Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice

Report of Best Practices

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Land Acknowledgement

University of Illinois System Land Acknowledgement

"I [We] recognize and acknowledge that the University of Illinois sits on the land of multiple native nations. I acknowledge and honor the original peoples of the Chicagoland area – the Three Fires Confederacy, Potawatomi, Odawa and Ojibwe Nations, as well as other Tribal Nations that know this area as their ancestral homeland, including the Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Miami, Peoria, and Sac and Fox.

These lands were the traditional birthright of indigenous peoples who were forcibly removed and who have faced two centuries of struggle for survival and identity in the wake of dispossession. Let us acknowledge the ground on which we stand so that all who come here know that we recognize our responsibilities to the peoples of that land and that we strive to address that history so that it guides our work in the present and the future.

I further acknowledge that this land is the current home to one of the largest urban Native American communities in the United States. Native people are part of Chicago's past, present, and future, and it is our responsibility to acknowledge these Nations and to work with them as we move forward as a more inclusive institution."

University of Illinois System Land Acknowledgement

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Executive Summary

As a research, academic urban university, the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) has made significant strides to creating a resilient and sustainable campus to take action against climate change through UIC Climate Commitments. The university recognizes the need for community engagement to ensure equity in creating climate resilience.

Disadvantaged communities who have contributed the least to climate change are repeatedly targeted and affected the most by the climate crisis. Research, academic institutions are in a unique position to leverage resources to advance community needs and climate solutions. However, it is important to acknowledge their past exploitive and extractive nature when working with disadvantaged communities.

The two-day civic engagement event in April 2021 at UIC, "**Creating a Circular Economy for Just Climate Action**," emphasized the barriers to sustainable and mutually beneficial university-community partnerships. From failure to establish long-term partnerships, lack of transparency of university resources, and limited community input it was clear that the University of Illinois required equitable models to create effective and sustainable partnerships.

Together, with our long-term community partners, Urban Growers Collective, we have worked collaboratively to create solutions to the universities traditional exploitive nature through a racial equity lens.

Executive Summary

In this report, we offer solutions to reduce challenges of initiating university-community partnerships by increasing transparency of resources and creating best practices that address challenges faced by community partners when working with a public research university.

- The asset map of university and community resources of climate justice work being done creates transparency of university resources to initiate partnerships.
- The best practices, developed through community feedback, identify pathways to streamline interactions between campus and community to accelerate climate justice and enhance networks and relationships.
- Ultimately, the asset map and report of best practices will foster sustainable engagements to support community work, ensuring engagements are non-extractive towards people or the environment.

Our hope is that together the asset map and best practices presented in this report will be used to initiate equitable, resilient, and sustainable partnerships to solve climate injustices within Chicago. It is time to collaborate with communities to catalyze solutions together.

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Background

The University of Illinois at Chicago, established in 1859, has shifted in becoming a sustainable, climate action-oriented institution supported by a large network of faculty, staff and students, leading efforts in education, research and practice. The Sustainability Strategic Thinking process, published in 2014, laid the groundwork for UIC's path towards sustainability within five sustainability domains: environment, energy, economy, equity and diversity, and health.

In 2016, the university furthered its efforts in creating a resilient campus and addressing climate change. Chancellor Michael Amiridis introduced the **UIC Climate Commitments** that included efforts to be a Carbon Neutral Campus, Zero Waste Campus, Net-Zero Water Campus, Biodiverse Campus, and Teaching and Learning by 2050.

The Climate Action Implementation Plan (CAIP) is a refined cost-effective portfolio of seven strategies with 42 solutions that will achieve the mid-term goals of the UIC Climate Commitments by 2028.

UIC recognizes the severity of climate change cannot be done within the isolated context of our campus. The seventh strategy, climate resilience, highlights the **need for community engagement to ensure equity in the advancement of the UIC CAIP solutions.**

Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice seeks to advance community engagement and address barriers to creating successful partnerships for combating climate and/or environmental injustices .

