

Bringing All Partners to the Table: The Virginia Commonwealth University and Carver Community Partnership

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Abstract

Creating a university-community partnership generates ideas, resources, and unanticipated benefits for those who come to the table willing to trust the process. Virginia Commonwealth University and the Carver Community share the many accomplishments from their partnership and the lessons learned from the journey. Reflections of participants and current literature capture the learning that has occurred from a partnership that grew from grassroots community organizing strategies.

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the neighborhood along its northern border, the Carver community, have forged a partnership that strives to enhance the well-being for all who live, work, and study within our shared urban environment. This growing, land-locked research university and struggling urban neighborhood with a long and rich history have chosen to work as partners rather than adversaries. They have pulled their chairs up to a table where frank dialogue over the years has fostered individual and institutional relationships and collective action for change in the neighborhood and within the university.

In 1996, the Carver-VCU Partnership was launched in an agreement between Dr. Eugene Trani, President of VCU, and Ms. Barbara Abernathy, President of the Carver Area Civic Improvement League (CACIL). The partnership established a Steering Committee composed of university and community representatives, and VCU's Office of Community Programs was designated as the Partnership's administrative home. The efforts of the Partnership have been richly rewarded. For Carver, crime has dropped dramatically, a master plan has been developed to guide the future of the neighborhood, a play has been written and performed to document and share the history and resolve of the community, access to health care for children and adults has increased, and children at Carver school have access to a greater range of educational opportunities. For VCU, undergraduate and graduate students have gained real-world learning experiences, faculty have participated in interdisciplinary activities with support from new external funding sources, and the institution has gained a sensitivity

and appreciation for its role as a neighbor and partner in an urban community. In addition, legislation was passed in the Virginia General Assembly supported by findings from studies conducted on blighted and tax delinquent properties in the Carver neighborhood, and the law now requires fewer years to elapse before Virginia's cities can take action on abandoned properties.

With the birth of this partnership came an opportunity for all involved to chart a new course for long-term collaboration. In this paper we describe the process of bringing various parties to the table to develop a plan of action and a mechanism for monitoring results; we identify our model for program delivery; describe interdisciplinary projects; review the factors that have contributed to the partnership's success; and finally, discuss venues for partnership sustainability.

University-Community Partnerships

Partnerships have been defined as two or more parties who make a commitment to invest resources in joint pursuit of a mutually beneficial end. By implication, each party to a partnership has something at stake—a contributed asset, whether money, expertise, time, data, or reputation—for which they expect some benefit in return (The Urban Institute 2002). Campuses and community partners possess and contribute very different assets, and benefit in noticeably different ways. Based on an analysis of university-community partnerships that have participated in the Community Outreach Partnership Center program of the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Urban Institute developed a framework of factors that relate to the integration and institutionalization of community partnerships. From their assessment, successful partnership performance depends centrally on the organizational capacity of the partners (i.e., the ability to bring the necessary resources to the table and the ability to negotiate and problem-solve together).

The process of bringing together partners to forge bonds that will result in mutually beneficial outcomes is the critical challenge in the early stages of partnership development. This process is especially formidable when the partners involved come from very different backgrounds, have access to different resources, have a difficult or challenging history, and may have very different outcomes in mind for the partnership. How can it be done? Guidelines on partnerships between communities and institutions of higher education have been developed by organizations such as Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, HUD's Office of University Partnerships, and the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities. Several core tenets emerge from these guidelines:

- **Respect:** each partner understands and acknowledges the value and the opportunity it has to learn as much as it has to offer;
- **Responsiveness:** each partner hears the pressing needs and formulates acceptable strategies using available resources;
- **Shared vision and mission:** each partner contributes to the mission's creation followed by a clear understanding of roles and processes for partnership activities;

- Organizational capacity: each partner, starting with its leadership, claims the partnership's mission as central to the mission of its organization and recognizes the long-term commitment; and
- Mutual benefit: each partner gains from the relationship and the credit for accomplishments is shared.

The process for establishing campus-community partnership has been described by Strand and colleagues (2003). They outline ten principles that comprise a framework for successful campus-community partnerships. At the beginning, there is the entering into partnerships where the partners share a worldview, agree about goals and strategies, and have trust and mutual respect. This phase evolves into conducting partnerships where the partners share power, communicate clearly and listen carefully, understand and empathize with each other, and remain flexible. Finally, the outcomes of the partnership are determined by community and campus partners when they satisfy each other's interests or needs, have their organizational capacities enhanced, and adopt long-range social change perspectives (p. 29). These principles are interrelated and provide a conceptual tool for understanding the key features of successful community-campus partnerships.

In a recent presentation entitled "Transforming Communities, Transforming Higher Education" (2003), VCU President Dr. Eugene Trani asserts, "Forward-looking universities have partnerships with their most important communities as a defining feature of institutional identity." He notes that linking basic and applied research is an obligation of the entire university and that the commitment to partnerships extends beyond the academic units to include administrative units as well, such as the campus police department and athletics. The successful university-community partnership focuses on the significant issues that face the city-at-large and its neighborhoods. Hence, if the university is truly responsive to its community, it will have a material impact on the quality of life of the community and will be seen as indispensable by leaders of the community. Through community partnerships, universities pursue creative scholarship that invokes interdisciplinary endeavors that are more effective and better able to address the pressing issues of our contemporary society.

