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Partnership Institute

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# Fostering Collaborative Community-University Partnerships

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*Commonwealth Autism Service*

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**Location**

VCU ASPIRE

**Disciplines**

Higher Education

**Fostering Collaborative  
Community -University  
Partnerships**

John A. Toscano, MSW, MBA  
President & CEO



COMMONWEALTH *autism* SERVICE  
*leading the way*

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**Workshop Objectives**

- Explore and understand the impact of cultural differences on collaboration between university and community partners.
- Explore and understand the myriad elements involved in developing, maintaining and sustaining a successful collaboration.



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**VCU defines partnership as...**

*...“a sustained collaboration between institutions of higher education and communities for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources. Examples are research, capacity building, or economic development.”*

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## Instructor Perspective

- **Informed by:**
- Course originally delivered to NPs interested in collaborating with other NPs
- Formerly an Associate Professor (17 years f/t) and now an adjunct at VCU (Social Work, Public Administration).
- Familiar with both cultures (NP & University).
- In my role at CAS we have experience:
  - ✓ Doing most of our work via partnerships
  - ✓ Collaborating/partnering with Universities
    - JMU, UMW, VT

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## Participants Summary Statistics

- Most of you are already community engaged
  - About equally divided between NP's & Public entities
  - Focused on education and/or health
- Vast majority report being very comfortable and see experiences positively
- Most view the activity as *collaboration*

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## Participants Perspective Via Survey

**Categories:**

- Building Partnerships & Networking
- Negotiating & Setting Realistic Goals
- Ensuring Mutual Benefit of Partnerships
- Strengthening, Sustaining & Expanding Partnerships
- Evaluating Partnerships

**Total:**

- 27 Wish List Items
- Santa can't do 27, but if you've been "nice & not naughty", maybe he can deliver on 17 items.

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**Building Partnerships & Networking**

- Build a partnerships between more than two organizations to tackle a broad and overarching problem. For instance, how can VCU, along with an influential nonprofit organization in Richmond and a school work together to find a sustainable method of providing a means for students in under-served communities to attend college at little or no cost?
- Hope to learn best practices and strategies that I can use to enhance my current partnerships or grow new ones.
- I hope to learn from and network with a community partner. It is a completely new area for me.
- I am interested in learning more about existing VCU-community partnerships, resources at VCU for creating community collaborations, and potential collaborators in the greater Richmond area.
- New ideas for working with community partners. Perhaps new partners to approach.
- New ideas, techniques, strategies, and diversifying my level of involvement...more research opportunities.
- Some insight and guidance on ideas and best practices for how to develop and sustain good, effective community partnerships.
- Strategies for strengthening and starting partnerships. Ideas for exploring new partnerships. Insights into how others ensure a collaborative nature in their community partnerships.
- To increase awareness of partnerships that are already occurring or may be available for our students.
- Exposure to what others are doing and tips for improving engagement with community partners.
- Learning how to form more effective partnerships. Learn about more organizations with whom to partner.
- Networking and information-sharing on different approaches and new partners.

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**Negotiating & Setting Realistic Goals**

- Red flags for limiting community partners' contribution to community-engaged research/programs.
- Guidance in how to choose appropriate partners when resources (primarily human resources/time) is limited.

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**Ensuring Mutual Benefit of Partnerships**

- Deeper, broader understanding of how
  - ✓ to be of the best service to community partners
  - ✓ to avoid feeling like I am bothering them to participate in a research study
  - ✓ to better understand how to design and conduct research that is mutually beneficial for all involved and skills to create sustainable partnerships.
- Information on new and existing areas for collaboration; new strategies to overcome the perception by many in the community that VCU treats/sees them as guinea pigs.
- Balancing the time it takes to build respectful partnerships with the community and other workload demands for faculty.

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**Strengthening, Sustaining & Expanding Partnerships**

- Best practices to maintain partnerships.
- How to move my community partnership work into community engaged research.
- I am most interested in networking with others who work in the community to determine how to take community partnerships to a new level of sustainability. There is a need to incorporate training and development of the community for long-term incorporation and management of programs.
- I hope to gain information necessary to the development of my service learning student organizations so that we can continue to develop collaborative projects with community partners.
- Moving community partnerships that have been service oriented into more research focused collaborations. How to negotiate scholarship decisions with community partners, especially author order.
- Strategies for sustaining partnerships and projects.
- Tips and strategies needed to strengthen community collaboration activities.
- To learn ways to improve the communication between our current partners & our department (student, staff & faculty).

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**Evaluating Partnerships**

- Methodologies and instrumentation for assessing the impact of our community engagement.
- Tools for creating culturally competent approaches to community collaborations, and to develop realistic expectations for both parties. Evaluation and sustainability planning.

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**Summary Themes**

- Strategies for approaching, building, maintaining and sustaining effective collaborations both micro focused (specific partnership) and macro focused (broad community impact).
- Meeting the needs of the "other", i.e. being a good partner
- Moving from service to research.
- Networking with VCU peers to learn about opportunities.
- Strategies re individual focus (faculty research) vs. student and/or department focused (service learning, internships, field placements, etc.)

