Partnership Perspectives: Exploring Strategies for the Development of Successful Campus and Community Collaborations

by

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Partnership Perspectives: Exploring Strategies for the Development 

of Successful Campus and Community Collaborations 

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ABSTRACT

As community college leaders are challenged to meet increasing needs with fewer resources, many seek external partnerships as a way to pool resources, build community networks, and extend educational opportunities. While many of these relationships begin with great promise, low success rates have been attributed to ill-prepared leadership.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore strategies that college leaders and their partners use in order to build and maintain successful collaborations. Understanding there is much to be learned from the experiences of seasoned practitioners, 19 leaders throughout the state of California were interviewed in an effort to define best practices. These individuals were nominated for participation by colleagues who recognized them as exceptional in the area of external collaborations.

Although the partnerships represented in the study were diverse in terms of membership and purpose, the group was unified when identifying the practices and processes that contribute to successful outcomes. These included strategies for the creation of aligned goals, maintaining healthy communication, and the development of trustful relations. These time intensive endeavors were seen as critical in building the foundation of model partnerships.

The challenges inherent to the work were numerous. Leaders encountered a lack of institutional commitment and bureaucratic systems that failed to accommodate external work. The complexities of building multi-organizational relationships partnered with the absence of supportive systems demonstrated why building sustainable partnerships can be difficult. Those who excelled at the work attributed their success to a passion for the work, clarity of vision, innovative thinking, and sheer determination.
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“I love my cohort!” In 2009, I began the doctoral program with 14 talented individuals who brought diverse strengths and perspectives to the classroom. We started the program as classmates, quickly developed friendships, and eventually became family. I was so fortunate to be a part of such an amazing cohort of educators.

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

In 2012, when President Barack Obama delivered the State of the Union Address, he singled out a woman in the audience named Jackie Bray. As a student at Central Piedmont Community College, Miss Bray received job training through an innovative program developed by the college and the Siemens Corporation. Working together, these two organizations designed curriculum for a laser and robotics program that allows students, like Jackie, to gain employable skills. The Siemens Corporation, which is a large company with investments in the fields of industry, energy, and healthcare, pays for students to attend college and then hires them upon program completion. The collaboration, recognized by the President, was hailed as an example of what is possible when campus and community work together to meet educational and national needs (The White House, 2012).

This partnership is just one example of many collaborative relationships that occur between the nation’s community colleges and public and private organizations. While not all partnerships have such impressive results, most are initiated with great hope that collective efforts will strengthen the capacity of participating institutions. Community colleges build external relationships for many purposes including workforce development, experiential learning, campus outreach, and entrepreneurial efforts. The goal is to accomplish something of value that cannot be achieved by the institution alone.

This study explores the development of successful partnerships between community colleges and organizations within their districts. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and examines existing models of campus and community engagement. In addition, the following sections are presented: (a) statement of the problem, (b) significance of
study, (c) purpose of study, (d) identification of research questions, (e) definition of terms, (f) limitations and delimitations of the study, and (g) the role of the researcher.

Campus and Community Partnerships

Community colleges have a long history of embracing complex challenges as they remain firmly committed to a mission of open access and affordable education (Flannigan, Greene, & Jones, 2005). Funding reductions, demands for increased accountability, and growing enrollments are just a few of the difficulties facing college leaders today. These economic and social forces have compelled educators to seek external partnerships as a way to maximize resources, provide job training, and respond to local community needs (Sink & Jackson, 2002).

This perspective was shared by Williams (1998) who advocated for a community college culture that values collaboration. Serving as a college president, she stressed the need for institutions to engage with local communities in order to meet educational needs and create change. According to Williams, “The educational challenges in our cities are too vast and the resources in our individual institutions are too limited for us to act alone” (p. 56). As college leaders respond to the diverse needs of the 21st century, cultivating campus partnerships is one strategy that can help ensure the mission of the community college is sustained.

There are differing perspectives on why external partnerships are a necessity in higher education. Some suggest multi-sector collaborations are essential in an economic climate that provides limited resources (Baum, 2000). The ability to develop strategic relationships is viewed as a coping mechanism that allows organizations with differing interests to merge resources and build productive networks.
Bergquist, Betwee, and Meuel (1995) agreed that economic forces play a role in the desire to cultivate multi-organizational partnerships but stressed there are additional influences. According to the authors, as organizations become increasingly specialized to meet the needs of a complex society, external collaborations are necessary in order to fully meet institutional goals. The interconnectivity between sectors provides an opportunity for partners to focus on their area of expertise while relying on a collective network to meet various organizational needs. This perspective was shared by the President of Metropolitan Community College, J. Richard Gilliland (1995), when he reported:

In this age of specialization, we need to team up with others who possess special talents, skills, or resources, while contributing our own set of capabilities and resources. When these ingredients are mixed in a carefully orchestrated and sensitive way, greater synergy can be accomplished than by any one organization operating independently. (p. 43)

Others view the creation of campus and community partnerships through a slightly different lens. Looking beyond practical and economic benefits, they question whether institutions of higher education have a moral obligation to work collectively with the districts they serve in order to advance knowledge, strengthen communities, and promote social justice (Plater, 2004; Saltmarsh, 1996). In his 1990 publication, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer challenged educators to rethink scholarship and consider the ways in which universities could better serve the public good. He criticized the notion that education is about the memorization of facts or the ability to participate in critical debate. In contrast, he advocated for institutions that prepare future leaders to
solve real world problems. The development of meaningful community relationships can engage students in applied learning and foster a sense of civic responsibility.

Regardless of the reasons for the efforts, community colleges are cultivating these relationships at a growing pace (Kisker & Carducci, 2003). In 1990, less than 40% of community colleges were engaged in partnerships with business and industry. Five years later, this number had increased to 90%. Growth was attributed to a poor economy, evolving workforce needs, and the intense pressure placed on community colleges to provide new and innovative programs. The demand for these collaborations has not been confined to the corporate sector. Partnerships with public entities such as nonprofit organizations, public schools, and county organizations have also been on the rise (Amey, 2010; Austin, 2000; Parker & Selsky, 2005). According to Sturgeon (2000), there is a new wave of community college partnerships that will help define the future. As these relationships become more ingrained in the institutional culture, it will be imperative for college leaders to possess the skills necessary to lead successful collaborations (Amey, 2010).

**Partnership Models**

Prior studies on the topic of campus and community partnerships have resulted in several models of engagement (Dorado, Giles, & Welch, 2009). These theoretical frameworks are intended to guide practitioners in the recognition and development of successful collaborations. Because these relationships are built on a series of interpersonal interactions and collaborative processes, some models are based on a linear progression of involvement with members progressing through various stages of development (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010; Thompson, Story, & Butler, 2002).
Others describe models that measure the depth of commitment to the collaboration (Scheibel, Bowley, & Jones, 2005). While both perspectives share similarities, they provide a different theoretical lens from which to explore the multiple dimensions of campus and community relations.

Scheibel et al. (2005) defined five different partnership levels in *The Promise of Partnerships*. The authors acknowledged that these levels are not characteristic of all collaborations, nor do they necessarily occur in a progressive manner. Instead, they are intended to describe the depth of interaction, the degree of commitment among members, and the benefits and challenges of operating at each level. At the first and second level, participants have limited awareness of each other and limited interactions. The partnership may be reliant upon one representative who assumes full responsibility for the collaboration. Interactions are transactional in nature and involve minimal commitment and communication. At levels three and four, the partnership is more structured and involves participation from multiple campus and community representatives. Projects are jointly developed that address issues equally important to both organizations. To reach a level five, partners share equal resources and risks. There is a deep commitment to a common purpose which allows the lines between organizations to fade. According to the authors, these types of partnerships are fairly rare due to the high level of expectations.

In 2002, Thompson et al. stated there were few models that adequately characterized partnerships between university, communities, and policy makers. In response to this observation, they introduced a collaborative model which emphasizes shared benefits, reciprocal relationships, and democratic interactions. The work was shaped by the principles of participatory action research which values the “lived realities
and experiential expertise of all participants as well as the creative potential of the collaborative process” (Thompson et al., 2002, p. 265). The model introduces five stages of collaboration: engagement, deliberation, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination. Each describes the progression of a multi-sector partnership beginning with engagement, which is a period where partners join together for a common purpose. The group then moves through subsequent stages by identifying goals and action plans, implementing the plans, evaluating the work, and disseminating the findings. The processes are linear in nature, although partners may move back and forth between stages.

Amey et al. (2010) introduced a model that defines a progressive pattern and consists of three stages: getting started, developing the partnership, and incorporating the partnership. Building upon existing work, this framework stresses the importance of building social and organizational capital. In the first stage, members disclose information that sets the foundation for the working relationship. This includes organizational history, motivations, existing relationships, and reasons for desiring the partnership. The purpose of this vetting process is to ensure that all members are fully informed before making a commitment and progressing further in the relationship. Once this is completed, the partnership advances to the second stage, which focuses on the processes of partnership development. During this period, members negotiate differences, create a common language and begin to work collaboratively on aligned goals. In the final stage of the model, partnership capital is established. This occurs when members begin to share a common culture of understandings, values, and norms. The relationship moves beyond two distinct organizational structures to that of a shared one. The attainment of partnership capital signifies a serious commitment to the
collaboration that is useful in further advancing the work and supporting potential institutionalization efforts.

In summarizing the partnership models, there are apparent similarities. Campus and community relationships are defined by the level of commitment, intensity of interaction, and whether multiple organizations can ultimately operate in unison. Building partnerships is a continuum of complex processes that demand time, reciprocity, and democracy. While describing stages of development is helpful in better understanding these relationships, it is also important to embrace the ambiguity required to accommodate evolving needs. The usefulness of each model lies in the ability to promote shared understandings that will support and guide the work of current and future practitioners.

**Statement of the Problem**

As community colleges are challenged to meet increasing needs with fewer resources, educational leaders seek external partnerships in an effort to pool resources, extend service delivery, and strengthen community ties (Amey et al., 2010). At best, these endeavors have the potential to transform campus and community dynamics, resulting in innovative and regionally responsive services (Enos & Morton, 2003). Yet, these relationships, which often begin with great promise, are destined to fail without knowledgeable leaders who possess necessary skills for the development and facilitation of successful collaborations (Goldring & Sims, 2005; Hubbell & Burman, 2006).