These recent conclusions reflect the learning of a university leader who has been willing to pursue and invest in a number of university-community partnerships since the early 1990s, including the partnership with the Carver neighborhood. VCU is in the company of more than half of the nation's institutions of higher education that are located in central cities or in their immediate surroundings (CEOs for Cities 2001). Campuses are intertwined with their communities, giving them the opportunity and responsibility to contribute to the community's economic growth, as well as the educational, health, and social service needs of its residents.

Background about Partners

Virginia Commonwealth University. Virginia Commonwealth University is an urban public research university with 26,000 students. Its academic campus borders three residential neighborhoods—to its north (Carver), west (The Fan) and south (Oregon Hill), and a mixed business/industrial area to its east. VCU has a history of strained and often callous relationships with its neighbors. In the early 1990s VCU had prepared a master plan that involved expansion into the Oregon Hill community. When Dr. Trani was invited to campus to accept the position of university President, he was met with irate Oregon Hill residents opposing the master plan. One of his first actions as president was to scrap the master plan and establish a Community Advisory Board to foster better communications between the university and its neighbors. Over the past decade the need for dialogue has been especially critical as the university has experienced steady growth requiring physical expansion, especially for student housing.

A segment of the university's mission statement declares that "VCU is inseparable from the urban environment in which it resides. Extensive interaction with the Richmond metropolitan region yields a two-way flow of benefits between University and community, and generates capabilities for addressing urban issues throughout the nation and world." One strategy to fulfill VCU's mission was the establishment of the Office of Community Programs (OCP) in 1995 to provide VCU with a centralized administrative unit focused on community service and community outreach programs. This new unit was an outgrowth of the implementation plan generated by the *Strategic Plan for the Future of Virginia Commonwealth University* that was approved in 1993. The Office of Community Programs supports and facilitates innovative teaching, service, and research opportunities by creating partnerships on campus and with community-based organizations. In keeping with VCU's mission, the office facilitates and coordinates innovative academic programs, on and off campus, to enhance the community's access to VCU; provides technical assistance and logistical support for faculty and student engagement in the community; and creates opportunities for multidisciplinary community-based collaborations that integrate research, teaching, and service. OCP reports directly to the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. The office administers a variety of programs linked to the community such as service learning, the Community Service Associates Program, VCU AmeriCorps and America Reads, the Virginia Mentoring Partnership, and the Carver-VCU Partnership, which is linked to a HUD Community Outreach Partnership Center and New Directions grant.

Two programs that have been tremendous resources for the Carver-VCU Partnership have been the Community Service Associates Program (CSAP) and service-learning classes. CSAP provides opportunities for faculty to assist with projects of neighborhood groups, civic associations, governmental or professional organizations, and nonprofit agencies. Dr. Trani launched this program upon his arrival at VCU in 1990. Since that time there have been 260 faculty-led projects from 44 different departments. Each project is individually designed to be of mutual benefit to the

agency and the faculty member. Faculty have provided expertise on program evaluation, strategic planning, marketing studies, board development, small business development, youth mentoring, community health projects, design of homeless shelters, and many public school initiatives. As a Community Associate, faculty members bring expertise to bear on problems or issues of importance to the community while concurrently receiving the benefits of hands-on experience that relates directly to their teaching or research. In return for a semester of service, the faculty member is released from teaching one course and the department is compensated to hire an adjunct. Community Service Associates have participated in projects with the Carver community and projects associated with Carver continue to receive high priority.

OCP supports service learning primarily through its Service Learning Associates Program, which encourages faculty to develop service-learning courses in their disciplines by providing training and logistical assistance. Faculty contribute service to the Richmond community by extending their expertise through the direct service of their students. Eight faculty members per year receive faculty development support to participate in the program. They spend one semester developing the course and then offer the course the following semester. To date, several service learning courses have been developed with the service projects located at Carver Elementary School and in the community.

The Carver Community. Currently, the Carver community is primarily a residential neighborhood; however, some commercial and industrial land uses exist within its boundaries. The area was established in the 1840s and quickly developed into a working class neighborhood. It became the home for freed slaves and eastern European immigrants. At one time the neighborhood had a population of 5,000 residents, but by the 1990s that number had dwindled to fewer than 1,000.

When the partnership began in 1996, the Carver neighborhood had numerous challenges. It had the highest rate of vacant housing in the City of Richmond with a rate of 29.6 percent, equivalent to 230 vacant properties. Carver ranked the highest in violent crime and second highest in property crime among the 33 neighborhoods in the city's third precinct. The unemployment rate was 12.4 percent; twice the average of the city, and 18 percent of the families fell below the poverty line. Carver Elementary School served 1,000 children, 98 percent of whom qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. The majority of these elementary school students reside in Gilpin Court, the largest public housing community in Richmond. Carver students' scores on standardized tests were among the lowest in the Richmond school system.

Today the neighborhood is experiencing remarkable transformation. The social conditions that contributed to the community's loss of population are reversing. According to the 2000 Census, the vacant housing rate has dropped to 23.1 percent. Unemployment has dropped to 10.3 percent, and the number of families below the poverty level has been reduced to 14.7 percent. Over a three-year period, the neighborhood experienced a 35 percent drop in violent crime and 53 percent reduction

in property crime. The community remains primarily minority, with 94 percent self-identifying as African American and 5 percent reporting to be European American. Due to changes in the school zones, the student population at Carver Elementary has been reduced to 700 students, but the demographics remain about the same.