Background

The event highlighted the need to cultivate sustainable community-university partnerships to advance climate justice.

This project is a continuation of the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) funded Climate Justice event held in April 2021.

The event launched a long-standing partnership with Urban Growers Collective, a Black- and women-led organization, and UIC's sustainability team.

UIC and UGC share similar goals in producing climate solutions that advance social welfare and in establishing an asset map of the university's existing resources to help advance community work.

During the event, "**Creating a Circular Economy for Just Climate Action**," community partner representatives voiced multiple concerns about:

- the exploitative past of academic research
- failure to establish long-term relationships
- lack of transparency of university resources to advance community projects

The event highlighted the need to cultivate sustainable community-university partnerships to advance climate justice.

Outcomes of the April 2021 workshop guided the team's efforts in creating tangible deliverables to advance university-community partnerships towards climate and/or environmental justice through:

- **An asset map** of university and community resources regarding climate justice
- **A report of best practices** for university-community partnerships that address community partners concerns when working with an academic institution.

This collaborative effort with UGC is building on our continued dedication to the UIC Climate Commitments to reach achievable goals to mitigate impacts of climate change and create resilient communities together.

Overview

The Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice began with a two-day event in April 2021 that launched a long-term partnership with Urban Growers Collective and highlighted the barriers in initiating effective and mutually beneficial university-community partnerships to advance climate justice. Together, UGC and UIC (Energy Initiative and the Office of Planning, Sustainability and Project Management) have been working collaboratively to create equitable models for community engagement.

Urban Growers Collective has a longstanding relationship with the community as a Black- and woman-led non-profit organization. UGC brings together residents from disinvested communities of color to nourish their physical and spiritual wellbeing and build their collective power. UGC is led by its **Co-Founders and Co-CEOs Erika Allen and Laurell Sims**.

Dr. Elizabeth A. Kócs is an environmental-behavior scientist at the intersection of social, economic, policy, and technological advances in energy, sustainability, and urban resilience. At the UIC, she has a strong focus on energy and technology for transportation, the electrical grid and smart cities.

Dr. Cynthia Klein-Banai is an environmental health scientist, dynamic change agent, and collaborative leader. Over the last 14 years she has led sustainability planning, projects, and reporting, while enhancing UIC's mission of student success, improving public health, and serving the communities of Chicago.

Graduate research assistant Cynthia Medina was onboarded to co-lead the project. Medina is a Master of Public Health candidate at the UIC with a dual concentration in community health sciences and global health. As a low-income Latina and a Southeast Side native from Chicago, her skills and background serve as a critical component to increasing effective and resilient community-university partnerships within disadvantaged communities.

Overview

The project began by identifying assets at both university and community level to make partnerships more effective and resilient. Informal interviews and questionnaires were utilized to gain an understanding of the successes and challenges of facilitating university-community partnerships and to identify additional assets.
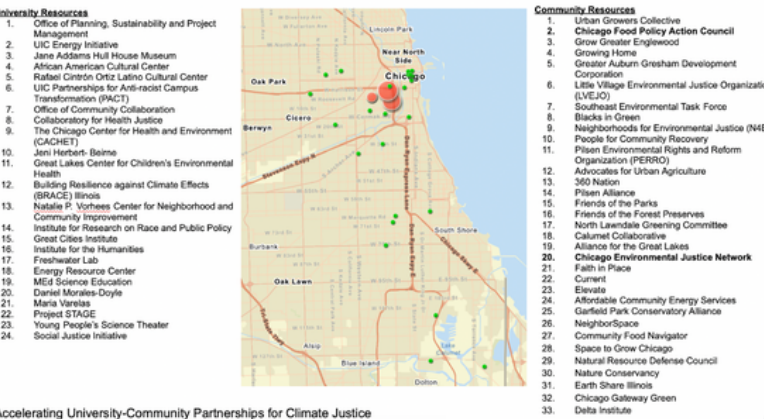
The development of the asset map has created an opportunity to increase transparency of university resources of climate justice work being done.