While numerous studies identify the characteristics of model partnerships, research demonstrates that few colleges and universities are achieving success (Baum, 2000). High failure rates have been attributed to leaders who are ill-prepared for the
complexities of multi-organizational work (E. S. Weiss, Miller, & Lasker, 2002). An apparent disconnect exists between recommended practices and successful implementation. This gap begs further study if community colleges are committed to external collaboration as a means of strengthening institutional capacity.

Few studies have addressed partnership practices at the community college level. While there are many commonalities between the 2-year and 4-year institutions, differences do exist. For example, universities may view collaborations through the context of a research driven agenda, while this is not typically the case for community colleges. Workforce development, K-12 connections, and entrepreneurial efforts, often drive the community college partnership agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Given the differences in institutional missions and organizational cultures, it is important to consider partnerships within the community college context. As new leaders respond to increasing demands for community partnerships, they will need data driven resources to guide their work.

**Significance of the Study**

This study will add useful information to the existing conversation about campus and community collaborations. There are three aspects of this study that are significant in nature. The first is that the findings focus on community college leaders and their partners. The individuals who participated in the study were identified by professional peers as being exceptional at cultivating external relationships. Their voices provided rich data which can inform and inspire. As previously mentioned in the problem statement, there is a dearth of research that specifically pertains to the practices and processes of the community college. This study addresses this issue and recognizes
campus and community leaders as experts whose knowledge can lead to the development of best practices.

In addition to the community college focus, a diversity of perspectives is presented in the study, which is often missing from the literature. Existing studies tend to focus on partnerships within a specific area such as healthcare or K-12 education (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003; Goldring & Sims, 2005; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002). While the collaborations presented in this work all share the common thread of community college participation, the participants had very different agendas and desired outcomes. The motivations of a leader in the manufacturing industry were very different from those of a college professor. These contrasting perspectives contributed to a rich description that allowed partnerships to be viewed from multiple contexts.

One of the concerns that surfaced in the literature review was the lack of research that examines multiple partnerships (Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001). Much of the existing research centers on case studies, which reflect the efforts of multiple organizations involved in a single partnership. According to Cox and Seifer (2005), “Efforts to build on prior learning and to synthesize results are limited, and as a consequence there is a rich descriptive literature of the unique characteristics of different partnerships” (p. 29). The call for additional research, which includes a larger sample of partnerships, is necessary in order to generalize the larger population. This study addressed this concern by examining ten different partnerships located throughout the state of California.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how community college leaders develop external partnerships with the communities they serve. Model collaborations between community colleges and multiple sectors were explored in an effort to identify successful practices. The research also examined the role of leaders in facilitating external collaborations and sought to define specific strategies that promote successful relationships and goal attainment.

Research Questions

In order to gain an increased understanding of the strategies and processes that lead to successful campus and community partnerships, the following questions guided the study:

1. What are the characteristics of model campus and community partnerships and what processes lead to the development of these characteristics?
2. What are the challenges encountered by community college leaders and their partners when facilitating campus and community partnerships?
3. What strategies do leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations use in order to develop successful partnerships?
4. How do leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations define and measure success?

Definitions of Terms

Authentic partnerships: According to Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH, 2007), authentic relationships are desirable but difficult to achieve. Authentic partnerships embrace equality of power, achieve meaningful outcomes, and are
transformative in nature. Transformation occurs on the personal, institutional, and societal level.

Campus and community partnerships: At the most basic level, researchers agree that partnerships occur when representatives from higher education and community organizations work together in an effort to achieve shared goals (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Typically, both sectors have something to gain from the relationship and are willing to commit some level of time and resources to the endeavor.

Collaboration: Reilly (2001) defined collaboration as a process “that unites previously separated groups or organizations into a new structure to achieve a mutual purpose. Such relationships require comprehensive planning, a shared vision and frequent and well-defined communication” (p. 55). In this study, the terms partnership and collaboration are used interchangeably to describe the same type of relationship.

Partnership champions: According to Amey (2010), successful partnerships are more likely to occur when there are individuals who are deeply committed to cultivating the relationship. Champions are typically program coordinators or faculty members who have the most to gain from the collaboration but can also include administrators. Without a champion to lead the effort, partnerships can become neglected.

Synergy: In an article written by E. S. Weiss et al. (2002), the authors state that synergy is created in partnerships when diverse partners combine perspectives, knowledge, and skills. Together partners “create something new and valuable—a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 684).

Transactional partnerships: According to Enos and Morton (2003), transactional partnerships are “designed to complete a task with no greater plan or promise” (p. 24).
These relationships typically occur when participants want something that the other can provide. The partnership operates within established systems, meets immediate needs, and requires little time or commitment. The goal is to achieve a desired outcome as quickly and cleanly as possible.

**Transformative partnerships:** Transformative partnerships involve a deeper commitment to the relationship. Intended outcomes may not be clearly defined at the beginning of the relationship as partners work together to determine future direction. A group identity takes place as partners look beyond their own needs in a desire to “create a larger meaning” (Enos & Morton, 2003).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study sought to gain knowledge from individuals who were identified as exceptional in facilitating campus and community partnerships. Operating from a constructivist perspective, study participants were viewed as the experts of their own experiences who had much information to share (Charmaz, 2006). While the perspectives of these leaders were valued and respected, there may be limitations to this approach. The professionals who participated in the study represented well-established partnerships. While they had much knowledge to contribute, they also had much to protect. Their demonstrated successes resulted from investments of time, labor, and resources. Therefore, the possibility exists that positive aspects of the relationship were emphasized, while negative perceptions diminished. If this occurred, important pieces of information would be missing from the study.

An additional limitation is that the research was confined to leaders within the state of California. This statewide perspective played a role in the study findings. For
example, as leaders discussed the challenges of state governance issues, the identified difficulties may not apply to others in the nation.

**Delimitations of the Study**

The sample for this study included leaders from the state who facilitate external partnerships within their communities. These individuals were selected based on the recommendations of their peers who viewed them as exceptional in this work. Some may suggest the examination of model relationships narrows the sample too much and eliminates the potential to learn from those who have failed in their collaborative efforts. The underlying assumption that guides this study is that successful leaders have encountered many failures along the way and have a continuum of experiences from which to draw.

**Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, it is important to recognize the existence of beliefs which can shape research processes and findings. I was drawn to this study because I am an advocate for campus and community partnerships and believe these strategic collaborations have the power to transform institutions and those they serve. In my role as a program director, I have worked hard to develop quality partnerships with numerous nonprofit and county organizations, as well as K-12 districts. Because of personal experiences, there is an awareness of the difficulties of building, facilitating, and assessing external partnerships.

There are those who caution researchers to “stay away from their own back yard” when conducting research (Bryant, 2004). This was a consideration when selecting this particular topic. Having acknowledged a passion for the subject, it is equally important to
disclose that professional experiences have been limited to the area of internships and service learning. I approached this process from a stance of curiosity, understanding there was a great deal to be learned by examining other types of partnerships across the California Community College system.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

Across the nation, community college leaders are building a variety of external partnerships to meet the diverse and evolving needs of the students and communities they serve. At best, these endeavors have the potential to address social needs, advance educational opportunities, and prepare a new generation of workers (Amey et al., 2010; Orr, 2001). In contrast, when partnerships are ill planned or imbalanced, these collaborations can alienate campus and community relations and hinder future interactions (Maurrasse, 2002).

According to Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, and Goss (2002), a growing interest in the development of campus and community partnerships has arisen due to economic factors. As public institutions struggle to meet increasing social needs with dwindling resources, these relationships allow leaders from multiple sectors to work together addressing complex problems. The ability to develop strategic partnerships can strengthen an institution’s capacity to meet educational demands while supporting the college mission (Driscoll & Goldring, 2005). The potential exists for building strong regional networks, leveraging resources, and extending service delivery (Amey, 2010; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Buettner, Morrison, and Wasicek (2002) stated that high performing community colleges know how to leverage resources through external collaborations and understand that collective accomplishments generally surpass those achieved by a single organization.

Given the possible outcomes, funding agents and policymakers have urged public institutions to build strategic collaborations in an effort to promote innovative planning and address community issues (Reilly, 2001; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002). Hopkins (2011)
cited the promise of corporate and public funding as an impetus for initiating educational collaborations. She noted that leaders in both primary and secondary education are expected to “work and play together or to go without” (p. 13). A belief exists that resources are better utilized with joint ownership and oversight. Policymakers promote multi-sector partnerships as a way to identify best practices and develop big-picture solutions (E. S. Weiss et al., 2002).

The interest in campus and community partnerships is not solely an economic one. In the past 20 years, there has been a renewed interested in providing academic programs that are relevant to local and global needs (Leiderman et al., 2002). College leaders seek external relations as a way to enhance educational experiences through internships, service learning, and career and technical preparation. Ramaley (2009) advocated for the scholarship of community engagement as a way to enrich student learning, foster innovation, and support workforce development. She stressed that linking educational systems to community resources could strengthen regions by addressing large scale issues.

While the need is great, educational leaders may find themselves unprepared to deal with the complexities of campus and community relationships (Hubbell & Burman, 2006). Understanding how to facilitate multi-organizational partnerships and structure them for success may seem like a daunting task for those who have received little preparation (Amey, 2010). In 2005, the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) conducted a study in which they sought to identify the six core competencies needed for community college professionals. One of the identified areas was the ability to cultivate both internal and external collaborations in order to promote student success.
and support the college mission. Although the ability to develop external relations was recognized as a desirable quality and growing necessity, little direction has been provided on how to develop quality, sustainable partnerships (Hubbell & Burman, 2006; Rubin, 2002).

This literature review summarizes research related to campus and community partnerships. Topics include characteristics of model partnerships, challenges encountered in the work, and assessment practices. The goal is to present an overview of the existing body of knowledge. When selecting journal selections to review, emphasis was placed on pieces that were written in the last 10 years, although some older works were cited. While an abundance of literature addressing partnership work exists, many of the journal articles focused on the role of the university interacting with community organizations in regards to research based projects. Examining collaborations outside the context of a research driven agenda was somewhat challenging. Even more challenging was locating literature that reflected community college issues and practices. Over 100 books and journal articles were reviewed for this study, and only 18 represented the community college perspective. Clearly, this voice is missing from the conversation.

**Defining a Partnership**

In order to fully understand campus and community partnerships, it is important to define the term “partnership,” since meanings can vary greatly. It cannot be assumed that all individuals will approach a relationship with a shared understanding of the definition. At the most basic level, researchers agree that campus and community partnerships occur when representatives from higher education and community organizations work together in an effort to address local needs (Kisner, Mazza, & Liggett, 1997; Miller & Hafner,
Typically, both sectors have something to gain from the relationship and are willing to allocate time and resources to the endeavor.