As predicted by city officials when the partnership began, if social conditions improve, development will follow. In recent years, restoration of aging homes and a citywide effort to attract new residents has spurred renewed interest in Carver. The City of Richmond has invested resources in the redevelopment of Carver through its Neighborhoods in Bloom program. This nationally recognized program concentrates Community Development Block Grant funds into targeted neighborhoods. The Carver-VCU Partnership provided assistance with the Carver community's application, and Carver was selected as one of the six targeted neighborhoods. Through this program, blighted properties have been purchased and either demolished or, if possible, restored and sold. Urban homesteading and newly constructed homes on cleared lots have also attracted new home ownership. Recently, two community development corporations have invested in land for the building of approximately 22 new homes. In addition, private developers targeting a burgeoning student population at VCU have been drawn to the neighborhood with a keen interest in converting old warehouses and industrial buildings into apartments. Development activities targeting VCU students have presented a new range of concerns for long standing community residents.

Establishment of Partnership

The impetus for the partnership began when Ms. Barbara Abernathy, President of the Carver Area Civic Improvement League (CACIL), attended a session on universities and communities at a Neighborhood USA conference in the mid-1990s. Expecting to learn ways to deter the university from northward expansion, Ms. Abernathy was surprised that the session was focused on ways in which neighborhoods and urban universities could collaborate to address challenges that communities face. Armed with this new perspective, Ms. Abernathy approached Dr. Trani about the establishment of a partnership between the Carver community and the university that would provide assistance to the community to offset the growing inconveniences that result from university encroachment. In a public statement announcing the partnership, Dr. Trani stated, "It is critical that we build partnerships, not fences, between the University and our neighbors." Rather than viewing the shared physical boundary between VCU and Carver as a dividing line between an academic community and an inner-city neighborhood, they agreed that a collaborative could be established that would have far-reaching positive outcomes for the neighborhood, the university, and the city of Richmond. For VCU, the partnership would provide opportunities for faculty and students to become involved in the real challenges of urban communities and to apply their professional skills to the creation of solutions. For the Carver community and Carver Elementary School, the partnership would provide new resources to address problems and concerns, and in so doing, create a stimulating learning environment for all participants. For the City of Richmond, the partnership represented a new model of

collaboration committed to improving the quality of life for a segment of the city. After the meeting between Dr. Trani and Ms. Abernathy when the partnership was conceived, the university leadership and city officials publicly expressed support for the Carver-VCU partnership and it became a university priority.

One of the first steps in this partnership was the establishment of the Carver-VCU Partnership Steering Committee. Dr. Grace Harris, then Provost, appointed VCU representatives, which included faculty and staff from the Schools of Education, Social Work, Business, Nursing, Pharmacy, the Departments of Urban Studies and Planning, Psychology; the Division of Student Affairs, and the VCU Police. CACIL identified community residents who represented the racial and economic diversity of the community. The Committee also included the principal, a teacher, and guidance counselor of Carver Elementary School and representatives from the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA), Department of Social Services, and Department of Community Development. Dr. Trani also committed funds for a special coordinator position at the university dedicated to the partnership and gave the partnership an administrative home within VCU's Office of Community Programs. He was very clear in his message to the university community that the partnership was an important university-wide initiative and he expected all units to participate in any way feasible. This message was articulated to the council of deans and communicated through various university publications. This strong and supportive message from the university's president served to encourage and affirm participation of faculty, students, and staff in the array of partnership activities.

The steering committee was inducted in a formal meeting attended by VCU's president, provost, and other administrative leaders as well as the neighborhood's member of Richmond City Council and the Director of the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. These leaders shared their expectations for the steering committee and charged the committee with its responsibilities. This public launching of the partnership provided a critical mandate of support to all participants. The steering committee would be responsible for setting the priorities for the partnership, identifying resources, and monitoring the activities. The steering committee would also select and hire the person to serve as the partnership coordinator. Many of the original steering committee members remain active to this day.

The steering committee met regularly in places where everyone felt comfortable such as the local church, the School of Social Work, and Carver Elementary School. These initial meetings focused on getting to know each other and brainstorming about the community and university needs and assets. In one session a facilitator helped to focus on the partnership vision and developed a focus question that would be posed to the larger community. This session was followed several months later with a large community meeting at the church. At this spaghetti dinner gathering of 90 people, including the city manager, the school board representative, and key nonprofit leaders, an interactive exchange resulted in identifying critical issues and potential resources from the university and the community. This input served to direct the steering