Successes and challenges identified by community and university assets were used to develop best practices for cultivating equitable partnerships.

This first year's research was wrapped up by a community engagement event, which was co-led by UIC's Partnerships for Antiracist Campus Transformation (PACT).

The event disseminated project findings and explored community-centered solutions to navigating institutional barriers to building reciprocal and sustainable partnerships.

The event furthered the project's goals of addressing root challenges in facilitating effective and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships to mitigate climate injustices.

Universities' Role in Mitigating Climate Justice

More than a hundred years of burning fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal has dramatically shifted weather patterns and temperature everywhere in the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported about a 1°C increase in temperature relative to pre-industrial levels, between 1850-1900 (Allen et al, 2018). The increase in temperature has caused damaging effects to human and natural environments through extreme floods, droughts, fires, rising sea levels and biodiversity loss. These never-before-seen environmental alterations are causing unprecedented risks to vulnerable communities and populations.

Specifically, to low-income countries who rely on crop production for economic development. In addition to biodiversity loss and pollution, low-income marginalized populations are characterized by economic inequalities and access to resources that intensifies their vulnerability to climate change (Levy & Patz, 2015). Many families and individuals residing in the global south are initiating climate migration. Climate or environmental migrants are forced to leave their home region due to inhabitable conditions (Lustgarten, 2020). The decision to involuntarily leave home is the final remedy after years of failed crops and food insecurity among the most vulnerable populations with limited resources. Similarly, low-income countries and poor people in high-income countries are unable to withstand adverse consequences of climate change, due to inaccessibility to resources.

Global economic growth has increased life expectancy and income in most of the world, however low-income and BIPOC populations are characterized by economic inequalities and access to resources that intensifies their vulnerability to climate change (Diffenbaugh & Burke, 2019; Levy & Patz, 2015). The effects of climate change disproportionately impact historically marginalized, underserved communities and populations that include Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Vulnerable populations are more susceptible to disease, have preexisting conditions, and/or live in communities that do not promote optimal health and well-being (EPA, 2021).

The effects of climate change extend beyond the environment, it impacts the health and well-being of individuals and the community. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of climate change and environmental justice that is deeply rooted in environmental racism. Individuals and communities who have contributed the least to climate change are targeted and the most affected by the climate crisis.

Universities' Role in Mitigating Climate Justice

The detrimental impacts of climate change, specifically to vulnerable populations, can be mitigated if action is taken now. Environmental justice organizations have been at the forefront in creating innovative climate solutions. Research, academic institutions are in a unique position to leverage resources to advance community needs and climate solutions. It's time to collaborate with communities, for communities to "catalyze local climate solutions and economic growth at the same time" (Herzl, 2021).

Solving the climate crisis begins by creating equitable climate action for vulnerable communities, who have contributed the least to climate change, however, suffer the most from it. Universities, while often having stated missions of community engagement and working for the betterment of society, are often viewed as exploitative in their approaches to work with communities and/or in their own capital development efforts.

It is important to acknowledge this history of engagement with marginalized communities', a failure to establish long-term relationships, and barriers in accessing resources. By facilitating best practices to cultivate reciprocal and sustainable university-community partnerships we can create equitable models to mitigate climate injustices. Integration and advancement of climate justice work require our community partners' collaboration and input to improve health for all.

By facilitating best practices to cultivate reciprocal and sustainable university-community partnerships we can create equitable models to mitigate climate injustices. Integration and advancement of climate justice work require our community partners' collaboration and input to improve health for all.

Methodology

We have utilized the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research asset mapping method in the development of the asset map of the existing University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and community resources in Chicago for climate and environmental justice.

Initial identification of assets began with the Sustainability Strategic Thinking process and the IPCE Climate Justice Workshop in April 2021. Inclusion criteria included any University center, department, individual and Chicago community organization who has recently, within the past 2 years, conducted any climate and/or environmental justice work.

