University-Community Partnerships: New York City University-Nonprofit Information Transfer Project Report

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September 2003
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Background

Following a presentation at a well-known research university’s international conference on university-community partnerships, an academic from a Midwestern university asked panelists how to find faculty members who were willing to go into communities and start working in multidisciplinary partnerships. The advice from one experienced panelist was to start moving from thinking about the project as an academic exercise in the classroom to making it a tool for the community. Another advised her to find a “champion” among the senior faculty who had local connections and consulting expertise, and encourage that person to involve students.

At the same conference, a couple in charge of their faith-based organization’s employment training program was looking for someone to help them set up and organize their technology. They had several program sites, funding, clients, training sessions and computers. They needed technical assistance in setting up their computer classrooms to ensure that their clients had all the information they needed to upgrade their job skills. Having exhausted their networks and resources, they now were attending all events at area colleges and universities in the hopes of finding the assistance they needed. They left the conference with numerous suggestions of colleges, centers, departments and people to contact. They did not, however, find a university-affiliated “champion” to take the lead on their project.

Two weeks later, at a convening of academics and practitioners discussing university-community partnerships at another top research university, the long time executive director of a well regarded advocacy organization said that one of the reasons she was in attendance was to find a university partner for one of her programs. Despite her thirty years of active community engagement, her role as vice-chair of the city’s nonprofit coordinating council, and her active participation in many local and professional networks, she had only managed to establish a working partnership with one university faculty member – and she was now based at a university on the other side of the country.

At that same convening, an academic discussed a study he had conducted on the effects of government contracting on social service agencies, including the erosion of service quality that contracting engendered. A practitioner expressed great interest in the study because she recently had met with city officials to discuss current procurement policies and their effects on service providers. Thanks to the convening, a connection between researcher and practitioner was made, and the academic’s research now will be shared with city officials in charge of reviewing procurement policies.

These situations occurred in the spring of 2003 and are part of the growing national and international movement to increase the number and effectiveness of university partnerships with communities. These accounts indicate that academics and practitioners are still feeling their way towards learning how to make connections between the work of the university and the work of the community. Making connections between university and community is not a new phenomenon. Part of the mission of higher education has
always been to benefit the community, whether to prepare citizens to contribute to the
fabric of society, or to conduct research that would advance national or global scientific
knowledge. As evidenced in the above accounts, the connection between university and
community, knowledge and need, research and use, can be fraught with pitfalls and
missed connections. There is a need to craft and support university-community
partnerships that bring concrete and sustainable benefits to all partners.

Introduction
In the summer of 2002, Columbia University professor Nicole P. Marwell (Appendix A),
under the auspices of Columbia’s Center for Urban Research and Policy (CURP), began
planning a convening on the topic of improving access to research and information by
community-based nonprofit organizations in New York City. She subsequently received
additional support for the project from the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) and the
Public Policy Clinic of Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs. In early
2003, Columbia professor David Maurrasse (Appendix A) also joined in the organizing
of the convening.

In the course of preparing for the convening, many examples and models of informational
transfer between universities and community organizations were discovered, both
nationally and internationally. The many forms of partnership rendered an incoherent,
inconsistent and inconclusive body of research and practice. In addition, the special
nature of New York City – its size, structure, numerous universities and community-
based organizations, and the many small-scale partnerships that already exist – added
special considerations to the task of organizing the convening. The sheer number of
people and activity in such a large and active urban area requires a careful melding of
resources, energies and needs.

There is a delicate balance to be made in connecting the current – and often individually
spearheaded – partnerships of research and practice in New York City to a larger public.
The balance should ensure that practitioners have access to usable information that can
assist them in their everyday work, and that researchers are able to see their work used to
its best effect. A prime example is the research discussed above on the effects of
contracting; this is research that when connected to the right people can have a direct
effect on the city’s nonprofit funding policies. Reliance should not be on serendipitous
occasions like the convening, when the people who need each other's information happen
to be in the same place. Reliance should instead be placed on a supportive system that
can be counted on to systematically help make connections between research and
practice. Support for collaborations in New York City should ensure that current efforts
are enhanced, and that new information-transfer projects utilize models that have proven
successful. All this should be done without imposing a burdensome new structure on an
already highly active and competitive metropolis.
Section 1: Convening Goals

The overall goal of the Columbia convening was to seek ways to foster a continuing discussion among New York City academics and CBO practitioners on how to develop collaborative informational transfers that would enable CBOs to access needed information to accomplish their work more effectively and efficiently. As such, the following general purposes of the convening were established:

- Reaching out to CBOs, which often do not have the staff or time to access or research the information they need
- Establishing new kinds of relationships between CBOs and universities, based on an exchange of information and skills, and accountability between partners
- Investigating how research institutions can share information and skills in a timely and effective manner, and extend research in a direction that would assist CBOs both in developing and delivering services
- Finding ways for researchers to work with CBOs in ways that both meet their professional needs for publishable research, and provide CBOs with truly useful information

The convening was an invitation-only event. Participants were primarily New York City research university faculty who are engaged in research relevant to CBOs. It was assumed that these faculty would be interested not only in building relationships and sharing perspectives among themselves and CBO practitioners, but also in conceptualizing and implementing methods of ensuring effective informational transfers and extensions of research. A smaller number of representatives from organizations that link researchers and CBOs, as well as CBO practitioners, also were asked to join the convening. It was hoped that together the participants could determine the feasibility of mounting a coordinated effort at New York City's major universities to leverage these institutions’ informational resources on behalf of local CBOs. A full list of convening attendees appears in Appendix A.

With these purposes in mind, key discussion questions for the participants were:

- How do we best meet the needs of the people on both sides of the table (academics and CBOs)?
- What are some of the opportunities that we can build upon in order to create greater cooperation?
- What are the obstacles and disincentives to cooperation?
- What are some of the key issues in New York City that could really benefit from higher education resources?
Section 2: Current University-Community Partnership Trends, Issues and Tensions

Universities
Teaching, research, and service historically have all been part of higher education functions. From the evolution of its focus on educating the leaders of society, to its function of providing sites of research to enhance national productivity, to the inclusion of a service dimension, higher education has adapted to societal needs (Maurrasse 2001). The relative importance of teaching, research and service, however, differs according to each university’s history, mission, student body, and surrounding communities. The extent of universities’ commitments to working within their wider community environments is highly dependent upon these factors. For example, U.S. land grant universities were linked to the needs of the rural communities in which they were granted land, as well as to the productivity needs of the nation. Public universities were set up with clear missions to serve their communities through education, research and service. Research institutions are linked to a more global community as governments and corporations have increasingly relied on their research and expertise. As political and local environments have changed, and a wider variety of students attend different institutions, universities have moved to accommodate new community challenges, as well as the concurrently changing interests and needs of students.

Urban universities have been faced with a unique set of issues stemming from the urban crises of the 1960s, and the resulting deterioration of their surrounding neighborhoods. Since that time, these universities have found it necessary to become involved in neighborhood development work in order to attract and house faculty, students and staff. These efforts frequently have been opposed by non-university affiliated residents of these areas, who feared displacement and changes in neighborhood amenities and costs. Many universities learned difficult lessons about undertaking neighborhood development work without regard for the desires and needs of non-university affiliates. More recently, universities have found that it is in their own best interests to engage in development work with the cooperation and support of other community members.

Partnerships
Much of the teaching, research, and service work of universities requires the availability of community settings. For teaching, experiential learning greatly enhances classroom learning. To conduct research, many disciplines require access to populations and social settings outside the boundaries of the university. Service to the community is integral to the development of the connection between the individual and society, and is vital to producing functioning members of society. Without connections to the community, higher education institutions would be hard-pressed to fulfill their overall missions.

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are part of the larger nonprofit organizational sector, which has become increasingly important to economic and social life over the last thirty years. Nonprofits currently account for some six percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, employ nearly seven percent of the U.S. labor force (about half the size of the public sector workforce), and constitute about sixty percent of all social service providers (Salamon and Anheier 1996). Within the nonprofit organizational universe,
CBOs tend to be smaller organizations, based in specific geographic places (like neighborhoods), and serve more disadvantaged clients (Marwell forthcoming). CBOs often struggle to make do with limited resources, and rarely have the staff time or expertise to obtain, assess or evaluate relevant information and research that could help them adjust or improve their work.

Relationships between CBOs and universities have frequently been one-sided or exploitative, with researchers using CBOs to gather necessary research data, but giving little or nothing in return for the cooperation of the CBO. With better guidelines and monitoring of university-CBO relationships, however, both parties stand to benefit. Salient issues these partnerships must address are of two kinds: substantive issues and process issues. Issues of substance concern the topic areas that communities, universities, government, or foundations bring to the table, such as housing, public health, or crime. Mutual agreement on the topics to be addressed can enhance the level of commitment from both sides. Process issues involve questions of partnership structure, match between resources and needs, the scope and scale of the relationship, and the replicability of the relationship. Informed agreement about partnership processes can bring greater accountability and facilitate longer-term, more productive relationships.

