NATIONAL
Child Welfare
WORKFORCE
INSTITUTE

Learning, Leading, Changing

University-agency Partnerships

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?	This article provides four general strategies necessary for building and maintaining effective university-community social work collaborations. The goal of this article is to provide universities and community-based social work professionals with a clear understanding of factors that can support and impede the collaborative process.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

The following four general strategies emerged from the experiences of building university-community research partnerships:

Adopt a "Technology Exchange" Perspective

- Respect the unique contributions of each partner in the collaboration
- Foster learning exchange dialogues to shape research questions and methodologies, and ensure that research results are relevant and communicated to community practitioners.
- Encourage practitioners to integrate research evidence with clinical practice toward the goal of implementing evidence-informed or evidence-based practice.
- Facilitate active, ongoing multidirectional exchanges to satisfy the goals and objectives of both partners.

Adopt a Longitudinal Perspective on Collaborative Relationships

- Build on mutually rewarding interactions over time.
- Encourage agency staff to help craft the methods of the research project's implementation.
- Provide training for practitioners in empirically supported, cutting-edge approaches they can transfer to other agency programs.
- Highlight early successes on smaller research projects that led to continuing supportive relationships.

Know Your Partners

- Understand why each partner is involved in the collaboration and recognize and respect different motivations/priorities.
- Know the influence of organizational systems on the behavior of the partners, and understand contextual constraints.
- Identify the individuals in each entity who are best positioned for effectiveness in different functions essential to the collaboration.
- Determine the best ways to communicate, problem solve, and maintain mutual trust and respect to understand the role of an agency's culture on university–community collaborative partnerships.

Develop Clear Contracts and Budgets

- Create budgets and contracts that are clear and unambiguous.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

A longitudinal perspective to university-agency collaboration allows partnerships to become more competitive and respond quickly to a broader range of funding opportunities, which in turn strengthen contributions and achievements of the partnership and lead to better research and implementation of evidence-based practices. Emerging trends related to social work research and pressures on community-based organizations suggest that revisiting strategies for developing university–community research partnerships is warranted.