To gain a further understanding of projects,
* **Informal interviews** were conducted.
* **Google forms** were sent via email.
* **Questions from the informal interviews and Google forms** were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the climate justice work, successes and challenges in facilitating community-university partnerships, and additional identification of assets.

A total of **22 informal interviews** were administered to **University of Illinois at Chicago faculty and staff** and 5 Google forms were completed by Chicago community organizations engaged in climate and/or environmental justice work.

Assets were mapped using **ArcGIS** software using 2 layers:
* One for university assets.
* One for community assets.

ArcGIS Story Maps was used to provide context on specific climate and/or environmental justice projects assets implemented within mapped assets.

Methodology

The asset-based community development (ABCD) approach had the community identify and delineate their assets and use them to develop solutions to a problem that is of concern to them--fostering active community participation.

In April 2022, in collaboration with Urban Growers Collective, UIC Partnerships for Anti-racist Campus Transformation (PACT), and the UIC Office of Planning, Sustainability and Project Management (PSPM) we hosted the E2S Climate Hub: Paths Toward Sustainable and Just Community Engagement in Green Era in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood.

A total of 42 people attended the community forum, with 15 University faculty, staff and students and 27 community stakeholders.

During the forum, the Climate Justice Project team shared our findings of the asset map, successes and challenges identified by university and community assets, and initial best practices through a two-way dialogue to engage the community in the dissemination process and foster active community participation.

Community feedback and internet searches supported the refinement of the final report of best practices.

Methodology

Case Study:

University of Illinois Chicago and Urban Growers Collective

The IPCE Climate Justice event in April 2021 launched a long-term partnership between Urban Growers collective and UIC's sustainability team. The University of Illinois Chicago Sustainability Team and Urban Growers Collective joined efforts to increase climate solutions in Chicago communities and fulfill the university's promise to create effective partnerships.

Urban Growers Collective is a Black and women-led not-for-profit organization in Chicago that utilizes urban agriculture as a tool to address the inequities and structural racism in our food system and create opportunities for economic development and healing.

The focus of our partnership is the development of the Green Era Renewable Energy and Urban Farm Campus. It comprises a 9-acre campus with an Anaerobic Digester and Urban Farm Site in Auburn Gresham. The anaerobic digester will divert inedible food waste from landfills to produce clean renewable energy, nutrient rich compost that will be used on site and across Chicago. The project will create jobs and that will support reinvestment into the community catalyzing opportunities for workforce development and healthy lifestyles. The relationship between UIC and UGC is exploring ways for academic/research institutions like UIC to collaborate with community partners more effectively.

UGC and UIC have standing monthly meetings to coordinate and explore ways to leverage their research to support UGC; partnering on funding opportunities; and engaging the UIC academic network and UGC community partners in collaborative community led work.
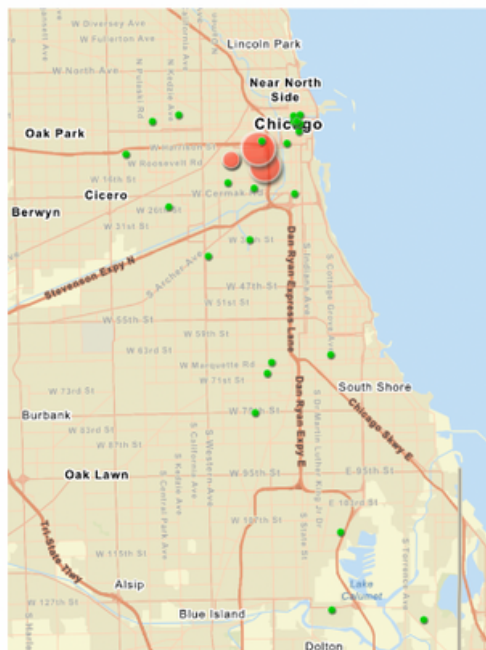
Findings

The asset-based approach applied in this project focuses on the strengths that the university and community are implementing to solve climate and/or environmental justice. Identification of community resources were originally North Lawndale and Auburn Gresham; however, it became apparent that climate injustices exist in all South and West sides of Chicago.