Trends
Nationally and internationally, researchers, universities, governments and foundations are increasingly focusing on investigating and supporting university-community partnerships. This movement has generated a significant amount of research over the past ten years, with an emphasis on partnerships, university-based service learning and community learning centers. There is a growing literature on the ways that universities and nonprofit organizations can prepare themselves for successful partnerships, and a concurrently growing recognition of the need for reciprocity between the partners. The shared learning perspective places an emphasis on understanding the resources that each partner brings to the table, and aids in the articulation of a multidisciplinary approach. For example, technology is being linked with social work, while social capital building and civic engagement efforts are being linked with public health services. The current movement towards increasing the scope and effectiveness of university-community partnerships has been recognized and aided by the establishment of a federal government office specifically devoted to fostering these efforts. In addition, private foundation initiatives have encouraged coordination of efforts, consistency in the structure of partnerships, centralized research efforts, and expansion of faculty and university participation.

The Office of University Partnerships (OUP) was established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1994 to encourage and expand the efforts of institutions of higher education, and, among other things, to increase the scope, effectiveness, and sustainability of university-community partnerships. The OUP administers eight grant programs, including the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC). Funding for this program requires that recipient higher education institutions collaborate with the community; this includes coordinating efforts with neighborhood groups and residents, acting as a local information exchange, developing public service
projects and instructional programs, applying research to urban problems and collaborating with other COPCs.

The Kellogg Foundation, which focuses on building the capacity of individuals, communities and institutions to solve their own problems, has several programs that support university-community partnerships. One of these is the Devolution Program, which is designed to help states and communities deal with the devolution of policy making from the federal government to the state and local levels. This program currently has five scholar-practitioner teams working to develop state and local research on devolution, to be used by local policy makers and community organizations. In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation, to name just two of the nation’s largest and most influential foundations, also have developed several grant programs designed to encourage university-community partnerships.

**Issues and Tensions**

Despite efforts to increase the number and efficacy of university-community partnerships, the increasing number of scholars and practitioners investigating and analyzing partnerships, and numerous attempts at defining best practices, the field of university-community partnerships remains disjointed. In 1999, the Aspen Institute’s Nonprofit Sector Research Fund found that knowledge-sharing projects were fairly haphazard, reflecting the lack of a coordinated system to connect nonprofit organizations and other community groups to researchers (Nonprofit Sector Research Fund 1999). Victor Rubin, a former director of HUD’s OUP, commented that there did not yet seem to be a cohesive debate on existing and potential strategies for connecting research and nonprofits (Rubin 2000).

The interrelationships between universities and nonprofits, and with their government and foundation funders, further complicate university-community partnerships. Each set of institutions has its own methods of operation and organizational goals, some of which overlap, while others can work at cross-purposes. For example, numerous university procedures can impact the effectiveness of university-community partnerships. These include the traditional tension between university administration priorities and the autonomy and priorities of its researchers and faculty, which make university-wide coordination of community involvement extremely difficult. Another factor is that junior faculty involvement in community service is rarely rewarded within the university, as tenure depends primarily on research and publication success. Besides discouraging junior faculty from taking part in community work, this policy ensures that their research will be targeted only towards scholarly audiences, and have little use value for CBO staff (Stoecker 1997). There is some evidence that these difficulties can be mitigated by strong leadership from the university president, as well as the presence of other community “champions” among the senior faculty and staff of the university (Maurasse 2001).

Partnerships must not only satisfy the distinct needs of universities and nonprofit CBOs, but also respond to the demands of government and foundation funders. These demands include shaping partnerships to match the priorities of funders – which change frequently
as well as meeting performance targets. The different priorities of the various players in university-community partnerships often have the effect of diverting resources into less productive tasks, hindering partnership progress, and putting additional pressures on already overworked researchers and (especially) CBOs.

Section 3: Models of University Community Collaboration

The case studies at the beginning of this report illustrate the crucial role of individual initiative in making the contacts that may result in university-community partnerships. Despite the unique nature of initial connections, relationships that ensue between universities and nonprofits tend to follow certain distinct configurations. From a review of approaches to university-community partnerships, nine distinct models emerge. Each is described briefly below. Examples of New York City projects using each model can be found in Appendix B of this report.

1) Faculty-Directed Research

The most common partnership is one formed between a CBO and an individual faculty member for research purposes. Usually initiated by the faculty member, this approach is implemented according to the faculty member’s personal interests and expertise. A variation on this model is its use in participatory or collaborative research; here, the faculty member can serve either as the project initiator or as a collaborator (Stoecker 1997). The faculty-directed research model often transforms into or originates as a service-learning or formalized university center model, or even a service (volunteer) relationship.

2) Service-Learning

Another common model is the service-learning model. This is a form of experiential learning in which students apply their classroom learning in a community setting outside the university. A wide range of activities is incorporated in this model, from internships to consulting to other classroom projects. This model usually is limited to a one-semester time commitment, although many faculty members maintain relationships with the same nonprofits on a regular basis. This allows them to provide services through students over multiple years. The success of these partnerships is highly dependent on individual students’ expertise and motivations, and their professors’ supervision (Silka 1999). Students are directly supervised by their professors and turn in their work product to their professor.