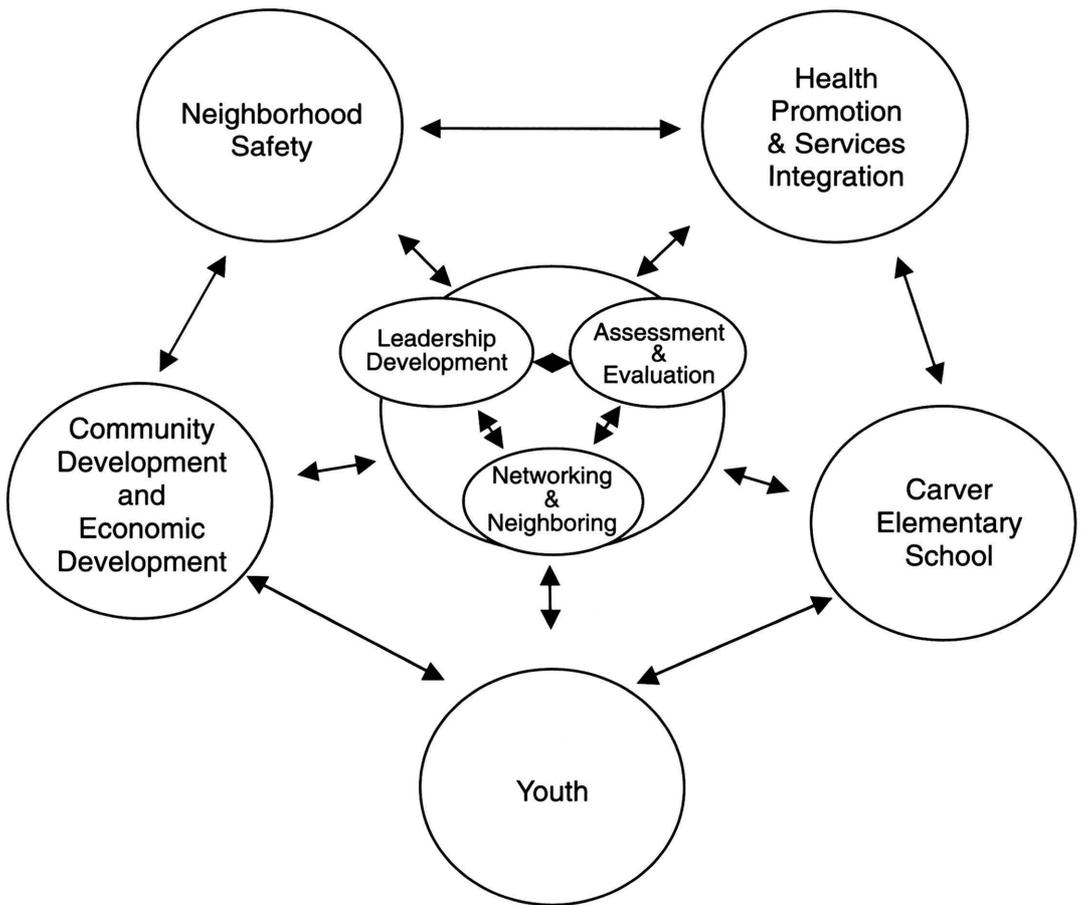
committee in setting priorities for the partnership and strategies for implementing activities that were sensitive to the community. The steering committee continues to be a vital force in directing the partnership and its agenda.

During the first year of the Carver-VCU Partnership, the Steering Committee developed its mission to “create a shared urban community with a commitment to improving the community’s quality of life including its health, community development, youth development, safety, and community school; and with a commitment to extending the experience of the community into the classroom and the university.”

An initial issue for the partnership was VCU’s potential encroachment into the neighborhood. Dr. Trani made a pledge that was adopted by the Board of Visitors that stated that VCU would not build or invest in any properties north of Marshall Street, the first residential street of the neighborhood. Early in the partnership VCU approached the neighborhood about the construction of a student apartment complex on the south side of Marshall Street. VCU offered to set aside space facing the community that could be used as a community center. With input from the community, the space was designed with a multi-purpose area, a computer lab, a police precinct office, and a suite of offices for the partnership coordinator and outreach programs.

In September 1997, the partnership received a grant from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop a Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC). With support from the grant, the partnership focused on two sets of activities. The inner set involved three core activities: Networking and Neighboring; Leadership and Community Training; and Assessment and Evaluation. These activities supported and provided the core structure of the partnership. The second set of activities targeted the specific priorities, challenges and concerns expressed by Carver community residents. These include a focus on (a) Neighborhood Safety, (b) Community and Economic Development, (c) Youth, (d) Community School, and (e) Health Promotion and Services Integration. The fifth focal area, Health Promotions and Services Integration, was based on a desire for improved access to and effective utilization of mental health, physical health, and social services for Carver residents and the children and families served by Carver Elementary School. Each of these five focus areas was assigned to a committee with shared leadership between a Carver community resident and a VCU faculty or staff member.

**Carver- VCU Partnership
Figure 1**



The inner set of activities focus on capacity building within the community as well as determining needs to be addressed and monitoring partnership progress. The assessment and evaluation activities have utilized an array of methodologies including focus groups, town meetings that incorporated audio response technology, and concept mapping (Allison et al., 2004). The intent was that the areas of leadership development and networking and neighboring would occur early in the partnership and support the work in specific content areas. Ironically, networking and leadership building activities have been the most difficult to launch and are just now in the implementation stages. Hence, the major accomplishments have occurred within the outer circle of partnership activities.