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**Era of increasing “incentives” to partner between NP’s and Universities:**

1. Mission driven (both parties):
  - VCU as an urban University...
  - Significant role in leading economic revitalization
  - Community Hospital
  - Etc.
2. Shrinking resources (both parties)
3. Funder requirements for partnership/collaboration (both parties)
4. Limited expertise (NP’s)
5. Limited access to subjects for research (University)

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**Impact of Incentives on Partnering Behavior**

- What impact do these incentives individually and collectively have on potential partnering behavior and eventual partnership?
  - ✓ Thoughts/discussion via small groups (15 minutes each for small group discussion & for sharing out findings)

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**Cultural Characteristics**

- Of the Nonprofit:
  - ✓ Mission driven
  - ✓ Team oriented
  - ✓ “Doing more with less”
  - ✓ Small environment – less bureaucratic, quicker and more agile
  - ✓ Credibility – earned as a result of outcomes
- Of the University:
  - ✓ Subject matter/department driven
  - ✓ Independent practitioner within a University (academic freedom)
  - ✓ Greater resources
  - ✓ Large environment – more bureaucratic, slower and less agile
  - ✓ Credibility – assumed due to public perception and credentials

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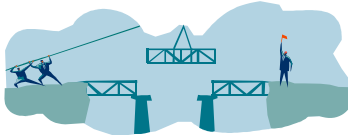
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### Impact of Culture on Partnering Behavior

Small group discussion and reporting out:

- ❑ Given that there are some cultural differences between nonprofits and universities, what are ways/strategies that can help you bridge the gap?




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### Definition of Terms

**Networking**

The exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; *specifically*: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business.

**Information Sharing**

Information sharing describes the exchange of data between various organizations, people and technologies.

**Cooperation**

A voluntary arrangement in which two or more entities engage in a mutually beneficial exchange instead of competing. Cooperation can happen where resources adequate for both parties exist or are created by their interaction.

**Coordination**

The synchronization and integration of activities, responsibilities, and command and control structures to ensure that the resources of an organization are used most efficiently in pursuit of the specified objectives. Along with organizing, monitoring, and controlling, coordinating is one of the key functions of management.

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**Alliance**

bond or connection between families, states, parties, or individuals an association to further the common interests of the members union by relationship in qualities

**Collaboration**

Cooperative arrangement in which two or more parties (which may or may not have any previous relationship) work jointly towards a common goal.

**Partnership**

A type of business arrangement/organization in which two or more individuals/organizations pool money, skills, and other resources, and share profit and loss in accordance with terms of the partnership agreement. In absence of such agreement, a partnership is assumed to exist where the participants in an enterprise agree to share the associated risks and rewards proportionately .

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### 2 Key Strategic Questions for consideration

**Already addressed -**

1. Why engage in any of the above activities - What would prompt such consideration: Practical issues, Philosophical issues, Possible gain(s)

**But -**

2. What about Risk - possible loss/cost?  
If failure, then: time, money, reputation, generalized impact on both sectors

Thoughts, experiences re #2?

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In 2004 the United Way's Collaboration Learning Project discovered that there were **Characteristics of a Successful Partnership.**

They are:

- 1. **Committed Leadership** - You have to have commitment at both the executive and the staff levels of both organizations.
- 2. **Unambiguous Goals** - A clear and precise set of realistic and attainable goals are necessary for success in this venture we speak of.
- 3. **Clearly Defined Roles** - The partnership has a specific plan on how best to use the strengths of both organizations to strive towards a set of attainable goals.
- 4. **Sustainability in the Midst of Change** - There must be plans and effort made that creates a collaborative that is not inspired by one staff person but by teams of people.

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### Strategies in support of Goals 2 & 3

• It is useful to consider developing good faith partnership agreements detailing:

- 1. Who the partners are.
- 2. What each will provide and to whom.
- 3. The parties should perform due diligence in developing the relationship.
- 4. There can be no secrets.
- 5. The agreement should have a mutual hold-harmless clause,
- 6. Responsibilities for insurance,
- 7. Maintaining each other's independence and,
- 8. Stating a beginning and ending date.
- 9. Include an authorization of release of information between the agencies for customers to sign.
- 10. The issues of grievance and disputes between the parties and the process for handling them need to be spelled out, such as who has final say on paying bills, arbitration and so on.

**NOTE: PLEASE BE CERTAIN TO FOLLOW YOUR UNIT AND VCU POLICY RE THESE TYPES OF AGREEMENTS**

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**20 Researched Factors That Make Collaboration Work - *The Wilder Inventory***

- Environment
- Membership
- Process/Structure
- Communication
- Purpose
- Resources

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**ENVIRONMENT**

- History of Collaboration
- Collaborative Group has Legitimacy
- Favorable Political and Social Climate

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**MEMBERSHIP**

- Mutual Respect, Understanding and Trust
- Appropriate Cross-Section of Members
- Members View Collaboration as in Their Self-Interest
- Ability to Compromise

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### PROCESS/STRUCTURE

- Shared Stake in Both
- Multiple Layers of Participation
- Flexibility
- Clear Roles and Guidelines
- Adaptability
- Reasonable Pace of Development

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### COMMUNICATION

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graph TD; A((Open and Frequent)) --> B((Have Informal (as well as formal) Relationships and Communication)); B --> C((Dealing with the Difficult)); C --> A;
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### PURPOSE

- Attainable, Incremental and Measurable Goals and Objectives
- Shared View
- Unique Purpose

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## RESOURCES

Sufficient Funds, Staff, Materials and Time

Skilled Leadership

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## Partnership Maintenance

**Keeping the effort on track:**

- Building trust
- Seeing the partner as a customer
- Exceeding expectations
- Meeting regularly
- Develop a "score card" to guide evaluation of the partnership
- Actively enquire about problems/issues

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## What Will I Do Differently?

• A general group discussion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

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