3) University-Based Consultancy

This model relies on the use of academic expertise to help the community develop theoretical understanding about some issue of interest. This approach often is initiated by an individual or organization from the community seeking information about a specific problem. Assistance takes the form of a time-limited, project-based contract between the university expert and the community actor. Methodologies can include technical research and analysis, data collection and analysis, research in action, conflict resolution and needs assessments.
4) **Formalized University Center**
This model is usually the outgrowth of individual long-term partnerships that have developed a specific expertise and relationship between university and community. The formalizing of the relationship occurs in recognition of the long-term need of the community for a particular service from the university. A center extends the university-community relationship beyond the time-limited efforts of previous models, via a formalized entity with formal operating procedures and a mixture of staff, student and faculty participation. Centers frequently generate their own financial support through grants from private and university sources, and may even incorporate as their own 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

5) **Continuing Education/Management Training**
Many universities and colleges have extended continuing education services such as management training or seminars to individuals working in the nonprofit sector or to specific nonprofit organizations. This model involves the extension of specialized university knowledge for nonprofit organization staff development, and the cultivation of staff and organizational expertise. This training is usually carried out in a classroom setting and can lead to certificates or degrees. This model is institutionalized within the university, and can be financially profitable for it.

6) **Service: Linking Community Needs with Volunteers**
Many universities have offices, student groups, or clubs whose sole purpose is to link people associated with the university to volunteer opportunities in the community. In addition, faculty members and administrators often serve as board members for local community organizations. While volunteer contact is largely on an individual-interest basis, these associations are a way for community groups to keep in contact with and be appraised of potential resources within the university. The initial volunteer contact can easily become part of a larger, more comprehensive partnership.

7) **University Corporate Citizen**
In addition to their role they play in education, most universities also have a corporate citizen role; they are powerful economic and social players in their communities, and have an interest in promoting good relationships with other local actors. “Good corporate citizen” efforts often are led by university’s community relations or public affairs offices. They usually are the result of a university’s interest in local community and economic development for the purposes of attracting students and faculty, and making a social contribution to its city and the local workforce.

8) **Government/Philanthropy**
Government and foundation roles in the encouragement of university-community partnerships also constitute a model of partnership. The overriding interests of foundations and government are to foster, encourage and develop specific areas of research and practice. The agenda for this type of university-community partnership is set or greatly influenced by the foundation and/or government body, rather than by the
university or individual researchers. This model carries the extra punch of funding allocated specifically for the preferred approach to these partnerships.

9) Intermediary Support
The last model identified, that of intermediary support, exists when a third party steps in to facilitate the transmission of expertise or need between universities and communities. These intermediary organizations may develop their own expertise to bring to nonprofits, or they may link community needs and university expertise through various funding sources and coordination services. The expertise provided is usually management-focused and includes technical training, consultancy, data production, new venture “incubation,” or clearinghouse services.

Any university-community partnership could begin with one of these models, and then develop into another model. This type of transition would depend on factors such as general interest, capacity, outcomes, longevity of the relationship, and other extant relationships, due to the fact that each model requires different responsibilities and responsiveness from each partner. These models offer a roadmap to begin to understand the breadth of university-community partnership approaches. This is helpful in addressing one of the main questions raised by the Columbia convening: how to build synergy among the existing and often disconnected university-community efforts currently operating in New York City.

Section 4: New York City Convening

Agenda
The main goal of the convening held at Columbia University was to begin to create a structure that would foster a continuing discussion among academics and CBO practitioners on promoting and supporting mutually beneficial collaborative informational transfers in New York City. The convening participants were a mix of academics, CBO practitioners, and intermediary representatives who met on April 18, 2003 under the auspices of Columbia University’s Center for Urban Research and Policy and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute. The day was designed to elicit participants’ knowledge, opinions, needs and perspectives on university-community partnerships.

Overall, the convening fulfilled three purposes. The first of these was the identification and bringing together of New York City academics working on issues relevant to CBOs. The second purpose was the development of a shared understanding among academics and CBO practitioners of the critical points, questions and concerns involved in university-community partnerships both within and outside New York City. The third intention was to begin the creation of a primary network to develop a platform for further action.

The agenda for the convening was comprised of a morning session of introductions and presentations, and an afternoon session devoted to discussing the main themes that arose during the morning session. The morning session contained a presentation by the Public
Policy graduate students on the various models of university-community partnerships (Appendix D), and perspectives on university-community partnerships from two academics and two CBO practitioners. The afternoon discussion was intended to facilitate the initiation of a longer-term plan on how or whether to begin to implement the convening’s goal of encouraging mutually beneficial partnerships between New York’s universities and CBOs.