Overall, 24 University and 33 Community resources were identified with descriptions of specific climate justice work being done. The asset map serves to delineate university resources that can be difficult to navigate and reduce barriers of accessibility for community partners.

This map is not a complete list of all university and community resources; however, it is a starting point to initiate effective collaboration to advance climate justice. Complete list of assets identified are in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - List of University and Community Resources in asset map implementing climate justice work

Findings

Successes and Challenges

The University of Illinois at Chicago has made significant strides in community engagement. However, as mentioned by community stakeholders during the April 2021 Climate Justice workshop, the university has not practiced equitable engagement with surrounding marginalized communities.

The successes and challenges that emerged guided the development of best practices to continue the successful practices of engagements and reduce the challenges. Common themes that arose during the informal interviews, Google forms and open forum are in Table 2.

	University Assets	Community Assets
Successes	• Initiating conversations & awareness on community issues • Collaborating on community issues • Program evaluation • Leveraging university resources/expertise to meet community needs • Access to policy makers • Establishing neighborhood presence (neighborhood centers)	• Relationship building • Program evaluation • Receiving technical assistance from university • Internship programs • Strong community networks
Challenges	• Leveraging university resources • Balancing work responsibilities • Limited time • Building trust with community • Community partners limited capacity • Funding	• Coordinating meetings • Online burn-out • Lack of research in the community • Funding

Table 2: University assets and community assets perspectives of strengths and challenges engaging in university-community partnerships.

The successes and challenges that emerged guided the development of best practices to continue the successful practices of engagements and reduce the challenges.

Findings

University Assets

Common successes from university assets were bringing stakeholders together to initiate discussions and bring awareness to community issues to empower community members to address local challenges. University assets discussed collaboratively addressing community issues and creating tangible outcomes useful to the community that can be utilized after project completion. Creating tangible, useful deliverables for the community ensures relevant and sustainable positive change for the community.

Additional successes included program evaluation and leveraging university resources and expertise to advance community needs. University assets identified being able to provide data, research and program analysis, and assistance with grant writing to the community.

Due to the university's influx of access to resources, in some instances were able to leverage access to policy makers for community stakeholders. Lastly, through partnerships the university has been able to implement a collaborative community project, the Neighborhood Centers Project, and establish neighborhood presence to facilitate access to university resources.

From a university asset perspective, leveraging university resources was a success and challenge. This is primarily due to the bureaucratization among higher education that makes it difficult for community partners to access resources, receive compensation for their contribution and access to decision makers (Barnes et al, 2009).

In addition, a significant challenge was balancing work responsibilities between engaging with the community and adhering to deadlines. This left limited time to make authentic relationships with the community that is needed to build trust.

Findings

Community Assets

Community assets identified several successes that cultivated from university-community partnerships. Community assets recognized relationship building as a success among community and university members.

University partners were able to leverage their resources to conduct program evaluation and provide technical assistance to ensure the success of community projects. In addition, partnerships were able to create internship programs, a channel for students within the community to access university opportunities.

Coordinating meetings was a challenge due to busy schedules and shifting priorities. Another challenge was online burnout primarily due to the pandemic. Meetings once held in person have all shifted to online platforms.

Lack of research in the community was noted as a challenge from the community asset perspective. During the informal interviews, university assets discussed several successes in implementing collaborative research with the community and developing tangible outcomes to advance community needs.

However, as acknowledged by community stakeholders, that presence is absent indicating further efforts need to be exercised to conduct collaborative research that meet community needs.

Findings

University and Community Assets

A common challenge from both university and community assets is limited funding. In addition, inequitable practices to funding distribution were mentioned as an existing challenge from community assets.

Funds are generally distributed to academic principal investigators with community partners as co-investigators or subcontractors. This barrier minimizes communities' autonomy to directly fund community services and resources to address their needs.

