all partners involved in authentic community-higher education partnerships.

Developed a set of actionable recommendations for maximizing the potential of community-higher education partnerships:

1. Community partners have the responsibility to share their collective wisdom and knowledge about community-higher education partnerships with community members, universities, and funding agencies.
2. Community involvement and capacity building is needed at the local, regional, and national levels. Supports are needed to develop community members as civic leaders, change agents, and community-based researchers.
3. Community partners should develop principles of participation to clarify terms of engagement and expectations in their partnerships with higher educational institutions.
4. To facilitate greater understanding, community partners must familiarize themselves with the culture and daily realities of their academic partners, and vice versa.
5. Community partners must work together with academic partners/allies to change the culture of higher education into one that values and supports communities as equal partners.
6. Community partners must work together with academic partners/allies to elevate the credibility and recognition for the life/work experience of community partners and the context/environment in which they do this work.

7. Funding agencies need to reexamine funding priorities, as well as how funding is structured, reviewed, distributed, and evaluated, to ensure that these advance and do not undermine the potential for authentic community-higher education partnerships.
8. Community partners should form a collective body to reduce the feelings of isolation experienced by many community partners and increase capacity through mentoring, networking and advocacy.

Agreed on next steps for advancing their work beyond the Summit:

At the conclusion of the Summit, participants organized themselves into these four action-oriented workgroups:

Mentoring Workgroup – Purpose is to develop and implement peer mentoring and leadership development activities that build the capacity of community partners to engage in authentic community-higher education partnerships and succeed in their community-building work.

Policy Workgroup – Purpose is to develop and advocate for policies that support authentic community-higher education partnerships, working in collaboration with existing national groups, community partners, funders, and academic allies.

Inventory Workgroup – Purpose is to compile existing resources that support authentic community-higher education partnerships so they will be more widely accessible and used by community partners, and to identify gaps and options for filling them.

Report Workgroup – Purpose is to take the written materials generated from the Summit and shape them into products that can further the conversation, dialogue, and action around authentic community-higher education partnerships. Priority products identified include: a proceedings report intended for a diverse audience, a compilation of community-authored case stories, articles targeted to academic leaders and a dialogue guide designed to assist community and campus partners to develop authentic partnerships.

Summit Participants

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