Presentations and Discussion
Professor Rikki Abzug of the Milano Graduate School, New School University, examined the question of the lack of connection and coordination of interests within New York City, in comparison to other cities where active city and state nonprofit coordination organizations exist. She discussed the array of New York City’s many nonprofit centers, programs, and universities and the multitude of individual efforts and resources that exist in the city. She also talked about some of the work on nonprofits in other states, including the Kellogg Foundation’s Building Bridges grant program. She identified many of New York City’s sectoral and non-sectoral intermediaries, and pointed out some of the difficulties in building collaborative networks in New York City.

Professor Michael Fabricant, of the Hunter School of Social Work of the City University of New York, discussed the consequences of researchers’ immersing themselves in their research sites, and assuming an investigative approach that reflects the community’s viewpoint. He reflected on two of his projects, one of which used the faculty-directed research model to investigate how contracting has affected the meaning and culture of social service provision (Fabricant and Fisher 2002). He also discussed his current project, which incorporates a university-based consultancy model to encourage and gauge the extent to which neighborhood-based collaboration can affect school reform.

The discussion that ensued following these two faculty presentations included remarks about the dichotomy of the extraordinary networking benefits and hostilities that occur when academics and practitioners gather. This is due to the different time frames under which academics and practitioners labor, as well as to a general ignorance of and insensitivity to each other’s worlds. The implications of imposing networks through an outside source, versus developing networks as a by-product of a working relationship were debated. The issue of the impositions of funding strictures on program development and responsiveness to community needs was also raised.

Two presenters representing CBO practitioners also presented their perspectives on university-CBO collaboration. Fran Barrett, Executive Director of the Community Resource Exchange, and Angelo Falcón, Senior Policy Executive of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, reframed the preceding discussion in terms of tangible products and outcomes for CBOs, rather than in terms of CBO needs. They both discussed what they would like to see emerge from CBO collaborations with universities, and the problems with the resources that are currently available.
Ms. Barrett discussed CBO access to the resources, research and knowledge in universities but warned of difficulties that are inherent in partnerships, especially with respect to CBO engagement. She reiterated that current access to research depends entirely on personal connections. She supported the wish for central and common access to usable research, while underlining the fact that CBOs should be able to evaluate researcher quality and credibility. The problems of student supervision also were raised in the context of assuring that students add value to the organizations in which they are placed. In closing, she noted that CBOs frequently seek access to effective and affordable evaluators to respond to the increasing demand by foundation and government funders for outcome evaluations. Unfortunately, universities do not adequately meet this request, although they are perceived as having the skills and resources necessary.

Mr. Falcón also discussed the difficulties in communication between researchers and CBOs. CBOs may have problems in understanding university research products because they usually are not the target audience for the work, and also because university products frequently are of uneven quality. He emphasized that academics often are seen in the community only while gathering data for their research, and then, at least from the CBO point of view, seem to disappear. This results in a marginalization of community members who participate in the research. In closing, he discussed what he characterized as a useful community partnership with New York University that supports a policy roundtable for people of color, as well as a women-of-color network that has potential for replication. He asked for more emphasis on implementation, as the planning of projects and collaborations often fall apart at the implementation level. He also emphasized empowering communities to obtain the resources they require without becoming dependent on university-based funding.

The ensuing discussion centered around focusing on the end product desired by the community. For CBOs, collaboration is the means by which the end is reached, not an end in itself – as it sometimes seems to be from the funders’ point of view. Many resource-strapped CBOs do not have the capacity to balance policy work, advocacy, service and the fundraising aspects of their missions. Time-consuming data gathering and networking tasks frequently take too long to be of help to CBOs in need of more immediate access to information and resources. It was noted that much information that CBOs need already exists, but researchers would rather undertake new data gathering projects than make existing work available in more usable forms. In general, it was finally concluded that while tensions exist with respect to individual versus organizational capacities, and university research and teaching needs versus CBO service and fundraising demands, it could be beneficial to view these distinct approaches less as dichotomous and more as points on a continuum that can be brought closer together with careful attention.

The convening’s afternoon session consisted of an identification of the main themes from the morning session led by Professors Marwell and Maurrasse, followed by a brainstorming and identification-of-next-steps session in which the entire convening engaged.
The key themes identified from the morning session were the following:

- Trust
- Reciprocity
- Credibility
- CBOs’ access to raw data and research findings
- Publication review by CBOs
- Managing relationships and balancing power
- Choice of research topics
- University/faculty comprehension of actual CBO needs and capacity
- Student placement
- Role of funders

In addition, several recurring questions emerged:

- Why, given the academic resources and wealth of nonprofits in New York City, haven't attempts at extending and coordinating collaborations worked?
- What are the strategies that can build synergy among the current disconnected efforts?
- How does the competition for resources to support these kinds of efforts affect attempts at collaboration?