In 2008, Portland State University conducted a partnership forum which examined the multiple perspectives of community and higher education partners. As a result of this effort, a guide was developed that described processes for building and sustaining successful collaborations. The participants who represented the fields of higher education, health care, county programs, and the nonprofit sector, concluded that partnerships are “collaborative and dynamic relationships between parties working toward and achieving shared goals while respecting individual differences” (Portland State University, 2008, p. 2). Each partner contributes to the relationship, and each receives something in return. Ideally, the collective efforts result in outcomes that could not be achieved by a single organization.

Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009) noted that the term partnership is used loosely to describe very different types of interactions. These range from casual relationships to highly structured alliances. The authors advocated for a more precise and intentional approach, one that would foster best practices and promote desired outcomes. They suggested the term partnership be reserved for collaborations that possess certain qualities including closeness, equity, and integrity. Miller and Hafner (2008) shared this perspective and stated that collaborations between university and community should be a “much deeper and more meaningful relationship than a simple coexistence characterized by shallow interactions” (p. 67).

Contrasts in partnership definitions often lie in the depth of interaction. The national organization, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH, 2007), noted
that relationships are often initiated with honorable intentions but fail to evolve into authentic partnerships. Authenticity occurs when a relationship moves beyond a transactional nature and includes a high level of quality processes, meaningful outcomes, and transformations. These partnerships are founded on reciprocity and recognition that each member brings assets to the collaboration (Pigza & Troppe, 2003). While these partnerships may be viewed as ideal, they can be difficult to achieve due to the necessary time commitment and intensity of the relationship.

In the 2003 publication, *Building Partnerships for Service Learning*, Enos and Morton addressed the issue of authentic partnerships by defining two different types of relationships: transformative and transactional. Authentic partnerships are transformative in nature and are developed with the goal of creating social change. As partners work together, organizational boundaries dissipate and shared goals become the priority. There is a deep commitment to the common good that transcends the individual needs of each organization. In contrast, transactional relationships are designed to meet immediate needs and require limited time, resources, and commitment. Creating change is not a priority, as each organization maintains their roles, resources, and objectives. Enos and Morton (2003) suggest that most campus and community partnerships operate at the transactional level and are “designed to complete a task with no greater plan or promise” (p. 24).

While some may advocate for authentic relationships that require a deep commitment to social change (CCPH, 2007), others may find that a transactional approach best fits the needs of their organization. The defined goals and objectives shape the parameters for participation and set the tone for the relationship. If tackling difficult
and complex social issue is the desired outcome, expectations will be high due the
challenging nature of the work. If the goal is to share resources or extend service
delivery, the expectations may not be as intense. One approach is not superior to the
other; instead, they both provide a framework for engagement. Ultimately it is the
responsibility of the participants to define what a partnership means to them and how it
will best serve their institution.

**Characteristics of a Model Partnership**

As college leaders look for guidance in the development of external relationships,
identifying the qualities of model partnerships is one place to begin. The literature
clearly demonstrates that certain characteristics define healthy campus and community
collaborations (Buettner et al., 2002; Halliday, Asthana, & Richardson, 2004; Holland,
2001; Sink & Jackson, 2002). These qualities serve as the foundation upon which to
build productive relationships. According to Baum (2000), a common misconception is
that a group of well-meaning participants is all that is needed for partnership success. In
contrast, a more thoughtful and intentional course of action is required. Formalized
processes are essential in fostering equitable and reciprocal relationships where members
are rewarded for their efforts (Amey et al., 2010). These characteristics include: a shared
commitment, clearly aligned goals, effective communication, and trustful relationships
(Bracken, 2007; Bosma et al., 2010; Buettner et al., 2002; Jones, 2003; Merzel et al.,
2007; Miller, 2007; Tett, 2005).

**A Shared Commitment**

Healthy partnerships require both parties commit equally to the project (Goldring
& Sims, 2005; Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001; Merzel et al., 2007). It is difficult to
achieve desired outcomes if the work is not a priority for all participants. When colleges enter into a new collaboration, support from high level administrators is essential, even if these leaders have little to do with the daily operations of the partnership (Amey, 2010). This is also true with community organizations. The support of corporate and nonprofit directors can determine whether the relationship will be valued enough to sustain over a period of time (Buettner et al., 2002). Collaborations which have the greatest chance of success are supported by an organizational culture that understands the importance of external relationships and promotes the ideology of community engagement (Ramaley, 2009).

Too often, the commitment to a partnership lies with one individual who is invested in the work. According to Holland (2005), few community leaders see themselves as partnering with the university. Instead, they have developed a valued relationship with a faculty member or college administrator who they trust to be responsive to their needs. While these types of one-on-one relationships are common, they can be problematic if the goal is to create an institutional culture that is committed to the work. When partnerships rely on the efforts of one or two individuals, they are less likely to be sustained over time (Amey, 2010).

In a 2004 quantitative study, El Ansari and Phillips explored community partnerships through a cost-benefit analysis. The researchers collected data from individuals participating in five different healthcare related collaborations in South Africa. The goal of the study was to examine numerous issues including costs, benefits, satisfaction, commitment, and ownership. The findings demonstrated that leaders who are actively engaged in partnership processes will report greater benefits and higher levels
of ownership than those less involved. Depth of participation and level of commitment had a direct impact on perceptions of success. El Ansari and Phillips questioned whether these time intensive endeavors could be burdensome for leaders, making them too costly to maintain. They recommended institutions find ways to minimize the cost of participation, such as providing additional support. If a deep level of commitment is needed for success, time and resources must be allocated to the work.

According to Kisner et al. (1997), identifying partners who are equally committed to the relationship is an important component of partnership selection. The authors stressed that individuals cannot be chosen out of convenience or ease. Instead, there should be a strategic process for including individuals who bring strengths to the partnership, can foster synergism, and have the potential to enhance educational offerings. Clarity of purpose enables leaders to recruit partners who are best suited for the relationship.

**Clearly Aligned Goals**

The development of model campus and community partnerships requires that members invest time in clearly defining goals and objectives (Buettner et al., 2002; Kisker & Carducci, 2003; Kisner et al., 1997). The identification of desired outcomes and thoughtful plan of action provides direction for the collaboration and ensures that members are committed to a common purpose. While partners represent different organizational interests, a commitment to shared goals brings leaders together and builds social cohesion among the group (Merzel et al., 2007).

While collective interests provide a purpose for the collaborative relationship, it is common for members to have additional outcomes in mind. This is not necessarily
negative aspect of collaboration but one that reflects the unique priorities of each partner.

A study conducted by Jones (2003) demonstrated how partners can be united while still maintaining individual interests. The study described a partnership between a university, an elementary school, and a community resource center. While the group adopted project goals and proceeded in a cohesive manner, each member had a vested interest in outcomes that were uniquely beneficial to their own organizations. The college wanted to secure field placements for student teachers; the elementary school desired higher test scores for their students, and the community resource center sought additional support for the Latino population they served. Overlapping interests brought the team together to create an after school program, and common goals shaped the direction of their work. Even so, the desire to achieve what is best for one’s organization will always be a thread that is woven through campus and community relationships. According to Jones, the challenge lies in ensuring that identified partnership goals remain the priority.

Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007) provided guidance on the processes necessary to adequately define partnership goals. They suggested that campus and community leaders initiate a relationship by clearly acknowledging that they have something to gain from the collaboration. The validation of mutual and independent needs sets the foundation for transparency and realistic expectations. A vetting process which allows all members to disclose personal interests is highly recommended since enthusiasm and unrealistic expectations can cloud judgment and lead to later disappointments (Baum, 2000). Amey et al. (2010) suggested that potential partners look beyond the value added rhetoric often found in requests for educational alliances and ask a series of questions that will allow mutual understandings to materialize. These questions should address issues such as
personal motivations, resource expectations, and leadership roles. Intensive dialogues can hinder hidden agendas and allow members to understand the relationship and its purpose in the same manner.

The importance of developing partnership goals through dialogue and careful planning cannot be overstated. This was illustrated by Edens and Gilsinan (2005) who used a mixed-methods research approach to examine a partnership between two Missouri universities, a K-12 school district, and the Coca-Cola Foundation. The Foundation awarded educational grants with the intention of lowering the high school drop-out rate and increasing the number of college bound students. The program partnered K-12 schools with the universities to provide academic assistance to inner city children. According to Edens and Gilsinan, the school systems selected for participation were in target areas where the corporate sponsor wanted to “gain access, increase presence, and leverage relationships in the cities and institutions” (p. 128). As the partnership progressed, it was plagued with numerous problems. On a philosophical level, educators questioned whether corporate sponsors should be granted campus access for the purpose of product placement. On an operational level, issues with budgeting, scheduling and reporting surfaced. While the corporation operated on a 12-month schedule, the school district and university did not. When the corporation held in-service trainings, they were scheduled during the month of August, when teachers were off contract. The distribution of resources were aligned with the corporate calendar and made no concessions for academic schedules. While differences in organizational values and cultures contributed to the demise of the partnership, Edens and Gilsinan indicated that poor planning, lack of social capital, and unrealized goals were also problematic.
Baum (2000) also stressed the importance of partnership planning and goal setting. He suggested that university and community partnerships “begin with clear purposes, including specific targets of action, goals with respect to the targets, and means to support the goals” (p. 234). He advocated for structure and transparency but also encouraged an element of ambiguity. Because partnerships are complex and evolve over time, a willingness to adapt to changes in structure and partnership identities is necessary. The challenge for leaders is to accommodate these “two principles in tension” (p. 234), finding a balance between structure and flexibility that supports separate and common goals.

As campus and community partners collaborate to define partnership goals, consideration must be given to equity of benefits. In 2000, the national organization, Campus Compact, identified qualities of genuine democratic partnerships. The organization, which is committed to advancing civic engagement in higher education, cited that an essential feature in democratic partnerships is that each participant benefits in a way that satisfies “their unique self-interests as well as the shared interests of the group” (p. 5). When the needs of partners are met with fairness and respect, participants are more likely to remain committed to the relationship.