Partnership Activities

Each committee took ownership of the capacity building activities that would meet the expressed needs of the community. The committees broadened their membership to include additional residents and representatives from organizations who could contribute to their activities. While the committees developed their independent tasks

and monitored them through regular meetings, the steering committee meetings provided a forum for exchanging information that often led to beneficial linkages. For example, the Economic and Community Development Committee oversaw a study of blighted and tax delinquent properties in the neighborhood. The final report listed the properties and their owners. The VCU police officers on the Safety Committee used this report to contact owners of vacant properties to request permission to set up stakeouts to monitor illegal drug activity, which led to a number of arrests. This example represents one of many unanticipated benefits that result from interdisciplinary efforts.

Neighborhood Safety. The partnership established the goal to improve the quality of community life by decreasing actual and perceived neighborhood risks. In addition to funding from the COPC, the VCU Police Department received a grant from the U. S. Justice Department to increase the number of community policing officers in the area, including a bike patrol. The department received jurisdiction of the Carver community in 1998 and that gave it full policing authority. The police have aggressively closed down open-air drug markets, crack houses, and nip joints. They assist with security at Carver Elementary School and have developed an adopt-a-senior program. The results of the VCU police involvement with the Carver community have been tremendous. In a three-year period, major crime in Carver decreased by 48 percent, with violent crime dropping 35 percent and property crime dropping 53 percent. While violent crime in the city dropped at about the same rate as Carver, the property crime drop was only 20 percent for the city. More telling was the Carver residents' response to their perceptions of helpfulness of police in the neighborhood. In 1998, 45 percent of Carver residents agreed to the statement, "Police are helpful in the Carver community." In 1999, when the question separated VCU Police from the Richmond police, 52 percent agreed that the Richmond police were helpful and 78 percent agreed that the VCU Police were helpful.

The VCU police have become widely accepted by the neighborhood. Each year they encourage VCU departments to sponsor families at Thanksgiving and Christmas by providing food, clothing, and toys. They have collected and purchased air conditioners and fans for seniors during the summer. They have provided boxes of school supplies for Carver Elementary School children—purchased with their personal funds. Officers attend the monthly meetings of the Carver Area Civic Improvement League (CACIL) and respond to residents' questions and concerns. VCU is now fully funding the community police officers in the Carver community. In addition, all new VCU police officers receive community policing training, developed during the first years of the community policing efforts in Carver, as a part of their formal training. The VCU police also staff the precinct office located in the Carver-VCU Partnership space on Marshall Street.

Health Promotion and Social Services Integration. The primary goal for this area was to promote the physical and mental health of individuals and families in the Carver community. Two strategies were adopted to address this goal: an annual community health fair and the Carver Health Project at Carver Elementary School. The health fair

is offered each spring and brings together approximately 35 vendors from across the city that provide health and social service information. Faculty and students from VCU's Schools of Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, and Pharmacy provide services such as dental check-ups, mammograms, and screenings for blood pressure, vision, hearing, and prostate cancer. Immunizations for children are provided as well as consultations for seniors about their medications. AmeriCorps members and VCU student volunteers offer face painting for children and assist with serving lunch. The fair has become a social and educational gathering for the community and a time for many VCU faculty, students, and staff to mingle with residents. The most recent fair was expanded to include housing-related information; hence it was transformed into the Health and Housing Fair. Due to its success, this format will be continued in the future.

Another avenue for addressing physical and mental health needs has been the Carver Health Project (Allison et al. 2001). With funding support from the COPC grant and the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, a nurse coordinator from VCU's School of Nursing has been assigned to Carver Elementary School. She works closely with the school nurse to provide services for the 700 students. With the tremendous demands for monitoring medications and providing immediate services for sick or injured children, the school nurse rarely has time to concentrate on health education and prevention. Nursing students supervised by the Carver Health Project Coordinator provide annual health screenings for all students. Children are then referred to additional services such as a visit to VCU's dental van or to an optometrist. In a two-year period, 365 children received dental evaluations and of these 249, were treated for identified dental problems. During this same period, the nurse coordinator arranged for 80 children to receive free eyeglasses through the LensCrafters Vision Program. In addition to clinical services, the nurse coordinator provides health education workshops for teachers on topics such as asthma and stress management. She arranges for community nursing students to go into the classrooms and teach on topics such as dental hygiene, hand washing, bicycle safety, and Halloween safety. She provides physical exams for children who require them for school entrance, daycare, sports participation, or Special Olympics. The mere presence of the nurse coordinator in the school makes it possible for her to ascertain students' physical and social needs and then respond to those needs with resources at VCU and in the broader community. The School of Nursing has provided support to continue this position beyond the funding provided by the duPont Fund.

Another component of the Carver Health Project is the provision of counseling and support services to students and their families. The School of Social Work and the Department of Psychology have assigned graduate students to the school. As a component of their clinical training, all child clinical psychology students are assigned to Carver throughout their doctoral program. During their first year at VCU they provide tutoring to Carver students, during their second year they provide assessments, and by their third year they are providing individual and family counseling. The Social Work students support the guidance counselors by providing mentoring for identified students and small group sessions on topics such as anger management for boys and self-esteem enhancement for girls. The services have been extended to Albert Hill

Middle School in circumstances when an entire family has been in crises. The principal and the VCU students and faculty meet monthly to exchange ideas and discuss issues. This has proven to be an effective interdisciplinary meeting that has improved the services for children and the learning for VCU students and faculty.