The successes from community and university perspectives make it evident that community-university partnerships can create valuable outcomes to meet community needs, however, can be hindered by challenges that can be avoided.

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Findings

E2S Climate Hub:
Paths Toward Sustainable and Just Community Engagement

The in-person open forum on April 8, 2022, hosted by Green Era, a renewable energy and urban farming campus in Auburn Gresham, brought community stakeholders who convened at the Climate Justice workshop in April 2021 and assets identified on the map together.

The forum was organized by Partnerships for Anti-racist Campus Transformation (PACT), Urban Growers Collective (UGC) and project team. The goal was to share findings from the Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice project and begin establishing tangible pathways for university-community engagement.

In total there were 42 attendees, comprising 27 community members and 15 university faculty, staff, and students (see appendix A). By creating an inclusive environment, the event facilitated positive engagements among university and community members, initiating relationship building.

Through an interactive presentation, the Climate Justice Project team was able to foster active community participation and gather meaningful feedback (see appendix B). Community responses from the asset map, successes, challenges and former best practices are integrated in this final report and will guide the continuation of the Climate Justice Project.

The second activity of the forum, co-creation of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), explored community-centered solutions to navigating university barriers that hinder reciprocal and long-term university-community partnerships.

The goal was to share findings from the Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice project and begin establishing tangible pathways for university-community engagement.

Findings

E2S Climate Hub:
Paths Toward Sustainable and Just Community Engagement

The MOU activity began with a short presentation explaining the significance of MOUs and the implication of not receiving the Carnegie designation.

As only public research institution in Chicago, the University of Illinois Chicago could not demonstrate prioritization of community engagement in research structures due to lack of documentation and invisibility of community partner collaborations.

The discussion portion of the second activity prompted community-centric solutions to barriers of community engagement that includes (see appendix C):

- The need to build relationships before the creation of an MOU

- Creating a structured process for the community to identify problems they want researched by the university.

- Demonstrating that the community is valued and compensated within a budget.

- Acknowledging equal and equitable ownership of data and projects between university-community partners.

- Centering youth voices in the community to create opportunities for youth input and engagement

- Intentionally being transparent, communicating without jargon (acronyms).

Findings

Based on discussions, it is evident that research academic institutions, like UIC, need to move towards transparent, accountable and accessible processes that are campus-wide. These efforts established an interest in developing equitable frameworks towards community engagement to foster effective university-community partnerships among all participants.

The open forum organizing team will be holding a second open forum in the fall of 2022 to continue the process of creating equitable pathways for university-community engagement guided by community feedback and long-term partnerships. Based on our bi-weekly fall forum meetings, we have co-collaborated a four part framework that are areas for improving university-community engagements across the span of long-term partnerships:

1. **Coalition and Capacity Building**
   a. Decreasing competition on funding opportunities and siloed projects/ research across UIC and community based organizations (CBO). Increasing university support towards peer learning among CBOs.
2. **Acknowledging and Accessing Community Knowledge**
   a. Acknowledging, valuing and amplifying community members as expertise within their community. Ensuring the community is equitably compensated for their contributions and that there is an equitable exchange of knowledge.
3. **Resource Development**
   a. Increase equitable engagement among CBOs and researchers when collaborating on opportunities. This includes recognizing existing barriers and/or processes that challenge CBOs full inclusion, and CBOs capacity to be involved. Continue leveraging university resources and expertise to empower community needs.
4. **Implementation and Praxis**
   a. As we begin to transform equitable pathways towards university- community engagement, what does it look like in practice? Incorporating the community within projects to expand on traditional research, and consider the impact findings have on CBOs.

The fall forum in 2022 will examine these areas and provide tangible pathways for meaningful and intentional engagements among university and community organizations. In addition our team will be providing transparent and accountable explanations of existing systems that hinder equitable engagements.