This perspective was shared by Maurrasse (2002) who stated that successful partnerships demonstrate a high level of commitment to mutual benefits. He noted that, all too often, universities gain more mileage from the collaboration due to inequities in power and resources. Bringle, Games, and Mallory (1999) voiced similar concerns when they stated that institutions of higher education often perceive local communities as “pockets of needs, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise”
These relationship dynamics can cultivate an imbalance of power and respect that hinders the development of healthy relationships. In model partnerships, there is an expectation that each member will be seen as an equal partner who benefits equally. The agenda and self-interests of one member cannot be allowed to take precedence, even if that individual yields authority or claims greater need. While partnerships evolve over time, this commitment to reciprocal relationships must remain intact.

**Effective Communication**

Communication plays a significant role in the development and sustainability of campus and community partnerships and is often to blame when things go wrong (Bracken, 2007). Frequency of contact, communication styles, and respectful interactions contribute to successful collaborations (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Miller, 2007; Prins, 2005; Walsh, 2006). According to Tett (2005), a quality partnership is dependent upon clear communication and recognizes each member’s ability to contribute to the conversation.

In a study conducted by Kirshenbaum and Reagan (2001), researchers evaluated 57 partnerships between the University of Rochester and the Rochester City School District. The types of collaborations varied in terms of activities, staffing, longevity, and depth of interaction. The purpose of the research was to explore the relationships between the college and district schools, examining issues such as commitment levels, sustainability, and effectiveness. Telephone interviews yielded data which provided an overview of project history, goals, and satisfaction levels. Although the depth of interaction varied among the programs, the K-12 leaders who were most satisfied with their college partnerships cited open and frequent communication as a contributing factor.
When there were high levels of collaboration including frequency of communication, effective leadership, joint ownership, and equal commitment, the relationship was more apt to be successful.

One component of partnership development is creating a common language (Amey et al., 2007). This task can be overlooked, as members assume they share similar professional practices and understandings (Bracken, 2007). In reality, campus and community representatives may subscribe to a language and organizational culture that is unique to their own institution. While working with multiple sectors can help with the attainment of difficult goals, these relationships are often troubled by frequent misunderstandings and tense interactions. According to Miller (2007), organizations may have differing opinions on how to accomplish goals but each “must be able to communicate their unique ways of acting” (p. 239). Conflicting assumptions can be addressed through dialogue and frequent communication. Defining terms, expectations, and meanings can ensure that everyone understands the partnership in the same way.

In a 2008 study, Miller and Hafner illustrated how poor communication and differing perspectives can be detrimental to a collaborative relationship. The researchers described a series of partnership meetings where university leaders facilitated structured discussions around a large conference table located on the college campus. Community members who played a vital role in the partnership responded to this approach in a negative way, believing that the meetings were facilitated in a condescending manner. They accused the university of being insensitive to cultural differences and communication styles. What was considered standard practices in an academic setting was perceived as alienating to community members who felt uncomfortable and
undervalued in the meetings facilitated by the educators. The partners preferred a less formal and structured dynamic, one that promoted open and meaningful dialogues. While it was not the intent of the university to foster an imbalance in power dynamics, this perception resulted from insensitivity to operational and cultural differences. Open communication is critical in avoiding these misunderstandings which can permanently damage a relationship. While no one can fully anticipate the cultural conflicts that may occur in a multi-organizational partnership, they can be minimized through honest and frequent communication.

Bracken (2007) evaluated a partnership between multiple stakeholders including several community colleges, a university, government agency educational directors, community volunteers, K-12 teachers, and nonprofit administrators. The partnership, which began with great enthusiasm and a similar language, eventually began to show signs of conflict. Bracken attributed the tension to differences in communication styles. Although members seemed to speak the same language, meanings and contexts were interpreted very differently. Issues over power and resources began to emerge and build divisions between the partners. One example of this occurred when the grant planners (community college, university, and government agency) invited nonprofit organizations to participate in the collaboration as a way to recruit additional community members. When members of these organizations empowered themselves with leadership roles and decision making privileges, conflicts ensued. According to Bracken, some of the misunderstanding occurred over the language of collaboration and what it meant to each partner. For the planners, participation included those with limited, supportive roles. For the community members, serving as a collaborative member translated into shared power
and authority. Eventually, these issues were resolved through intense conversations and analysis about what was said and what was actually meant. While the words can be the same, it is important to remember that meanings are shaped through cultural and organizational contexts. When partnerships are formed, exploring these differences is a critical component to building healthy relationships. Developing a common language entails getting to know each partner and understanding the multiple lenses that shapes perspectives.

**Establishing Trust**

All campus and community partnerships involve an element of risk. Not only do members agree to collaborate on projects that are important to their organization, they agree to share responsibility for success with someone outside their institution. For leaders who are comfortable working independently or assuming full responsibility for project outcomes, this can be a difficult undertaking (White-Cooper, Dawkins, Kamin, & Anderson, 2009). Successful partnerships require a level of trust and vulnerability that allows members to fully commit to the collaboration and feel comfortable working with others from different sectors (Halliday et al., 2004; Torres, 2000).

The difficulty of building trust within multi-organizational partnerships was documented in a 2007 qualitative study conducted with community members, a health department and university educators who worked together on public health research projects (White-Cooper et al., 2009). The goal was to examine the multiple perspectives of those involved in the partnership in regards to personal experiences and trust related issues. Six focus groups were facilitated: two with community partners, two with health department representatives, and two with university faculty members. The findings
indicated that community representatives were often apprehensive about working with the
university and questioned their intentions. Some of the members had prior experience
working with the research institution and were disappointed with the outcomes of those
experiences. Representatives from the health department were generally optimistic about
the collaboration but noted there were some instances where initial expectations were not
met. Academic partners expressed some frustration with the partnership work but
acknowledged these feelings stemmed from the attitudes of university colleagues who
questioned the validity of their community based research work. Faculty members also
cited the difficulty of interdisciplinary research and the challenges of partnering with
culturally diverse populations. All three groups shared rich information regarding their
collaborative experiences and agreed that developing trust was an essential component.
When asked to define the factors that led to trustful relationships, the group cited open
communication, clearly defined needs, timely feedback, respect, and flexibility.

The findings from this study also indicated that trust occurred at an interpersonal
level. Members trusted their partners, not necessarily the organizations they represented.
It was the personal relationships that made a difference and allowed members to be less
apprehensive about working with someone outside their home institution. It was only
after multiple successes with an organization that participants viewed the organization as
a whole as worthy of trust.

Knowing that partnerships are built on qualities such as trust, commitment,
communication, and mutual interests, it is not surprising that an analogy has been drawn
between campus and community partnerships and personal relationships (Bringle &
Hatcher, 2002). Because collaborations evolve as the result of personal interactions;
development processes are perceived as similar. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) compared the starting point of a partnership to that of a budding relationship. In personal dealings, individuals measure the merits of the relationship before proceeding to engage further. In campus and community partnerships, members must first determine the desirability of the collaboration before commitment. The key to both is establishing carefully defined criteria that will help select or eliminate suitable partners.

Just as relationships develop over time, so do partnerships. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) continued the analogy by suggesting that partnerships, like personal relationships, evolve in different ways and varying time frames. The evaluation of processes, such as the frequency of interaction, the costs and benefits of involvement, and the level of shared decision making, all play a role in determining whether the relationship deserves a long term commitment. The authors conclude that the desired “terms of engagement” are ones that “preserve the integrity of each partner and, at the same time, honor the purpose of the relationship and the growth of each party” (p. 513).

**Partnership Challenges**

External partnerships often begin with great promise only to dissolve into frustration and failure (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Many underestimate the complexities of building external relationships and are unprepared for the numerous challenges encountered (Baum, 2000). In 1989, Gray stated that all collaborative work is difficult. What makes campus and community partnerships particularly challenging is the diversity of membership. Participants are representing different organizations and may have conflicting ideas about how to approach and solve problems. E. S. Weiss et al. (2002) acknowledged that hardships often lead to high failure rates:
Building effective partnerships is time-consuming, resource intensive, and very difficult. Many partnerships encounter great obstacles while attempting to establish good working relationships between partners, create viable plans, and implement interventions. The problems encountered are generally not well anticipated, and collaborative processes often break down; as a result, partnerships have a high failure rate. (p. 684)

The key to avoiding failed partnerships is the ability to work through problems as they surface. In 2005, Prins explored a relationship where open and honest dialogue was essential to solving conflict. The partnership was between a university, K-12 school district, and a family resource center who worked together to serve the needs of migrant families. According to Prins, “Often, disputes are not about the issues at hand (e.g., scheduling a meeting) but rather what it represents such as the experience of disrespect or the illegitimate exercise of authority” (p. 57). The case study explored how an action by a university representative was viewed as crossing professional boundaries and threatening authority. The conflict began when a university partner scheduled a meeting with a group of teenagers without obtaining prior consent from the director of the family resource center who oversaw youth activities. This action sparked a great deal of conflict and threatened the sustainability of the relationship. Questions emerged about proper protocol and organizational boundaries.

Subsequent interviews with each partner revealed the partnership had a long history of unstable goals, membership, and decision making. The issue which initiated the conflict was really a symptom of much deeper problems. While all members shared a strong commitment to serving families, there was an absence of formalized policies and
practices to guide the work. Lack of communication played a role in the conflict but issues of power and respect were also problematic. Prins (2005) suggested that educational leaders who plan and facilitate external partnerships consider the ways in which power can be subtly exercised over community partners.

A continuous theme demonstrated in the literature review is the inequities that exist between campus and community partners (Amey et al., 2007; Baum, 2000; Bracken, 2007; Holland, 2001; Maurrasse, 2002; Prins, 2005; Scheibel et al., 2005). Because institutions of higher education are often the ones with funding and resources, partnerships can be driven by university goals and research agendas (Maurrasse, 2002). According to Bringle et al. (1999), universities often treat the communities they serve as populations to be studied, serviced, or enlightened with academic expertise. Those desiring a democratic partnership characterized by equality may be frustrated when differences emerge in power, decision making, and goal setting (Miller, 2007). Community representatives often report their role is minimized and partnership expectations unmet (Jones, 2003).

Researchers agree that some level of tension is inherent to campus and community partnerships (Baum, 2000; Maurrasse, 2002; Hubbell & Burman, 2006). The merging of values, work cultures, and operational styles can inhibit the attainment of quality relationships and goal achievement (Miller, 2007). Misunderstandings can occur over daily business practices such as scheduling and timelines. Examples of this are often evident collaborations between higher education and the business sector (Edens & Gilsinan, 2005). While corporations operate on a 12-month calendar, most educational systems adhere to a 10-month schedule. This one difference in institutional calendars can
create conflicts with meeting schedules, project deadlines, budgeting cycles, and the alignment of reporting practices.

