University-agency Partnerships


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.

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

1. **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.

2. **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.

3. **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.

4. **Develop Clear Contracts and Budgets**
   - Create budgets and contracts that are clear and unambiguous.

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.