Recommendations

Best Practices for University-Community Partnerships

Successes and challenges identified by community and university assets, the project's team experiences with long-term partner Urban Growers Collective, community feedback and literature searches influenced the development of best practices to engage in resilient, effective, and sustainable community-university partnerships to catalyze climate solutions in marginalized BIPOC communities.

These practices serve to address challenges faced by community partners concerns when working with a public, research university, identify pathways to streamline interactions between campus and community to accelerate climate justice, and enhance networks and relationships.

These 6 best practices are encouraged to be incorporated to facilitate effective and sustainable university-community partnerships to mitigate climate inequities (see Figure 2).

Build Thoughtful Inclusivity. Intentionally build partnerships with marginalized communities; create an inclusive environment to work collectively in addressing community needs.

Establish Expectations. Have a clear understanding of roles and goals for the partnership. Establish expectations and any limitations from both parties.

Commit to Long-term Sustainability. Begin building relationships with the community before launching any project. Commit to and sustain partnerships long after project completion.

Prioritize Partnerships. Coordinate regular, scheduled meetings to share resources and opportunities to continuously prioritize partnership.

Develop Equitable Funding. Create equitable funding distribution by authorizing communities to allocate funding to directly support their needs.

Leverage Resources. Recognize positionality and leverage resources to be more accessible, applicable & transparent to power community needs.

Best Practices

Figure 2: Best Practices of University-Community Partnerships

Best Practices

1

Build Thoughtful Inclusivity.
Intentionally build partnerships with marginalized communities; create an inclusive environment to work collectively in addressing community needs.

- Building thoughtful partnerships with surrounding underserved BIPOC communities can be an effective strategy for creating ongoing opportunities that meet the needs of the community (Allahwala et al, 2013). In every partnership, we should practice in the process of listening and working with our community partners in a meaningful manner to address important issues that are of concern to them (Allahwala et al, 2013; Collaboratory for Health Justice, 2020). As experts of their own community, the knowledge they possess is invaluable to solving community issues. Communities have the "right to participate in decisions that impact their lives," and take a leadership role in creating solutions (Climate Justice Alliance, 2019). By intentionally building an inclusive environment for all traditions and cultures, partnerships can work collectively to develop community-centered climate solutions.

Establish Expectations.
Have a clear understanding of roles and goals of the partnership, establish expectations and any limitations.

2

- It is critical that university partners are fully transparent and honest throughout the entire partnership to maintain a trusting relationship. With any partnership, aligning goals, communicating expectations and limitations can minimize conflicts. There are strategies to prevent tensions between partners, however they are unavoidable, committing to work through challenges is essential to a successful long-term partnership. Having a clear line of communication, mutual transparency, and commitment to work through challenges, will build the foundations to effective partnerships.

3

Commit to Long-term Sustainability.
Begin building relationships with the community before launching any project. Commit to and sustain partnerships long after project completion.

- To create a strong foundation of trust within the partnership, begin creating a relationship with community partners before launching a project. Appearing at community events can establish commitment to the community in a non-threatening manner. In addition, partnerships extend beyond a single project and/or funding period. Effective and resilient university university-community partnerships are strengthened by on-going collaborations that empower community needs (Detroit URC Board, 2011).

Best Practices

4

Prioritize Partnerships.
Coordinate regular, scheduled meetings to share resources and opportunities to continuously prioritize partnerships.

- Given time conflicts and various responsibilities, prioritizing partnerships is critical to partnership development. Creating authentic long-term partnerships extends beyond appearing at community events or co-creating a research project. Adopting different forms of engagement can advance relationship building with community partners (via online and in person). A reciprocal, sustainable partnership begins with dedicating time to partnership by committing to regular scheduled meetings to share resources, information, and opportunities to leverage community partner needs (Baker & Meletzke, 2021). University tenure criteria can often hinder the development of creating authentic engagements with the community. University faculty are not given recognition for their involvement with the community, having to surpass their expectations of teaching and research. To bridge the gap, university staff has taken initiative in building relationships with the community. Prioritizing partnerships can lead to developing authentic long-term partnerships and create more opportunities for the community.