In addition to operational practices, Miller (2007) reported that community members often felt a greater sense of urgency in achieving desired outcomes, particularly when they advocated on behalf of others. Partners questioned whether academia moves too slowly to adequately respond to the complex needs of society. According to Holland (2005), this might be attributed to the fact that universities are self-referential in nature. Although educators see themselves as the purveyors and distributors of knowledge, they often focus their attention on issues that are important to themselves versus the greater community. This attitude can be problematic in the development of campus and community partnerships, resulting in collaborations that are one-sided and university driven.

While the challenges may seem great, Hubbell and Burman (2006) stressed there is much to be learned through hardships. In 2006, the researchers examined a campus and community partnership between a land-grant university and a Wyoming healthcare clinic. The clinic was particularly important to both partners in that it provided free services to uninsured community members and provided necessary field work for the university students. The goal of the study was to examine the partnership and identify factors that contributed to development of successful partnerships. In addition to having a clear mission and a strong commitment, the researchers discovered that a level of tension contributed to healthy relationships. Tensions over funding and operational practices pulled the partners back and forth. It was working through these issues that ultimately propelled the group forward and created a stronger collaboration. Hubbell and
Burman stated that dynamic tension serves a purpose by energizing partners and accommodating new ideas. The absence of conflict may signify an underdeveloped partnership.

**Partnership Champions**

Leadership plays an important role in the development of campus and community partnerships. Because these collaborations are labor intensive and demand interpersonal and organizational skills, relationships can be strengthened or weakened by those facilitating the efforts. The literature addressed the role of the collaborative leadership and placed great emphasis on the necessity of recruiting individuals who are both passionate about and capable of leading these efforts.

A recent article by Coleman (2011) examined leadership in school-based collaborations. He noted that the term collaborative leadership is often interpreted in two different ways. For some, it entails the sharing of leadership responsibilities within a single organization in order to promote learning and organizational effectiveness. It is a management approach that moves away from top-down practices and empowers employees to work collectively for a stronger organization. For others, the term is broadened to include leaders who build collaborative relationships outside a single institution. In both instances, there are certain competencies that define collaborative leaders. These include the ability to promote a common vision while empowering others to be active contributors. There is a high commitment to success that requires determination, problem solving skills, and knowledge of conflict resolution techniques (Coleman, 2011).
In the 2002 publication, *Collaborative Leadership: Developing Effective Partnerships in Communities and Schools*, Rubin elaborated on the skills necessary for effective partnerships by defining 24 dimensions of collaborative leadership. These competencies include: strategic thinking, credibility, interpersonal communication skills, diplomacy, data driven decision leadership, resource development, and management skills. While the list may sound intimidating to future practitioners, Rubin stressed that few people are gifted enough to have mastered all 24 qualities but possess varying levels of each one. The goal for collaborative leadership is to strengthen the skills necessary to better facilitate campus and community relationships. While the work is incredibly challenging, it need not be limited to a selected few.

Amey (2010) stressed the importance of partnership champions who develop and maintain external collaborations. While partnerships may be supported by college administration, they are typically driven by personnel who have a vested interest in the outcomes. These individuals work diligently to build successful relationships while serving as advocates for the work. Champions have a wide variety of roles and responsibilities that include creating a vision, facilitating processes, and soliciting campus support. Without leaders who are willing to assume this level of ownership, achieving successful outcomes would be difficult. According to Amey, these individuals must be passionate about collaborative efforts, particularly since these relationships are often facilitated in addition to assigned responsibilities.

The importance of partnership champions was further validated in a study by Bosma et al. (2010). The qualitative study was conducted with partners from a university, K-8 district, and community agency. Together, the group provided a service
learning based program for middle school students that aimed to lower incidents of violence and school failure. Through a series of interviews, observations, and meetings, the researchers discovered the importance of champions in advancing program goals and sustaining activities. The leaders were identified as individuals who understood the school culture and organizational practices. They strived to maintain positive relationships with partners and school administrators which resulted in a cohesive network. The study findings underscored the importance of partnership champions in achieving successful outcomes.

While Bosma et al. (2010) examined leadership practices within a case study, E. S. Weiss et al. (2002) conducted a national study in an effort to examine leadership within multi-organizational collaborations. Using quantitative methods, the researchers examined factors that contributed to the development of partnership synergy. For the context of their study, synergy was defined as a “primary characteristic of a successful collaboration” (p. 684). According to E. S. Weiss et al., the ability to measure this quality enables leaders to determine whether a partnership is worth the investment of time and resources. The participants, who worked in the area of health promotion, responded to a series of topics including leadership effectiveness, resources, challenges, communication, and commitment to common goals. The findings determined that leadership effectiveness had the greatest impact on developing synergy. Participants valued leaders who were able to facilitate open dialogues and productive interactions. They appreciated those with the ability to think innovatively and challenge limitations. When partnerships were led by individuals who were willing to nurture interpersonal relationships, empower members of
the team, and embrace the diverse perspectives of the group, the collaboration was more likely to have higher levels of synergy.

Much of the literature examining the role of leadership in campus and community partnerships concludes with a list of necessary or desirable qualities for practitioners (Coleman, 2011). Skills such as communication, problem solving, and goal setting may sound like attributes necessary for all leaders, whether or not they are engaged in external partnerships. Armistead, Pettigrew, and Aves (2007) addressed this very issue when they conducted a study to determine whether leadership practices in multi-sector partnerships were different from those in a single organization. The researchers stated, “The extent to which approaches relevant to a single organization translate adaptively into a partnership context is not clear” (p. 213). They questioned how those working in hierarchical structures adapted practices to fit a collaborative model. Data were collected through interactive learning seminars and partnerships forums with practitioners from all different sectors. The group identified a number of traits they viewed as essential for leading partnerships. This included: a clear vision and deep commitment, the ability to motivate and inspire others, and the willingness to live the values of the partnership. The participants also identified challenges unique to multi-sector partnerships, such as differences in organizational cultures and building consensus across sectors. An analysis of the data demonstrated that the facilitation of external partnerships did not require a different skill set. In contrast, the traits, behaviors, and tone of discourse were all framed by the participants’ traditional understanding of leadership roles and practices.
Assessment of Partnerships

As colleges and community organizations invest valuable resources in the building of external partnerships, the future of these relationships will depend on their outcomes. Exploring effective processes and measuring results are necessary in order to better understand these complex relationships. Unfortunately, the literature presents little information about the assessment of campus and community partnerships. Maurrasse (2002) stated, “No one has figured out how to accurately assess the progress of these highly complicated efforts” (p. 132). He noted that the movement of campus and community collaborations is still fairly new in higher education and will need additional time for outcomes to materialize. This can be problematic for partnerships driven by external funding sources where measurable results are expected. The lack of data driven decision making and proven outcomes has left some educational leaders questioning the value of these time intensive endeavors (Baum, 2000).

Before the assessment process can begin, practitioners must first determine what they plan to evaluate. Are successful partnerships measured through benchmarks, achieved outcomes, or the quality of the collaborative relationship? Baum (2000) raised this issue when he noted that campus and community relationships are often filled with unrealistic expectations. If partners are committed to long term processes like creating social change, attaining desired outcomes may not come quickly or easily. Baum questioned whether institutions are setting themselves up for failure by establishing lofty goals and hoping to achieve them with individuals outside of their organizational culture.

Gelmon (2003) cited the need for assessment as a way to legitimize partnership work and acquire data that will shape future planning and decision making. She stressed
that partnerships are not just an entity, they are also a process. For this reason, it is important to assess both the partnership and the progress made towards shared goals. To help practitioners think about assessment models, Gelmon introduced a matrix that examines characteristics such as the capacity to fulfill the organizational mission, the nature of interaction, social and economic benefits, satisfaction levels, and sustainability. An evaluation of these areas covers the key components of collaborative work and provides a nice framework for practitioners needing guidance with the assessment process.

As difficult as assessment processes may seem in multi-organizational partnerships, a case study by Rendón, Gans, and Calleroz (1998) demonstrated that careful planning and determination can result in useful and valuable practices. The authors reflected upon their own involvement in a program sponsored by the Ford Foundation that brought partners together from K-12 schools, community colleges, universities, community agencies, government, and business. The goal was to provide a support system for at-risk students throughout the nation. Initially, the assessment model was designed by a diverse group of leaders who wanted the process to be easily understood and implemented, fully participatory, nonthreatening and nonjudgmental, and rigorous enough to ensure credibility. Rendón et al. reflected on the first 6 years of assessment practices, noting lessons learned from each stage of the process. Some of the core messages included: (a) assessment takes time and practice, (b) practices have to be woven throughout the partnership, otherwise they are neglected, (c) assessment should be framed as a learning process versus a judgment, and (d) processes involve a great deal of interpersonal interactions, including communication and negotiation. The authors
concluded that the process was painful and yet necessary in order to advance the program and document change. While their experiences centered on a national project where assessment support and expertise was provided by the Foundation, the information provided is relevant and useful for all different types of partnerships.

Summary

The literature reveals a great deal about campus and community partnerships. These time intensive collaborations are formed in efforts to extend educational opportunities and build community relations. They demand leaders who are committed to solving problems through a shared vision and collective process. The challenges encountered in campus and community work are great, and even those with the best intentions often fail. While much has been written about these relationships, there is still a great deal to learn.

Although the literature provided an overview of campus and community partnerships and the different dimensions of these collaborative efforts, there were noticeable gaps in the material. Specifically, there was an absence of literature that adequately reflected community college practices and perspectives. While articles could be found that highlighted successful partnerships, they failed to provide data that could inform future practices. Despite the knowledge that community colleges play an important role in the development of healthy communities and the education of a diverse citizenry, little documentation exists that validates the work. In a time when public institutions are heavily criticized for poor performance, a demonstrated commitment to innovative and collective solutions would be beneficial. This study adds to the literature base.
CHAPTER 3—RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations utilize in order to facilitate successful collaborations. In developing the research design, qualitative methods were determined to be the most suitable means of data collection. Since the intent was to learn from the experiences of seasoned practitioners, capturing personal stories of successes and challenges was essential. Meaningful conversations with leaders who have excelled at facilitating external relationships can result in data which can inform and inspire.