**Convening Recommendations**

There were numerous recommendations made for further action by convening attendees, who overwhelmingly shared a recognition of the vast amount of resources available in universities, as well as the lack of cohesion and coordination of efforts within the city. The discussion centered on two main themes:

1. How to obtain, manage and communicate information between universities and CBOs
2. How to identify, coordinate and use the resources that already exist

The central concern of convening participants was that any effort towards coordinating informational transfers should guarantee an inclusive, reciprocal and non-duplicative process that would not be overly burdensome either for university personnel or CBO staff. Since the convening discussion focused on the kinds of information needed, who needed the information, and how the information should be obtained, the recommendations listed below are separated into two categories: structural and functional. The structural recommendations focus on methods of bringing together individuals and groups. The functional recommendations focus on opportunities for relationship building and activities in which individuals and groups can collectively engage.
Structural Recommendations

Three main types of structures were discussed. They all represent different methods of discovering and sharing information. The overall goal of each of the structures is to create an inclusive vehicle that involves all interested parties in developing informational transfers with mutually beneficial, tangible and positive outcomes. Several participants suggested that Columbia’s Center for Urban Research and Policy might be a viable location for these collaborative relationships in New York City.

Focus Groups/Affinity Groups/Roundtables

Several different configurations of group-based discussion were suggested as a method for universities to accurately detect information wanted by CBOs. For all of these configurations, it was suggested that a moderator with a specific agenda should focus the discussion in order to make it more productive. Group discussions would center on identifying CBO informational needs, potential university collaborators, and the structures and expectations of university-CBO partnerships. The groups could be convened based on geography (e.g., by neighborhood or borough) or issue, and could be hosted by CBOs or governmental actors. It was specifically noted that universities might not be a good location for these meetings, as university locations might discourage CBO participation. The types of groups suggested included:

- A series of mixed academic-practitioner focus groups to help assess the requirements of each group, and to create dialogue between them so as to facilitate a better understanding of each others’ work processes, needs, and resources
- The formation of affinity groups centered around profession or issue area to discuss collaborations and share information inter- and intra- group
- Roundtable discussions bringing together university and CBO personnel interested in developing policy approaches to particular topics
- Working with funder affinity groups (e.g., New York Regional Association of Grantmakers) to examine the benefits and costs to CBOs of standard funding practices

Intermediary organizations

It was also suggested that universities work with existing nonprofit intermediaries, of which there are many: coordinating bodies, coalitions and federations, to name a few. Using the current intermediary structure to build university-CBO collaborations could also have the added benefits of equalizing the power balance between universities and CBOs, and responding to the disparate needs of CBOs of different sizes and administrative capacities. University work with intermediary organizations may result in more indirect connections to CBOs, or more limited interactions as universities work with the set of CBOs to which the intermediary is attached.

Consortium of academics and CBOs with university-community partnership experience

Another suggestion was to bring together, in a loose consortium, university and CBO people and organizations who are already partnering in New York City. The consortium would share information on best practices gained from experience working in the New
York City environment, and develop methods of outreach to the wider CBO and academic community. This consortium could be modeled after the Policy Research Action Group in Chicago\(^4\) or the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia\(^5\). It might focus on developing guidelines for university-CBO partnerships that would create norms of trust, reciprocity, accountability, and power sharing.

**Functional Recommendations**
The convening participants identified two main concerns in this area. One set of suggestions centered on the effort to recruit participants to engage in planning and implementing collaborative partnerships. The other focused on tools that can be used to set up or expand effective partnerships.

**Recruitment**
Given the size and diversity of New York City and its CBOs, there are numerous opportunities for productive university-CBO collaboration. The goal of the recruitment strategies identified here is to create a critical mass of university and CBO personnel who know about opportunities to make beneficial partnership agreements, and to encourage them to share their knowledge with colleagues. This produces a multiplicative effect without involving all potential collaborators in time-consuming recruitment activities.

- Several participants noted that in order to attract CBOs to participate in any of the structured opportunities for relationship building, it would be a good idea to provide at these meetings some immediate resources from which CBOs could benefit. For example, universities could provide specific relevant content such as demographic maps and statistics, which can assist CBOs with grant writing or needs assessment tasks.

- A database of university researchers working in collaboration with CBOs could be a useful tool for keeping track of ongoing efforts in geographic and substantive areas. Regular updating of the database would be necessary to maintain its usefulness. Publicizing the database and the projects it tracks could attract academics interested in becoming involved in collaborative efforts with CBOs. University-based forums such as Columbia’s University Seminar series might serve as opportunities for such publicity.