Equitable Funding Distribution.
Create equitable funding distribution by authorizing communities to allocate funding to directly support their needs.

5

- Partnerships should consider collaborating on funding opportunities to support their shared vision, embedding community partners within the proposal. To reach an equitable level of funding, university partners should be willing to allocate a percentage of funds to equitably compensate and recognize community partners and their organizations who are experts of their community and knowledgeable of their needs. Establishing equitable funding distribution will maximize community resources where inequities are prevalent and strengthen trust between partnerships for future opportunities (Climate Justice Alliance, 2019). This includes co-ownership of the intellectual property of the project. Research and data co-developed belongs equally to academic researchers and community partners. Within partnerships, we should invite community partners to share ownership and authorship of co-produced research and data, within processes, legal agreements, and publications (Chicago Beyond, 2019). Creating opportunities for equal ownership and leadership can develop equitable practices and alleviate power dynamics imposed by research, academic institutions.

Best Practices

6

Leverage Resources.
Recognize positionality, as a research-academic institution, and leverage resources to be more accessible, applicable, and transparent to power community needs.

- As research, academic institutions with access to resources and experts, we should commit to intentionally leveraging our resources to support community needs. Through access to resources and expertise, university-community partnerships can work collectively in creating solutions to transform historical and present social inequities (Climate Justice Alliance, 2019). Projects should produce tangible outcomes that are culturally relevant, accessible to the public and applicable to community context (Chicago Beyond, 2019; Collaboratory for Health Justice, 2020). The dissemination of project findings should be adapted for various audiences to increase relevancy and integrate community feedback (McDavitt et al, 2016). Universities possess the capacity to leverage resources and create tangible deliverables to create opportunities for the community.

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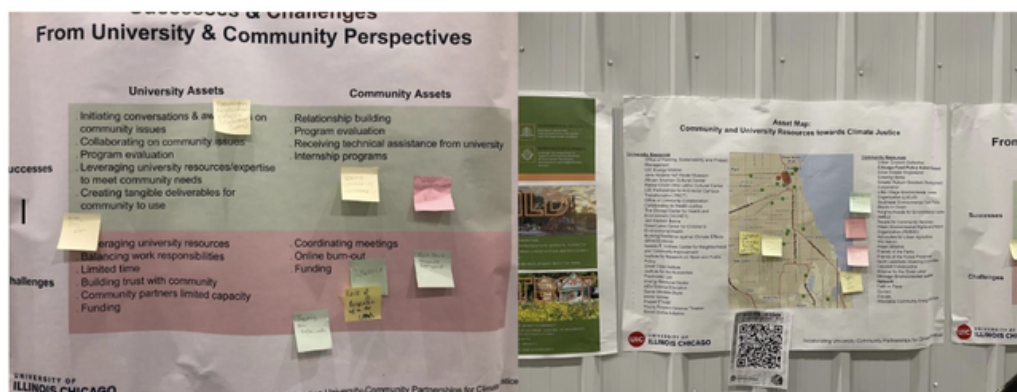
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Appendix

A. Accelerating University Community Partnerships: Paths toward Sustainable and Just Engagement open forum at Green Era Campus on April 8th

B. Community & university feedback from Climate Justice Project during the open forum

Appendix

C. Community & university feedback from MOU activity during the open forum

Activity Two:
- Addressing community needs that are not only research-based.
  - mental health, food insecurity
- Intent, transparency, + purpose of MOUs
  - make sure folks understand the language in MOU. Make the lang. accessible
- Making sure results are accessible + usable for community
☆. UIC + other universities develop an IRB specific to community engagement.
  - est. best practices + standards for CE.
  - Transition away from episodic CE.

Activity 2:
- Having a mechanism for community to communicate their research needs are to institutions of higher ed.
- Communicate how universities structure their budget.
- Data ownership → how does data get shared btw. research institutions + community partners
- Building relationships w/ community from the outset
  - important step before MOU