Educational Opportunities for Carver Elementary School. A major goal of the partnership has been to increase the academic achievement of Carver students through an increase in parental and community involvement in the school's activities. The academic challenges at Carver Elementary are enormous. Each year, VCU students tutor or provide special assistance at Carver through their service-learning courses in Psychology, Education, and Art Education. A team of AmeriCorps and America Reads tutors provides intensive reading tutoring to identified first and second graders. As many as 80 VCU students volunteer weekly to serve as mentors in the Carver Promise program, a long-term mentoring program. VCU faculty have provided professional development in the areas of science education and reading. Carver Elementary School, with the assistance of VCU faculty, was the first school in the City of Richmond (and one of only 20 in the state) to receive a two-year \$200,000 Reading Excellence grant, which began July 2001. The reviewers commented that Carver has developed strong partnerships that will support its ability to achieve the goal of having all students read at grade level by the third grade. Two faculty from VCU's School of Education have provided extensive staff development and coaching services for the entire Carver instructional staff, and a VCU graduate student has assisted with the evaluation for this grant.

The actual academic outcomes as measured by Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests reveal steady progress toward the state required accreditation goals. Students have done well in Science, Writing, and Technology—areas where VCU has provided special assistance. The school and community have created a stronger bond that has enhanced the overall services for children and families.

Community and Economic Development. An ultimate goal for the community has been to increase the availability of affordable and quality housing. To accomplish this goal, the community established a more fundamental goal of creating a master plan that would address the blighted properties, examine appropriate uses of unused lands, and propose improvements in public areas. The community worked very closely with the primary faculty member and committee co-chair, Dr. Morton Gulak, from the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Through various Urban Studies and Planning graduate classes and studio projects, key work was done for the community. Projects examined the issues of vacant and tax delinquent properties, market feasibility for the community, and revitalizing the commercial corridors. The final document, *Carver: The Neighborhood Plan* (VCU Urban Studies and Planning 2002), has been approved by CACIL and the City Planning Commission. It is anticipated that it will be approved by City Council and incorporated into the City of Richmond's comprehensive plan.

Because of the master plan planning process, the Carver community was selected as one of the City's "Neighborhood in Bloom communities," which entitles it to receive additional Community Development Block Grant funds for neighborhood revitalization. This program provides resources to the community over a six-year period to refurbish a core area of the neighborhood. In addition, the study on vacant properties resulted in new legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly that will reduce the number of years before cities can take action on abandoned properties. Delegate Viola Baskerville, the representative for the Carver neighborhood, introduced this bill.

A Play to Preserve the Community's History. During steering committee meetings in the early stages of the partnership, community members commented on the fact that many of their senior residents were moving away or dying, and as they left, so did their stories and knowledge about the history of the community. They wondered aloud if seniors could be interviewed and their stories transformed into a play about the community. This idea was taken seriously by the steering committee and with a multidisciplinary team of faculty and students, a play was written and produced in November 2000. The play, *Sheep Hill Memories, Carver Dreams*, was written by a faculty member in VCU's Department of English (Browder 2001). The oral histories were collected by students from Urban Studies and Planning, Sociology, and Psychology, along with community members. In addition to COPC funds, the project was supported by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy. The play was performed by the Richmond Community Theatre Guild, an organization founded 30 years ago by a Carver resident who is now an octogenarian. The VCU Theatre Outreach Council, a student organization, provided the technical support for the play. Three hundred and fifty people, consisting of residents from Carver and other urban neighborhoods, VCU administrators, students, and staff, and city officials, attended the two performances. The play was followed by a panel discussion about the nature and importance of urban neighborhoods. The audience was asked to complete a survey about how the play had affected their image of the Carver neighborhood.

The survey results revealed that 58 percent of the respondents knew almost nothing or very little about the history of the Carver neighborhood. Before the play, only 27 percent of the audience thought the Carver community had any promise as a neighborhood but, as a result of the production, 68 percent agreed that their impressions of the neighborhood had changed. Eighty percent claimed they had a better understanding of challenges faced by urban neighborhoods, and 60 percent agreed the panel added to their understanding of the challenges faced by urban neighborhoods. Dr. Trani attended the performance and served as host for a post-performance reception. The transcripts from the 36 interviews and copies of the research materials are in a special collection at the VCU library.

In a debriefing with the project participants, all parties claimed that the project had been a positive learning experience for their organizations as well as an educational service to the community. The Community Theatre Guild praised the level of expertise and dedication of the VCU students and faculty and acknowledged that they gained

new knowledge and experience that would serve their company. The VCU students claimed that this project gave them a sense of purpose and an appreciation of the experiences of the Theatre Guild as well as the history of Richmond. As one student said, "Their art has purpose and academic work pales in comparison." The VCU Theatre faculty commented that the spirit of the Guild and its founder were inspirational; some members have belonged for 27 years. There was a cross-pollination of energy between all participants.

This project represents the flexibility of the partnership to respond to community needs and to grasp opportunities to address those needs. It was also a tremendous collaboration across VCU disciplines and with various community groups.

Attributions for Partnership Successes

After five years as the Carver-VCU Partnership, we began to prepare for a HUD New Directions grant. A first step was a session with the steering committee where we discussed the accomplishments of the partnership and, more importantly, explored the question "How did we make it happen?" There was a high turnout for this meeting with good representation from the community and the university. The variety of comments was very enlightening and seemed to fall into three categories: organizational structure, committed people, and mutual benefits. These categories parallel the guidelines discussed earlier about working partnerships.