As Chapter 2 illustrated, effective partnerships are complex and relationship intensive. While successful collaborations can help strengthen the capacity of an institution, leaders may not fully understand how to facilitate these relationships (Amey, 2010; Baum, 2000; Sink & Jackson, 2002; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002). In order to better understand the practices and processes that lead to success, individual interviews were conducted with leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations. While the literature provides plenty of “how to” guidelines, I questioned whether these linear approaches truly captured the nuances of interpersonal relationships and the complexities of collaboration across organizational cultures. Qualitative methodologies provided the opportunity to explore the “how” and the “why” of these relationships. Since the intent was to build a framework of knowledge based upon the experiences of those engaged in the work, the study utilized a grounded theory approach.
Grounded Theory

Birks and Mills (2011) stated that grounded theory has become “one the most popular research designs in the world” (p. 2). The approach was first introduced by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the 1960s after they conducted research on the subject of death and dying. As they analyzed data which included long conversations, observations, and analytical notes, a theoretical analysis of the subject emerged (Charmaz, 2006). This process prompted the sociologists to suggest that data can inform and define theoretical models (Birks & Mills, 2011). This was an innovative approach which challenged existing notions that data are a means to confirm existing theories.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that exploring processes and practices is one way to move beyond descriptive work and create a theory based upon individual field experiences. They noted that existing theories are often ill-suited to reflect the individuals and cultural settings being studied. Because the purpose of this research project was to gain an increased understanding of the practices and processes that lead to successful collaborations, constructing grounded theory was the ideal approach to the work. The intent was not to test or challenge existing perspectives, but to create a new theoretical model informed by the expertise of those actively engaged in the work.

According to Merriam (2009), the ability to construct theory from the lives of others is what differentiates grounded theory from other models. There is an emphasis placed on an inductive process which respects and validates the human experience. When I began this study, one of the goals was to honor the work of those who have excelled in an area where many have failed. There was a healthy respect for leaders whose vision for success takes them beyond the walls of their own organization. There
was a desire to meet these individuals, share their stories, and collect information which could inform future practices. Constructing grounded theory is uniquely designed to accommodate these objectives.

Due to the nature of the work, flexibility was critical in data collection and analysis. The task of accommodating 19 participants throughout the state who were engaged in various types of work, in different organizational settings, would have been difficult given a rigid set of rules and guidelines. A grounded theory approach allowed responsiveness to individual needs, work styles, and narratives. It also encouraged openness and creativity when immersed in the task of data analysis. While this flexible approach was essential to the work, there were times where things felt messy and ambiguous. Charmaz (2006) noted this lack of structure allows the imagination to flow, promoting innovative results. Ultimately, this inductive process led to clearly defined findings and recommendations for future practices.

As a conceptual model for the research, a constructivist paradigm was adopted, since this framework places focus on how “participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Understanding how college and community leaders cultivate multi-sector collaborations within the context of their organizational settings was a critical component of the study. In order to construct a theory from the shared experiences of others, it was necessary to accept the validity of individual perceptions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a belief in multiple realities allows the data to be credible, transferable, and trustworthy.

Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) stated that “constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher, the participant and the construction
of meaning” (p. 9). Investigators are recognized as participants in the process versus objective bystanders. Because of their role in data collection and analysis, the findings can never be seen as value free. Instead, there is a healthy appreciation for the human dimensions of inquiry. This perspective lends itself well to grounded theory and the emergent nature of qualitative work.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions evolved through various phases. Initially, they stemmed from a professional curiosity. Later, they were shaped by the literature review and interview processes.

1. What are the characteristics of model campus and community partnerships and what processes lead to the development of these characteristics?
2. What are the challenges encountered by community college leaders and their partners when facilitating campus and community partnerships?
3. What strategies do leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations use in order to develop successful partnerships?
4. How do leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations define and measure success?

**Sampling Strategy and Description of Sample**

Since the intent of the study was to learn from campus and community leaders who excel at partnership work, purposeful sampling methods were employed. Specifically, the study relied on the snowball technique in order to identify a specific population of participants. According to Merriam (2009), this method is one of the most common ways to compile a sample. It relies on the process of identifying key participants...
and then asking them to refer others who may be qualified for the study. This strategy was a necessary one since the research involved interviewing at least two individuals engaged in each partnering relationship. Community college leaders were identified first and then asked to refer their community partners for participation. The following section summarizes this process and describes the sample in greater detail.

The first step to composing the sample was to identify community college leaders who were viewed by their institutions as partnership champions. Electronic letters were sent to over 500 college employees at the 112 community colleges in the state of California. The recruitment letter described the purpose of the study and solicited nominations for participants. A copy of this letter can be found in Appendix A. Those receiving the requests held positions in administration, college outreach, public and government relations, and career and technical programs. They were specifically asked to identify individuals that they viewed as exceptional in cultivating and maintaining external relationships. The goal was to generate a diverse group of leaders from different divisions who were engaged in various types of work.

Recruitment efforts began in May 2011 and yielded 53 nominations. In some cases, multiple individuals from the same institution were recognized. In other cases, college administrators declined to participate or cited the absence of employees who fit the criteria. Since the goal was to select 10 community college leaders for participation, no other recruitment efforts were deemed necessary. The pool was large enough to complete the sample.

The second step of the process involved contacting the 53 individuals to determine interest in participation and whether they met the predefined criteria.
According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), it is important for qualitative researchers to create a list of desirable attributes and then recruit individuals based on those qualities. This allows the researcher to narrow the sample and intentionally select members who best fit the study needs. Following this protocol, each nominee was interviewed via a phone conversation or electronic correspondence in order to determine eligibility. Use of the following criteria narrowed the potential sample from 53 potential participants to 40 participants:

1. The individual facilitates a partnership that is recognized by both the college and community organization as a successful collaboration.
2. The individual facilitates a partnership that has been in existence for a minimum of 2 years.
3. Both the college and community leader have facilitated the partnership for a minimum of 2 years.
4. The partnership involves more than business transactions (the rental of room space, the lease of vending machines).
5. The individual who facilitates the partnership is viewed by colleagues as a partnership champion. In other words, success is attributed in part to leadership contributions.
6. The community college leader is willing to refer campus partners for participation purposes.
7. The individual who facilitates the partnership is available for follow-up questions throughout the research process.
Once the pool of 40 individuals was confirmed, the next step of the process was to compile diverse representation. The goal was to compose a sample that reflected different regions, institutional size and enrollments, college divisions, community organizations, and partnership purposes. Keeping these areas in mind, the sample was narrowed to 15 potential participants, with the anticipation that there would be cancellations and schedule conflicts.

Once these leaders were confirmed and given final details, they were asked to refer partners they believed best fit the study criteria. The second phase of snowball sampling occurred as these individuals were contacted and evaluated for eligibility. Since some of the community leaders were not interested in participation, this further narrowed the sample.

When the recruitment processes were completed, the final sample included 10 community colleges and 10 partnering organizations in the state of California. During the interview stages, one of the community representatives experienced a death in the family and discontinued participation. Therefore, the final group was composed of 19 individuals. Four of the individuals represented institutions in the northern sector, 6 the central portion of the state, and 10 were located in the southern areas. The smallest community college had an enrollment of 7,000 students, while the largest served close to 25,000. Geographically, the institutions represented rural, desert, coastal, and urban communities. College leaders participating in the study worked in the areas of administration, instruction, career and technical education, contract education, foundation, and school outreach. The community leaders worked in the areas of K-12 education, business and industry, nonprofit, and government.
Data Saturation

It should be noted that during the planning phase of the study, 10 partnerships (20 interviews) were determined to be an adequate sample. While this was the plan, the final determination was made during the research process as data saturation materialized. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a researcher must continue to interview new participants until a pattern of replication or redundancy occurs. At this point, emerging themes diminish and all new data fits into existing categories (Charmaz, 2006). Although levels of saturation occurred after the completion of 8-10 interviews, all 19 were completed in order to accommodate the diversity of the sample. Since interviews were conducted in regional phases, concluding the process early would have eliminated the participation of certain regions and sectors. For this reason, there was a very strong level of saturation which indicated the exhaustion of possible themes and categories.

Maintaining Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality is an important one in both the research and writing process (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Every precaution was taken during the study to protect the participants’ identity, as well as the identity of their organizations. Study protocol was preapproved by the San Diego State Institutional Review Board and all guidelines were followed. A copy of the Individual Review Board Approval Letter can be found in Appendix B. The participants were fully informed about the study, including the purpose, timeline, and dissemination of findings. In addition, the roles of participants were defined so that expectations were clear, and individuals knew they had the option to withdrawal at any point in the process. Protecting the privacy of those who volunteered their time was an essential step in the research process. The intent of this preinterview
protocol was to inform and create a level of transparency that promoted openness and honesty.

Prior to interviews, each participant was assured that everything was confidential and that personal and organizational names would be protected. The individuals were presented with a copy of the consent form and asked to review it, asking questions whenever needed. In many cases, the form was mailed prior to the interview in order to provide adequate time for review and to allow for supervisor or institutional approval. Once the individuals signed it, a copy was provided for their records and a signed copy was locked in a home office filing cabinet. A copy of this form is located in Appendix C.

The interview recordings were sent to a transcription company outside of California as an additional precaution. Once the recordings were fully transcribed, I went through each one eliminating names of individuals, cities, organizations, and institutions. Pseudonyms were assigned to each of these areas and used during the analysis and writing of the findings. The goal was to make the data completely free of all identifying factors. The tape recordings were then stored in a locked filing cabinet. These will be destroyed after the dissertation defense is completed.

**Data Collection Strategies**

The data for this study were collected in multiple ways. According to Creswell (2007), one advantage of conducting qualitative studies is the ability to use multiple sources of information. A diverse collection of data can strengthen findings and provide a wider perspective of the research topic. Collection strategies for this study included: semi-structured interviews, observer notes, electronic correspondence, published materials, and analytic memos.
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 community college leaders and 9 of their partners. The sessions lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and were held at a location selected by the participants. Because the goal of the study was to learn from the experiences of others, interviews were deemed the best method of generating information about practices, processes, and leadership perspectives. The opportunity to ask a series of open-ended questions and then request further clarification resulted in a more complete set of data. This particular format also provided a venue for college leaders and community representatives to share their thoughts and experiences without interruption or outside influences. Unlike focus groups where the emphasis is placed on group interaction, meeting independently with participants ensured all voices were heard equally (Merriam, 2009). Although the process was time intensive, it was imperative to hear each story as its own unique occurrence.