- University resources often are publicized to CBOs in general terms – e.g., “research support available” – in venues commonly used by CBOs, such as citywide meetings on particular issue areas. While these efforts can be helpful to CBOs, they usually are inadequate to develop working partnerships. It was suggested that project-based efforts such as data utilization workshops or introductions to faculty members working on particular substantive issues would be more concrete and attractive to CBO staff. These efforts could be made more accessible to CBOs by offering them in close geographic proximity, such as in each borough.
Tools of Collaboration
A set of recommendations were made that would specifically assist in structuring collaborative partnerships to promote effectiveness, trust, reciprocity and mutual accountability. These recommendations were partially informed by a discussion of the pressure on CBOs to produce increasingly sophisticated program evaluations – a task for which CBO staff rarely are trained – to meet increasingly restrictive constraints imposed by foundations and government contracts. Convening participants recommended the following actions:

- Research specific CBO needs by geographic location and issue area
- Benchmark the characteristics of existing New York City university-CBO collaborations, and compare with best practices identified both in New York and in other urban areas
- Develop guidelines to govern mutually beneficial university-CBO partnerships. These protocols could be publicized to CBOs, intermediaries, universities, governments, policy institutes, foundations, and professional associations. These could consist of:
  - A protocol or explicit code of conduct for both researchers and practitioners
  - A sample contract for CBOs to use when engaging university researchers or consultants
  - A booklet for CBOs on how to obtain information, how to engage higher education, how to work with universities, and how to make researcher hiring decisions
  - A compendium of best practices for academics that would set a standard for researchers involved with CBOs
  - A continuation of The Loka Institute’s work on a set of protocols, principles or standards on the interactions of research groups
- Draft advisory “white papers” directed towards New York City foundations and the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers (NYRAG) to profile issues that directly affect New York City CBOs. Two key topics were suggested for these papers:
  - An examination of foundation and government evaluation requirements, including an analysis of how to set these requirements in a manner that takes into account CBOs’ differing capacities to perform evaluation research
  - An analysis of the role played by foundations in developing university-CBO collaborations, and the challenges posed by at times unequal power relationships between funders and collaboration participants
- Additional New York City conferences to discuss and implement the findings of this first convening, and to maintain and build on contacts made amongst
researchers, intermediaries, and CBOs. Subsequent conferences would seek to involve larger numbers of participants, especially CBO representatives.

Lessons Learned
The convening proved that there is a definite interest in increasing the number and effectiveness of collaborations between universities and CBOs in New York City. The discussions illustrated the interest and tensions both among academic and practitioner communities, as well as between these two groups, as they attempted to decipher what information was needed, how to share it and how to communicate it in a usable form. Many ideas and suggestions were extended as participants grappled with what was wanted, what was possible in the current environment, how it could be done and who could do it. There was a unanimous agreement that the desired inclusive, supportive partnership network would have to fit within existing structures and be easy to use.

Presentations on the different types of structures that currently support university community partnerships would have helped carry the discussion forward. A future convening should discuss the array of supporting structures available nationally as well as those currently available in New York City. While the convening did indeed advance its three purposes of identifying and gathering interested academics and practitioners; developing a shared understanding of partnership needs in New York City; and beginning the creation of a platform for further action; it also pointed out that there is much more work to be done in order to implement a supportive structure for mutually beneficial collaboration. Ideally, to fulfill the recommendations set out by the convening participants, a multi-year plan should be developed.

Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
There are many academics and CB practitioners who are ready, willing, even eager, to form mutually beneficial informational collaborations. Many of them have already experimented with numerous forms of partnerships and have used their experiences to support and nurture successful relationships. There is a vast amount of new research about partnerships written every year, which is beginning to form a solid body of work. A significant challenge is the plethora of information from so many people working in so many different collaborative forms, that it is difficult to find, synthesize, analyze and apply.

Facing this bewildering array of information is a common experience for CBOs that identify an outcome they would like to achieve, recognize that the expertise to achieve it may already exist, go out to search for that information, and find that unless they have the organizational capacity and the time, finding the information they need can take as much time as implementing the project itself. This CBO experience was mirrored by the experience of preparing for the Columbia University convening. Over the course of the planning period, more and more research and practice on informational transfers and
collaborative partnerships was uncovered. At every juncture, including during the convening and afterwards in writing the final report, more relevant information was discovered. It is clear that convening was only the first step in implementing a supportive structure for university-CBO collaborations in New York City.

The enthusiasm of the convening participants, as well as that of many who were unable to attend but asked to be kept apprised of this work, demonstrates that both CBO practitioners and university researchers believe that the formation of a structure to encourage and support collaborations would be welcomed in New York City. Two important questions that were raised at the convening, however, indicate that such an effort should proceed with caution and an understanding of the hard work that will be required. These questions are:

1. How does the competition for resources to support university-CBO collaborations affect the success of existing and new efforts?