Organizational Structure. From the beginning, the governance of the partnership was with the steering committee that was composed of equal representation from the Carver community and the university. The Steering committee was co-chaired by the president of the civic association and the university's designated administrator. The subcommittees followed the same leadership pattern with a co-chair from the university and one from the community. The initial meetings were held in the community in living rooms, church fellowship halls, and the local elementary school. These were all places where the community felt comfortable and empowered and the university could demonstrate its genuine desire to consider the community as an equal partner.

During the first years of the partnership, annual retreats were held where questions were addressed such as, "Who are the key decision-makers at the university and what relationship do they have to the university representatives?" It was important to use these times to clarify roles within the university and the distinctions between administration and faculty in their roles as they relate to the community. For example, the day before one retreat the local newspaper printed a story that stated the university's intentions to play all home basketball games in the new arena, bordering the Carver community, instead of the city's coliseum. This was viewed as a real breach with the Carver community, since the university's previous assurance was that home games would continue to be played at the downtown coliseum and they would not suffer the inconvenience of crowds at the sporting events. At the retreat the faculty were seriously questioned about this policy shift. When the community members heard

faculty say that the newspaper article was also the first they had learned of this change they realized that, like the community, faculty are often not informed of the actions of the university's administration. Thus began a better understanding of the different university units and positions of power. But it was of critical importance to the community that the leadership of the steering committee had access to the university administration so that concerns could be communicated and responses delivered. The university president and provost agreed to meet at least once a year with the steering committee for an open discussion, and the co-chairs of the steering committee have access to the provost for any immediate concerns.

Retreats were also the time for story telling by older members of the community to give us a shared history of the community and its traditions.

Committed People. The individuals selected to serve on the steering committee had a strong commitment to community development and empowerment. From the university, the provost selected individuals because they had a history of personal or professional community involvement. The community members later referred to them as "community activists in university clothing." The members from the community were all individuals willing to take a risk to "trust" the university and its extension of partnership. This was not an easy role since there were still many in the community who felt the partnership could compromise the community's real interests. There were assertions of "doing business with the devil" and questions about how the community could have a real partnership when one partner is the obvious 800 pound gorilla. The time spent developing relationships among the steering committee helped to navigate periods of tension on several occasions. One such time was soon after the announcement of the grant from HUD. At a subsequent civic association meeting, new faces appeared who accused VCU of taking money that belonged to the community. They wanted to find out how they could access these new resources for their purposes. Because community residents had been involved with every step of the grant development, they responded to the demands and questions. They assured these individuals that Carver had been in the driver seat of determining what activities were important and how the resources would be used for the community. Fortunately, the community representatives were able to understand both the potential of the partnership's benefits and its dangers, coming to the table with a dose of healthy skepticism.

A core group of steering committee members remain involved after seven years. What began as a university or community obligation has evolved into personal caring relationships between individuals with a sense of investment. As a result, community members described the university representatives as "real" and "genuine," claiming that when they encountered someone from the university in different settings, they were always greeted and treated with respect. While everyone acknowledged that there had been rocky times in the partnership's development, we were willing to work through the issues and the result is a feeling of open and honest communication among steering committee members. The primary reward for involvement with the partnership has been the intrinsic sense that one's contributions are helping to transform a community.

However, each year the provost acknowledges the service of the faculty members with letters of appreciation which are sent to their department chairs and deans. These letters serve as documents to incorporate into faculty members' annual reviews.

As for the community representatives, it was noted that their efforts for the partnership often entailed considerable personal sacrifice of time and effort. Typically the same individuals took on the extra responsibilities to co-chair committees and to participate in the various activities. For this reason, ambitious agendas would occasionally need to be adjusted or curtailed. Patience and flexibility were key to steady progress.

It has been critical to have retreats or extended meetings to “check-in” on our progress. Occasionally these meetings were facilitated by someone outside of the partnership to allow for objective processing of issues, especially when tensions had developed. These times were also designed to acknowledge and celebrate accomplishments.

Mutual Benefits. At the beginning of the partnership, the assumption by all was that the key recipient of benefits from the partnership efforts would be the Carver community. In fact, to even consider benefits to VCU would be viewed as opportunistic for faculty, students, and the institution. Yet, in the process of identifying accomplishments, we recognized grants received, articles published, and student research and learning. Over the course of the partnership, community members had become more astute about how universities work. They understood that to engage faculty in community-based work, the faculty had to find a way to fit this work into the roles and rewards system. So, to write a grant with a focus on Carver or publish a paper based on the work in the community for example, was understood as critical to keeping an important faculty member involved in the partnership. It became apparent that it is acceptable to enter into partnerships with a public expectation that all parties can and will benefit. In fact, that position is the more honest and trustworthy position to assume.

The process acknowledged various benefits of the partnership for the community, several of which have already been described. When the partnership began, the primary concerns were to reduce crime and to focus on the social fabric of the community. Public officials had claimed that once these issues were addressed, the physical revitalization would follow. Indeed, with the VCU Police jurisdiction extended to cover Carver, the crime rate dropped dramatically. This new responsibility confronted the VCU Police with a need to enhance its community policing capabilities. Community police training was developed and has been integrated into the VCU training academy, which is required of all police officers. The need in the community generated a change in the training and operations of a university unit.