Kvale (1996) compared interview research to that of taking a thoughtfully planned journey. Traveling to new places, the researcher artfully observes and listens to those they encounter along the way. As people share their personal narratives and social realities, a story unfolds that reflects the truths of many. In the end, the researcher becomes the storyteller, never pretending to be untouched by the journey or those they met along the way. Kvale used this metaphor to illustrate a constructivist approach to interview based research. Because grounded theory is process driven, the experience was much like taking a journey and gaining new understandings through the constant collection and analysis of data.

As the researcher, I embraced the notion that rich understandings emerge through conversations with experienced practitioners. Birks and Mills (2011) stressed an
important component of conducting a grounded theory study is the acknowledgment of personal beliefs, biases, and values. I selected interview methods because I firmly believed that personal dialogue was the best way to truly capture the stories of those who advocate for collaboration, build authentic partnerships, and navigate the barriers inherent to the work.

Another tool used to collect data was the composition of observer notes. Immediately following each interview, I would find a quiet place to write summaries and personal impressions of the interview process. I took note of issues that needed further consideration, as well as topics that surfaced after the recording process ended. It quickly became apparent that the language used in an interview did not always reflect the sentiment. One example of this occurred when a college leader stated, “I love how much our president supports community partnerships.” This reflected a positive perspective on the written transcript. In actuality, the college leader was rolling her eyes and using a sarcastic tone when she said it, indicating this was not the case. These types of behaviors happened frequently as people were mindful of being recorded and saying the socially correct things. Having notes that reflected these issues were instrumental in the analysis phase of the study.

While it was not initially anticipated, electronic correspondence became another tool for data collection. As I prepared to interview each campus and community leader, a series of short notes and letters were exchanged electronically. These communications often included information the participants chose to disclose about themselves and their partnerships. After the interviews, many of the participants also sent informational materials to further summarize the totality of the work.
The electronic correspondence partnered with document analysis provided additional pieces to the partnership puzzle. Because I was keenly aware of how valuable time was to each participant, I wanted to be as fully informed as possible prior to the interview. This eliminated asking programming questions which were adequately addressed in the existing literature. Although each partnership had differing levels of public documentation, artifacts such as program reports, marketing pieces, and web page materials helped promote a better understanding of the collaboration. Having this collection of materials also proved helpful during the writing and analysis phase when clarification was needed.

Another important component of collecting data was the compilation of analytic memos. According to Charmaz (2006), these notes not only help document the research experiences but allow investigators to start comparing data and assigning codes. Memos were written throughout the research process and often shaped or redirected the work. Initially, the notes were rather short and captured initial thoughts about the process as a whole. With the completion of new interviews, the memos became more thorough, suggesting possible codes and new avenues of questioning. One example of this occurred when a partner spoke emotionally about the consequences of losing a long-time partner. I initially noted this in a memo assuming that a level of friendship had developed between the individuals which resulted in these feelings of sadness. In a following interview, this subject arose once again but was addressed by the partner as a normal occurrence that should be anticipated. The documentation of these different responses urged me to explore the subject in more depth and assign early codes. When later participants
addressed this issue, I was prepared to ask questions that would tease out a little more information. Had I waited until the final analysis, this opportunity would have been lost.

According to Merriam (2009), this constant comparative method of data analysis enables the researcher to examine and respond to the information as it emerges. An early grouping of similar topics and themes can inform decision making and impact the course of future interviews. Unlike quantitative methods where the investigator must wait for a completed data set to proceed, the constant comparison method requires the researcher to be analyzing the data and collection processes throughout the study.

**Instrument Development**

Developing a set of carefully crafted interview questions was a critical step in the research process. Because the study was inductive in nature, I understood there was a good chance these might evolve throughout the research process. Nevertheless, it was important to ensure questions were composed in a thoughtful and intentional manner. Since the interviews were scheduled for 60-minute periods, a series of 10 open-ended questions were written in anticipation of the allotted time frame. In designing the instrument, several factors were taken into consideration. First, it was important that the questions encouraged the sharing of personal stories and experiences versus providing specific answers. Secondly, the questions reflected some of the topics prevalent in the literature review. For example, literature clearly demonstrates that communication is a major component in development of model partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Miller, 2007; Prins, 2005). Using this knowledge as a starting point, follow-up questions were prepared should this topic arise in the interviews.
Another factor that was considered in the development of interview questions was the sample of the participants responding to them. Those selected for the study represented multiple fields such as business, education, social services, and K-12 education. This diverse group of leaders held different professional roles and represented different organizational cultures. It was important that questions were tailored for all participants and not skewed by topic or language. As a researcher who is also an educator, it would be easy to design questions that are comfortable for college administrators but seem foreign to nonprofit or corporate leaders.

Lastly, the instrument reflected what was learned during pilot studies. Mock interviews were held with four different college and community leaders from the San Diego area who would not be participating in the study but were actively engaged in the cultivation of external partnerships. After responding to the 10 questions, each leader provided feedback about what was effective and what seemed awkward. The mock interviews also provided an opportunity to practice asking the questions and observe genuine responses to the prompts. This experience was quite valuable and resulted in questions being altered or eliminated. In some cases, I followed the suggestions of participants and in other cases, I opted to follow what I thought was best. According to R. S. Weiss (1994), pilot interviews can reveal potential problems, such as the redundancy of information or the inability to solicit what is needed for a complete study. This perspective was validated by the pilot study. Initially, two questions were asked about model partnerships. One focused on the definition of a model relationship, while the other asked for specific characteristics. In the end, they both resulted in the same
information, so one of the questions was eliminated. A copy of the initial set of questions can be found in Appendix D.

In keeping with the constant comparison method of analysis, these questions did evolve over time. As each conversation yielded new information and the analytic memos reflected patterns of interest, questions were tailored to accommodate this emergent data. Questions were also altered when levels of saturation had occurred. When a question repeatedly solicited the same uniformed response, I questioned the importance of having all 19 members reporting the same thing. Instead, this was viewed as an opportunity to add new questions that better reflected the patterns of data.

Data Analysis

The analysis process was both frustrating and exhilarating. The study which resulted in over 1,000 pages of transcribed data took a great deal of time to fully appreciate and understand. Analysis began early in the study with the coding of interviews, observer notes, artifact review, and analytic memos. Charmaz (2006) stressed that grounded theory involves “simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis” (p. 5). Not only do these processes occur at the same time, they happen throughout the duration of the study utilizing a constant comparative method. Adhering to these guiding principles, the data were analyzed throughout collection processes.

Once an interview was conducted, the audio recording was immediately sent to a professional service for transcription. Within days, the text was completed and ready for the coding process. Because the study had a tight timeline and involved a large data set, an electronic software package was purchased to assist with the process. After working with the program for a month and feeling apprehensive about the results, manual coding
resumed. Several copies of the transcripts were made in order to allow for multiple coding techniques. The first step involved coding the document with a series of notes, underlined text, and preliminary codes. A few days later, a clean document was used for a second round of analysis. This time, post-it notes were used to capture phrases, page numbers, ideas, and codes. While reviewing the transcripts multiple times was labor intensive, it was worth the investment of time as new topics emerged in subsequent efforts that were not initially captured. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), a genuine comfort level with the data helps promote a more thorough analysis. By continually reviewing the data, this level of comfort was achieved.

Throughout the process, the post-it notes were hung on a blank wall and moved around to define different categories of information. This process was completed with each new interview and resulted in the post-it notes eventually losing adhesive power due to constant motion. Having the ability to reconstruct possible categories and seeing them in a linear manner helped achieve a more thorough level of analysis.

When the coding process was completed, there were 72 different codes which were eventually collapsed into 14 categories. These included: goals, mutual benefits, communication, trust, support, advisory boards, reflections, success, challenges, bureaucracy, change, disconnect, focus, and marketing. Because these topics were reoccurring themes throughout the interviews, most are addressed in the findings. Analytic memos played an important role in analysis due to the number of topics and issues to consider. I kept a spiral notebook with all of my handwritten notes and reviewed these on a continuous basis. When the wall of post-it notes felt too overwhelming, the memos provided an organized story of where I had been and where I
hoped to go. Messages written to myself proposed creative ideas, frustrations, and unanswered questions. While my initial intent was to formally transcribe these notes into professionally typed documents, the writing process became personal and the informal notebook was retained. Charmaz (2006) noted that each researcher must determine what methods work best for them when composing analytic memos. This unstructured method was determined to be the most effective for collecting thoughts and interpretations.

Once categories were clearly defined, the writing process began. In an effort to structure the data in a logical order, I kept referring back to the categories and rearranging them so they resembled a story. Throughout the process, there was never a feeling of completion or finality with data interaction. There were always lingering questions and necessary clarifications. This constant focus on the data led to a high confidence level with the study findings.
CHAPTER 4—RESEARCH FINDINGS

As a college leader tasked with developing external partnerships, I often find myself in awe of individuals who excel at facilitating cross-organizational collaborations. With a healthy appreciation for the challenges inherent to the work, this qualitative journey began with a desire to learn from others who have experienced great success. For a period of 5 months, I traveled around the state and met with campus and community leaders asking them to reflect on their personal experiences. These conversations generated a rich collection of data that addressed numerous partnership issues. While each leader had unique perspectives, certain themes emerged that demonstrated common understandings about partnership development. Table 1 illustrates the emergent themes and subthemes that are discussed in this chapter.

Table 1

Study Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieving Success</td>
<td>Passion, innovation, determination, results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligned Goals</td>
<td>Partnership selection, dialogue, goals and objectives, equitable benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Communication</td>
<td>Face-to-face interaction, periodic contact, quick response, delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustful Relationships</td>
<td>Research, partnership selection, courting period, building on small successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Lack of support, differing perceptions, organizational muck, loss of a partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Strategies</td>
<td>Be intentional, build support, determination, tell the story, build it to last</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Efforts</td>
<td>Lack of formal assessment efforts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campus and Community Partnerships

The findings of this study reflect the narratives of campus and community leaders who are dedicated to building multi-organizational partnerships in order to better serve students and community. Individuals were interviewed and asked to share strategies for cultivating successful collaborations. Ten community college employees and nine of their community partners shared their personal experiences, challenges, and successes. Through their voices, a story began to unfold that illustrates the art of building successful campus and community partnerships.

