

New Brunswick Community-University Research Partnerships Best Practices

Significant benefits ensue when universities and communities collaborate on research that results in both scholarly publication and community action. Universities create new knowledge and deliver an effective mode of teaching and learning; communities affect positive change and strengthen their capacity to leverage research for community empowerment. At their best, community-university research partnerships represent a striking opportunity for Rutgers and New Brunswick to work together toward the future.

Recognizing Rutgers' responsibility to be a strong partner, the following characteristics and best practices have been defined to guide successful, respectful, community-based, participatory research.

Characteristics of Effective Partnerships

Successful partnerships—large or small, simple or complex, research- or service-based—are all marked by common characteristics.

- 1. Mutual respect and trust** grow from the belief that each party brings valuable assets to the collaboration and values the others' interests as equally as its own.
- 2. Clear communication** incorporates both effective practices and meaningful discourse to bridge differences in language, culture, and tradition as well as address the unique organizational constraints and capabilities of each partner.
- 3. Flexibility** allows partners to manage unexpected changes while remaining focused on achieving the project's goals.
- 4. Cultural understanding** extends to an appreciation that community organizations differ from each other—and from academia—in fundamental ways, from goals and values to timelines and staffing.
- 5. Shared authority** for assigning roles and responsibilities allows all partners to feel comfortable deferring to others in support of the wider goals of the project.
- 6. Reciprocity**—valuing the goals of both the community (positive change) and the university (new knowledge)—ensures that all partners are equally invested.

Best Practices within Partnerships

The most effective partnerships incorporate practices that are known to support success and avoid problems.

- 1. Establish mutually agreed upon goals and strategies** for achieving the purpose of the research and fulfilling the needs of each partner.
- 2. Create effective communication structures** that express clear expectations, recognize progress, and allow constructive feedback.

3. Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations, and document them in a written agreement appropriate to the size and scope of the project.

4. Include letters of community participation in proposals that require institutional review board (IRB) approval, and be sure that the endorsements are detailed, project-specific, and signed by the appropriate representative.

5. Establish agreement on the disposition of data, including its ownership, interpretation, and dissemination.

6. Develop a plan for reporting research findings that is agreeable to all partners, especially when those findings might be sensitive for the community.

Structures to Support Community-University Engagement

Rutgers has support structures to assist in efforts to initiate, develop, and sustain effective, reciprocal research collaborations.

1. The Office of Community Affairs serves as a central resource for building collaborative relationships between Rutgers and the greater New Brunswick community, from connecting potential partners to creating new opportunities for Rutgers to employ its resources in addressing community issues. Contact Melissa Selesky, Director, Rutgers–New Brunswick Community Relations, mselesky@ucm.rutgers.edu or 848-932-0598.

2. The Programs for the Community website is an online resource with relevant information and a directory of current community-university collaborative programs, among other features. Visit community.rutgers.edu.

3. The Community-University Research Partnerships Tutorial will educate participants about the principles of community-based participatory research and the best practices for managing successful, respectful partnerships. The tutorial can be found at community.rutgers.edu/grants/tutorial.