'Getting it right': Principles for university engagement in the community from the perspective of the community

Research Summary

PIs (in alphabetical order): Clark, Kaiser, Reece, and Schmiesing

Anchor land grant institutions are questioning their role in conducting impactful research in and with the community and, more broadly, how to engage with the community as a research institution (APLU, 2019; Gavazzi and Gee, 2018). At the same time, large science funders (ex. National Science Foundation) are integrating community-based and participatory research into funding calls, incentivizing more collaboration between researchers and communities. The normative expectation is that engaged research is good for the community. However, critiques have been put forth that even "community responsible" research puts a burden on vulnerable communities, in part because engagement does not fundamentally change the underlying structures of inequity that are the basis of the socioeconomic problems faced by anchor institutions neighbors (Lee et al., 2015). Here at home, Ohio State University's (OSU) strategic plan for research calls for inquiries around community-based and participatory research (Office of Research, 2020). Yet little, if anything, is known about with how OSU's community residents and leaders want or need this type of engagement, and if there is a recognition in the community about what research is, and what is even meant by engaged research.

Much of the previous research on community-university research relationships focuses on (1) barriers to research, (2) university researchers' reflexive analysis of community-university relationships, and (3) how universities can support faculty members in the process (Clark et al., 2015; Gavazzi and Gee, 2018; Mikesell et al., 2013). A critical voice missing is the perspective of the community member. What is their experience with university research? What expectations and concerns do they bring into engagements with the university? What are barriers to engagement from the community's perspective? What are their reflexive understanding of the relationships? What type of organizational infrastructure and guidelines are needed to meet the ideal form of engagement expressed by community members? Often university research is preceded by community development efforts in which the university is involved. In these cases, what are the experiences of community members in these development processes? What are their aspirations, hopes and concerns when this happens? How do these experiences shape their perspectives on the role of a research university? These unanswered questions offer an opportunity to take a cultural humility perspective and a critical theory approach to understanding the perspectives of community members, including the diversity of voices within communities. Our proposal is aimed at making this very contribution to the literature. From a practice perspective, our work can inform how universities consider relationship building and reciprocity with their neighbors. Specific to OSU, this project can inform OSU's work on at least three fronts: (1) OSU's own funding of projects, including how projects are prioritized and supported; (2) the design and delivery of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff; and, (3) the support of student research.

With this aim in mind, we pose the following research question: *How can a large, land grant research institution build meaningful community relationships while conducting research?* Note that when we refer to research, we are interested in the range of methods that provide a range of roles for community members, from conventional approaches whereas the community member is a test subject to approaches, such as CBPR, whereas the community member acts as a collaborative researcher. Our research objectives are as follows: (1) Describe the experience of community members' in university research and engagement; (2) Document the language community members use in regards to community-university research relationships; (3) Understand how community members' perceive the institution and its role in

the community; and (4) Identify the ways that community members want the university to build and maintain relationships with them and vice versa, with a specific focus on what reciprocity means to community members and, from the community's perspective, what organizational infrastructure and practices could create the ideal environment community university relationship.

We propose a multi-site case study research design, using elements of critical and criterion-based base selection approaches. Critical cases are important cases that are likely to yield the most information. For this research, cases will be drawn from past OSU research projects that involved Columbus community members. Criterion based case sampling will be used to select specific sites. The first main criterion is that the community has a high density of university research projects (a critical mass of projects in the neighborhood) and include a range of types of research projects (conventional research approaches, engaged research approaches, etc.) and a range of disciplines engaged in research. We acknowledge the important role that power dynamics have in this work and that these dynamics are often embedded in communities and relationships between communities and outsiders (e.g., universities). Power differences are often related to wealth and the perceived or real ability to influence decision-makers. Historical disenfranchisement of a community can also lead to distrust of outside institutions. Thus, the second main criterion is that the focus communities have wealth inequities (measured through indicators of income, economic status and tenure) and have been disenfranchised historically. These communities are most likely to have, or have had, less voice in the development and maintenance of relationships with external institutions. Given these criteria, initial sites for consideration are Weinland Park, East side, South Linden, and South side.

Our methods include semi-structured interviews with community members who have past experience with OSU research (to address research objectives 1 and 2, above), and focus groups with community members from selected sites, including people who do not have previous experience with OSU research (to address research objectives 3 and 4, above). Data collected from existing community collaborators will enable us to better understand past positive and negative outcomes in past experiences with the University. Focus groups will emphasize a forward looking inquiry to help produce data that defines the scope and parameters of ideal collaboration and engagement. We anticipate that the following elements will comprise the budget: graduate student stipend, tuition, and fees, transcription services for interviews and focus groups, investment in a community liaison that is a community leader, and compensation for participants.

Anticipated Budget:

- Phd Student, Seungbin Park : 9 months + summer: $37,920 (Summer 2020 to Spring 2021)
- Post Doc, Jee Young Lee: 3 months @50% time: $9,835

References Cited

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