

Benchmarks for Campus / Community Partnerships

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The benchmarks below represent the eight essential features of campus/community partnerships identified at the Wingspread conference. These features are grouped loosely into three overlapping stages that are characteristic of most partnerships:

Stage I: Designing partnerships based on the values of sharing and reciprocity.

Stage II: Building collaborative work relationships among partners.

Stage III: Sustaining the partnerships—linking partnerships to the missions of partnering institutions, establishing processes for decision-making and problem-solving, and installing the mechanisms for continuous evaluation.

The following represents a snapshot of the benchmarks. These benchmarks are targeted at colleges and universities.

Stage I: Designing the Partnership

Genuine democratic partnerships are: _____

Founded on a shared vision and clearly articulated values.

Partnerships proceed from the idea that participants are members of a common community that they seek to improve for the sake of their own and each other's benefit. In collaborative conversation, partners develop a vision of how their immediate environment—the community in which they live and work—can be strengthened. Resources and skills are pooled and used to help the partnership realize its vision.

Genuine democratic partnerships are: _____

Beneficial to partnering institutions.

The work of a partnership holds tangible incentives for partners. It satisfies some of their unique self-interests as well as the shared interests of the group. Concrete benefits are an important piece of why institutions remain faithful to a partnership.

Stage II: Building Collaborative Relationships

Genuine democratic partnerships that build strong collaborative relationships are: _____

Composed of interpersonal relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Strong relationships take time to build and energy to maintain, but partnerships cannot exist without them. Genuine democratic partnerships value the bonds that form between people, and acknowledge that the building of strong communities happens through networks of individual relationships that deepen with time and experiences shared. Strong collaborative relationships are intentional and are characterized by the following: trust and mutual respect; equal voice; shared responsibilities; risks and rewards; forums to support frequent and open communication; clear lines of accountability; shared vision; and mutual interest.

Genuine democratic partnerships that build strong collaborative relationships are:

Multi-dimensional: they involve the participation of multiple sectors that act in service of a complex problem.

Multi-dimensional relationships are those formed between diverse institutions in order to address a neighborhood problem, or network of problems that no one institution can resolve on its own. They necessitate the participation of multiple sectors of society and are inclusive. Partnering institutions actively seek out the unique assets of each partner; each partner provides a contribution that enables the partnership to have comprehensive problem-solving strategies. Partnering institutions should, however, be prepared for the culture clash that may occur when a multi-sector approach is used.

Genuine democratic partnerships that build strong collaborative relationships are:

Clearly organized and led with dynamism.

Partnerships function best when participants understand their individual responsibilities and how these relate to the work as a whole. A combination of clear lines of accountability and energetic leadership fuels a partnership with the clarity of purpose and the inspiration necessary to effect change.

Stage III: Sustaining Partnerships Over Time

Genuine democratic partnerships that will be sustained over time are:

Integrated into the mission and support systems of the partnering institutions.

The most effective way to sustain a partnership is to secure the support of influential neighborhood institutions, and to spread the work of the partnership throughout your own institution. Successful partnerships are aligned with their institutional missions, frequently linked to the academic curriculum and have full institutional support. The important questions to ask are: What does your institution value, and how does the work of the partnership relate to those values? To what degree should the work of a partnership link to the curriculum, and how might this link be made? Ideally, a partnership both reflects and influences the priorities of its sponsoring institution.

Genuine democratic partnerships that will be sustained over time are:

Sustained by a "partnership process" for communication, decision-making, and the initiation of change.

A strong partnership process provides ample opportunity for the sharing of opinions and ideas. This solidifies the commitment of partners to collaborate over time, and facilitates their ability to change direction and redefine their work as the world around them changes. Three major elements form the basis of a strong partnership process: a method for revisiting the premises of the partnership; a structure that allows for evolution and growth; and practices that support frequent communication both within the partnership and in the immediate community.

Genuine democratic partnerships that will be sustained over time are:

Evaluated regularly with a focus on both methods and outcomes.

A partnership can be evaluated on several levels simultaneously—the impact on participating groups (particularly the community), the products of a partnership, and the processes by which work is accomplished. The results of evaluation can be used to guide future work and modify existing practices. Sometimes evaluation can provide a context to convene partners and stakeholders. In this way, the activity itself serves the important purpose of bringing participants together in analytical conversation.