Confidence in development was then spurred by the City Council selecting Carver as one of the “Neighborhoods in Bloom” and committing Community Development Block Grant funds for rehabilitation of a core section of the community. Now the community is challenged to manage the development requests and proposals for new housing and conversion of large abandoned buildings to apartments.

Another benefit has been the change in the way VCU does business with its neighboring communities. From the onset, Dr. Trani considered the Carver-VCU Partnership a university priority, a position that he has reiterated in various university and community forums and publications. This assertion set the expectation for all university units to reach out to the Carver community and to support their faculty and staff in activities that involve the partnership. As a result, university administrators consult with steering committee members when their areas are contemplating an activity or issue that could have some bearing on the community. There is an increased willingness to negotiate with the community and an effort to do no harm. This is especially true when building programs are involved. The university attends civic association meetings to present building plans when they are in the initial stages of planning and seeks community input. Developers with any association with the university are strongly encouraged to do the same. Units of the university also take the initiative to actively reach out to the community; for example, the athletic department offers scholarships to basketball camps, and student organizations sponsor tutoring and enrichment services to residents.

Finally, VCU students have experiential learning opportunities within the Carver community and at Carver Elementary School. Students are involved with Carver through participation in the VCU AmeriCorps and America Reads program, in service-learning courses, Urban Studies studio courses, internships, and clinical assignments. They also learn about community-based issues from talks provided by Carver community members who come to class or through the examples provided by faculty who are engaged in activities with Carver.

Sustainability of Partnerships

Sustainability is a critical issue from the first day that a university-community partnership is formed. The guidelines noted earlier apply to the commencement and the long-term survival of a partnership. For a partnership to endure, an infrastructure with committed resources has to be embedded within the university. In our experience, having an active community civic association and the university's prior structural and financial commitment to the development of an Office of Community Programs provided critical infrastructures on which to build a partnership. In addition, the continuity, commitment, and ongoing relationship development between the university and community leadership within the Partnership has been vital. A coordinator for the Carver-VCU Partnership supported by university funds plus a dedicated physical space to serve partnership activities has made it possible to deliver the requested activities as well as to respond to opportunities and needs as they arise. The value of the partnership also has to be embraced in the university's mission and strategic plan. As for the community, the civic association maintains the responsibility of appointing individuals to the Partnership Steering Committee and having them serve as liaisons between the organizations.

The governance structure provides the foundation of the partnership. As noted earlier, the dedication of a core of university and community members has been critical to the

formation of trust that can withstand times of tension. Yet, the group needs to be careful not to be perceived as enmeshed to the point of exclusion. The involvement of new people nourishes the partnership with new energy. New members bring fresh ideas and possibilities plus a willingness to assume duties.

The integration of Partnership activities into university programs and curricula has been central in supporting the benefits that the university receives from this work. For example, the School of Nursing and Department of Psychology have fully and structurally integrated student participation at Carver Elementary School into their graduate and professional training curricula. Graduates from these programs report on the value and importance of these training experiences as developing professionals. Service-learning courses and programs such as America Reads provide ongoing programmatic support for the community. Programs without the commitment or flexibility to provide such educational opportunities may limit their students' access to meaningful experiential learning activities that can provide rich training.

Sustainability of the partnership is contingent on both parties remaining as strong independent entities. Hence, the leadership development and building of strong community capacity is essential for the community's ability to advocate for itself with the university, the city, and other major institutions in its vicinity. A strong civic association with operational bylaws and the diversification of duties in the association builds a base of promising leaders. The Partnership can provide the consultations and technical assistance for the organizational structure and provide the training and mentoring of residents assuming leadership roles.

Finally, the Partnership must have the ongoing capacity to seek funds necessary to support on-going and new activities. Grant writing is a role that university personnel can provide as funds are sought from local foundations or corporations to support particular projects. The likelihood of funding is higher if the community's voice is clearly articulated in the proposal and there is no doubt that the community is intricately involved in the proposal process.

Conclusion

Forming a long-term partnership is an on-going learning process for which there is no guaranteed mold for success, much like a marriage. Every community and university has its unique resources, challenges, politics, and idiosyncrasies. Reflecting on our experience with the Carver-VCU Partnership, it is difficult to identify anything specifically that we would do differently in the partnership's formation or processes for implementation. We have had our share of disappointments with not meeting certain expectations within established timeframes, but with patience we have found that the accomplishments far outweigh the failures.

It has been noted that campuses often address concerns with their communities by establishing advisory boards or inviting members of the community to sit on existing campus committees. This approach has been described as treating the community as guests at a dinner party rather than as members of a family (Goodman and MacNeil

1999). At a dinner party, individuals are polite and feelings of hospitality and companionship are shared for the moment. In contrast, at the family dinner table one finds noise, joy, chaos, and occasional dissension. But as Goodman and MacNeil note, “Underneath it is trust and participation, because everyone is a stakeholder who cares about the long-term health of the family and who knows that we will all have dinner together again tomorrow... Instead of treating the communities we work with as guests, we need to embrace them as family—family whose members understand that they depend on each other to thrive.” A true partnership requires us to add another permanent leaf to the family dinner table and partake in a home-cooked meal.

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