Principles of Partnerships

Adapted from Community-Campus Partnerships for Health

Agree upon values, goals and measurable outcomes
How do you foster agreement? Identify your own values, goals, strengths, weaknesses and priorities and that of your partner organization, then develop points of intersection and compromise to agree. Maintain these agreements by keeping track of progress towards priorities and goals and revisiting them.

Develop relationships of mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment
Acknowledge preconceptions on the side of both partners in order to begin the process of developing trust and respect. It will take time and effort to move beyond assumptions and preconceptions to replace them with positive experiences of a successful partnership.

Build upon strengths and assets, and also address needs
Using an asset-based model allows for planning and activities based on capacities of people and the community, which fosters an internal investment of community rather than service solely from the “outside.”

Balance power and share resources
Do efforts to collaborate with community partners lean towards the interests of the larger, more resourced and networked partner? Share resources to meet each other’s needs, resources to obtain funding and cultural knowledge.

Have clear, open and accessible communication
Being aware of the set of beliefs, values and expectations each partner holds fosters culturally competent communication in which parties develop awareness of differences, build knowledge and understanding behind those differences and gain trust within the community.

Agree upon roles, norms and processes
Acknowledge the norms and standards by which both the academic partner and the community partner function and establish the standards and processes of the partnership.

Ensure feedback to, among and from all stakeholders
Feedback helps revisit and improve the relationship and functioning of the partnership through providing 1) a mechanism for sharing information and 2) a forum to address issues that arise, new approaches to consider, progress towards goals and revisiting primary objectives. Be aware of and cater to different feedback styles and time or resource constraints—some partners may not be able to attend meetings or fill out extensive evaluations.

Share the credit for accomplishments
While keeping an equal partnership is ideal, intellectual and financial resources are often imbalanced. Acknowledging the collaborative accomplishments of each partner is one way to foster the trust and respect needed to counter this imbalance. Make sure to develop publicity with the community partner that is sensitive to community values and perspective.

Take time to develop and evolve
Your partnership may be constrained by conflicting academic and organizational calendars, but take the time to gather ample information, give enough time for response, take the time to celebrate and reflect after the project is done, but also put in time to address the future possibilities of your partnership. Could this relationship extend to next year’s course or another course?