2. Given the wealth of academic resources as well as CBOs and other nonprofits in New York City, why have past attempts at extending and coordinating university-CBO collaborations been unsuccessful?

On the first question, it is important to note that impediments to successful collaboration are not simply an inability or lack of time to find and synthesize the appropriate research. There is also the lack of a shared vision of a common outcome. The differing and sometimes competing interests of collaboration partners – CBOs, universities, foundations and governments – contribute to a shared misunderstanding of what outcomes are valued, and by whom. Organizational pressures on each of the participants contribute to these differing values and misunderstandings. For example, the CBO wants to provide a service; the academic wants to gather and analyze information and publish the findings; the foundation wants to encourage new, innovative, and eventually self-supporting programs; and the government wants the nonprofit sector to provide services with higher effectiveness and at lower cost than the government could do itself. Is it possible to pursue all of these desired outcomes in the same collaboration? The challenge is to understand and make room for a positive outcome for each partner. All of the functional recommendations of the convening address some aspect of this issue. The ensuring of an inclusive participation process, the building of a critical mass, the development of guidelines for collaborative partnerships for researchers and practitioners, the white papers – all of these are directed towards ensuring positive outcomes for all involved.

Then there is the question of why thus far efforts to systematize and extend university-CBO collaborations have not been successful. This question needs further investigation, and probably is related to the necessity of thinking through an inclusive structure in which all participants have a voice in shaping what they need. This is no small undertaking. The convening recommended several directions regarding the creation of a structure for this task. This may be the most fruitful line of investigation if a coordinated university-CBO collaborative network is the desired outcome.
Action Plan
While the two preceding questions are more long-term and conceptual, there are also some more immediate issues to address if any of the tasks identified by the convening are to be pursued. These are:

1. Who can take the lead on implementing next steps in this effort?

2. What are the strategies that can build synergy among current, disconnected university-CBO collaborations in New York City?

The first order of business is to identify who should perform the next steps. It was suggested at the convening that Columbia University’s resources and stature could make a real difference in actually implementing a supportive structure for university-CBO collaborations. CURP and the SIPA Public Policy Clinic are natural institutional locations for the continuation of this effort, as both are interested in furthering the ability of New York City to operate in a positive and inclusive manner utilizing all its resources; this includes the melding of academic and community knowledge. This effort has a similar goal: harnessing academic and community resources to work together to further increase the city’s capacity to meet the needs of all its citizens. The combination of SIPA’s Public Policy Clinic and CURP would ensure a supply of graduate students to work on the project, while CURP and the professors at the Public Policy Clinic would maintain continuity of the effort even as students graduate.

The priorities for action should be building the database of researchers and CBO practitioners involved in collaborations, and benchmarking the national and city program structures involved in supporting university-CBO partnerships (see Appendix F). Benchmarking is critical: it should examine ongoing New York City collaborations through the lens of the different models of university-community collaboration, and be done in the context of what partners expect from their relationships. Benchmarking can be particularly useful in ferreting out duplications and overlaps in the service areas of universities and CBOs that may affect collaboration. Key criteria include: the extent of collaborative efforts’ experience of learning from and sharing with the broader field; ensuring that institutions are structurally prepared to support project implementation; and ensuring that collaboration participants transcend “a small handful of especially committed people” (Maurrasse 2002). Intermediary organizations in New York City may be valuable resources in the benchmarking task, and they should be identified and invited to participate. Finally, based on the interest expressed at the Columbia University convening, the lively discussions that occurred there, and the idea of reaching a critical mass of interested university and CBO personnel, ongoing work should be shared via a second, bigger conference.

From beginning with the desire to improve access to research and information by CBOs, this project has identified the opportunity to build a structure that will support, nurture and sustain university-CBO partnerships in New York City. This report describes some
of the wealth of information and numerous unintentional roadblocks that have hindered the development of an effective bridge between research and practice. There is a fast-growing national and international movement to link research and communities, and to develop effective collaborative practices that meet the needs of all participants. This examination of the New York City case adds to this growing body of knowledge.
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1 See http://www.oup.org/about/about.html.
3 See Community Resource Exchange's report, Community-University Partnerships in New York City, for an excellent classification of available university resources that meet community needs: 1) Training; 2) Physical Resources and Infrastructure; 3) Program Specific Knowledge and Information; 4) Professional Services; and 5) Evaluation.
Services. New York City CBOs especially want more access to research and information, and access to more physical resources.

4 http://www.luc.edu/curl/prag/PRAG.html.

5 http://www.temple.edu/uccp