To better understand their work, it is helpful to know who they are, what they do, and why they have experienced success and recognition. The group was purposefully diverse, representing the fields of higher education, government, K-12 education, the nonprofit sector, and business and industry. While the representatives from higher education all worked at community colleges, their roles were quite different. Expertise came from the areas of workforce development, administration, instruction, the college foundation, college outreach, community and government relations, and community education. The least tenured college employee had held her position for 2 years, while the most seasoned leader had served her institution for 30 years.

The community partners worked in a variety of fields including the construction industry, manufacturing, community development, government, and K-12 education. The least tenured member had served her organization for 5 years, while the most senior member had held his position for 30 years. Table 2 provides an overview of the partners represented in the study and their organizational role.
Table 2

_Campus and Community Partners_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community college participants</th>
<th>Community partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Steven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Economic Workforce</td>
<td>Nonprofit Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Construction Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Miranda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator of Community Outreach</td>
<td>Nonprofit Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Dana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Instructional Programs</td>
<td>Director of Workforce Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Joanne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Dean</td>
<td>Nonprofit Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career Development for Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Economic Development and Community Ed.</td>
<td>Human Resources Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manufacturing Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Lynne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Community and Government Relations</td>
<td>Human Resources Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manufacturing Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Eduardo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator of Assessment and School Relationships</td>
<td>Nonprofit Founder and CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Advancement for Latino Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Megan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor of Environmental and Hazardous Materials and Management Technology</td>
<td>Operations Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Environmental Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory</td>
<td>Amelia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Community Advancement and Business Training Center</td>
<td>Director of State and Federal Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K-12 School District</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Geographically, all of the participants were from the state of California. Some worked in large, densely populated cities, while others worked in small rural communities. The largest community college represented in the study serves over 25,000 students, while the smallest serves 7,000 students. Some of the organizations were located in areas plagued by poverty and high crime rates, while others were located in affluent neighborhoods. As the researcher, I looked for contrasts and sought differences, hoping to discover the common threads that weave successful collaborations. The goal was to identify effective strategies for building campus and community partnerships that crossed job titles, geographic regions, and socioeconomic levels.

All of the leaders selected for the study were nominated by professional peers for being exceptional at partnership work. Many times, the participants were nominated by multiple colleagues who recognized their strong commitment to building collaborative partnerships. For some participants, the necessity of building external relations was evident in their job title, such as “community outreach coordinator.” For others, it was not always so obvious. In reviewing the nominations received for study participants, it became apparent that facilitating external partnerships is an activity that spans the many divisions and departments of a community college.

**Defining Success**

Upon meeting each individual, I asked them to describe a partnership that made them particularly proud. It was essential to understand what their definition of success looked like in both practice and results. The stories they shared were expressed with great enthusiasm and feelings of accomplishment. And each narrative gradually painted a portrait of what is truly meaningful to those who excel at collaborative work.
to the leaders, success and personal satisfaction resulted when the partnership work had significant meaning, required innovative thinking, and delivered impressive results. These qualities were often the driving force behind the passion and commitment demonstrated by those in the study.

For many of the individuals, the work had special meaning. As leaders spoke of the collaborations they built and sustained, a commitment to change and helping others was a priority. This was demonstrated by Seth, a college foundation director, who spoke passionately about his partnership with the Lucht Foundation. This charitable organization is dedicated to providing housing and support services to children who have been abused and abandoned:

So the Lucht Foundation used to give scholarships, and the scholarships would come into our office, and I’d see kids from the foster care system were coming to Glenwood Community College. I always kind of wondered, “I wonder what we are doing, whether we are doing enough to help these kids get here and do they get any support.”

With these concerns in mind, Seth began working closely with the Foundation and private donors to create a college program that would provide necessary support services for students from the foster care system:

When you are an unsophisticated 18-year-old, you may not know how to ask for help in the right way, or you may just get discouraged, you get bad grades, and just give up. I knew intuitively, and now I know having worked with them, that the foster youth tend to come more unprepared than kids coming out of intact families where there’s a mom and a dad and all those kinds of things that are
giving them guidance. Basically, the goal of the program was to make sure the foster youth who we could identify, got all the help they needed. To make sure they are getting all the financial aid, all the freebies so to speak, and then we have other money when they run out of government support.

Although Seth raises millions of dollars a year for his institution and facilitates numerous campus and community collaborations, this partnership seemed to have significant meaning for him. It was more than securing and distributing dollars; it was about providing much needed financial and emotional support to a vulnerable population:

We had a student in culinary arts, and they need knives for the training program; we’ll buy their knives for them. We’ll buy extra things that they need for their classes—art supplies, books, whatever is reasonable. We try and provide some guidance. Bea, who works for me, has sort of been like a den mother. We’re not counselors in here, we don’t have the expertise, but some moments it’s just kind of helping them. We’ve done other partnerships, but this truly affects students. We now have over 100 foster youth that we have identified on campus, and we’re trying to work with them and make sure they get what is needed to be successful in school. To me, that’s the best partnership we’ve ever done. It doesn’t make the most money, but it just pays back.

The idea of giving back and bettering the lives of individuals was a common theme for the educators and community leaders. Whether it was supporting foster youth, marginalized populations, the unemployed, or those perceived as “hopeless,” the leaders felt a strong connection to the work and viewed external partnerships as a way to accomplish something of social value, something that could not be achieved in isolation.
When Steven, a nonprofit director, was asked to describe a partnership that solicited pride, he identified the strong working relationship he had developed with his college partner, James. The two men had worked together for over 19 years, collaborating on a number of projects involving community building and job training. Steven stressed the value of working with someone “who had become a best friend” and found it rewarding to partner with an individual who could use creative thinking skills to tackle difficult problems:

I’m very proud actually; if I had a shining star it is now with James Bennett at the college. James has a lot of creative juices, and creative juices translate into a color, it’s grey. So, he has creative juices and that helps. That works with me. It makes a good marriage basically. He also has another attribute that works well with the private sector and that is, it’s not always “no.” Some people just go, “Well, I guess we can’t do it.” Well you know what? Yeah you can. There’s always an angle. I should get that painted on my wall, because I believe it so much. There is always an angle. I don’t care what the problem is, there is always an angle. You just have to figure out what that is. That is where I work good with James.

Taking the initiative to solve problems was important to both Steven and James who respected the ability to “think outside the box.” Steven spoke proudly of a training program that he had developed in response to the lack of skilled labor in the local construction industry. Realizing that contractors “couldn’t wait for the government to solve their problems,” he brought industry leaders together to develop a construction training program:
We realized that we had a problem in the industry, and the problem was very simple. We couldn’t find any labor. We couldn’t find any workers. Then when we did find them, we couldn’t find them to show up on time, we couldn’t find them to be clean of drugs, and we couldn’t find them to have a driver’s license. So, our organization said that we are going to find, train, and retain people in the industry. That was our motto and our goal.

As the program grew, the community college became more actively involved, assisting with curriculum development and training. What began as a remedy to a local need, eventually evolved into a nationally recognized program. To date over 1,000 graduates have completed the training, and while Steven was proud of these outcomes, he was equally pleased that he was helping people often seen as “hopeless”:

I’m going to be honest with you here. We have the actual graduation ceremony here and parents show up for it. It’s like you’re graduating from high school or college, because they have dealt with some problems, and their parents are really proud. They show up with their entire families. What we have found, and this is just fascinating, what we have found is that from 18 to about 27 years, people get lost. They’re gone. They come to us as a 27-year-old. The question with those 27-year-olds is how much baggage they have, and whether it’s having kids and three marriages, whether it’s drug related, or whether it’s having been to prison, whatever it is. They all have baggage, every one of them, and it’s getting clear of that baggage and getting them through that.

According to Steven and James, lives have been altered and an industry supported because a group of people agreed to take action. Coming from a “place of yes” was a
quality valued by many of the partners who expressed frustration with those who easily concede to barriers. The leaders as a group valued the ability to address social problems with innovative thought and sheer determination. When asked to provide a few words of advice for emerging leaders tasked with partnership building, the phrases “be innovative” and “don’t give up” were most suggested. These very qualities were demonstrated by the campus and community leaders who were driven to achieve results. “It’s not just about doing what feels good,” James stated. “It’s about helping your institution accomplish a mission.”

When Beth, who oversees workforce development at a community college, described the partnership that made her feel proud, she spoke about win-win results. Beth partnered with a major healthcare provider to provide job training for healthcare workers:

I am particularly proud of the partnership with Health One, because I just think that it’s gone so well and it’s a win for the organization because they are getting a more qualified workforce. It’s a win for the individual because they are going to phase out of the jobs they had, and this will be a step up for them rather than having to find another job within the same organization for the same pay. And I think it’s a win for the college, because we are able to serve more students without increasing the full time equivalency students. So, we have more licensed vocational nursing (LVN) students, and part of the money that I get from that has paid for the simulation lab person who benefits all of our LVN students. So, it’s a real win for the college, and I just think it’s a model. It’s a model that we need to see more of. Even in this downturn of economy, we know that healthcare is going
to increase. So, we have to develop these partnerships so that we can do these things with less resource.

Creating partnerships that delivered tangible outcomes was a priority for the leaders. They were willing to invest their time and energy to multi-organizational collaborations, but they wanted to see evidence of change. Beth acknowledged that developing the partnership with Health One was difficult and time consuming due to the many bureaucratic layers of health care administration. Her persistence resulted in a successful program that will be duplicated with other Health One sites and will help numerous healthcare workers attain professional advancement. Achieving results in spite of barriers solicited pride with Beth and many of the partners.

These select narratives provide a small glimpse of the many successes shared by the campus and community leaders. They also illustrate why these individuals choose to build external partnerships and what is accomplished through their efforts. Perhaps successful collaborations begin with a passion for the work, embracing each challenge with innovative thought, and knowing that in the end, lives are enriched through collaboration.

**Partnership Descriptions**

In order to provide a better understanding of the collaborations represented in the study, the following section briefly summarizes four of the partnerships. The goal is to illustrate what these relationships look like in terms of practice and goals. Summaries include collaborations with K-12, county government, nonprofit organizations, and business and industry.
Partnerships in Education

The Gateway to College Program joins leaders from the community college, district K-12 schools, and state university together in efforts to support local students earn college degrees and certificates. The program which has been in existence for approximately 5 years brings leaders together through the shared goal of increasing college attendance and academic achievement. Each participating institution provides specialized services for the students enrolled in the program. According to community college leader, Roger, educators must stop blaming each other for failures and work towards collective solutions. He stated that early intervention at the primary and secondary level decreases the number of high school graduates requiring basic skills courses. Additional support at the community college level prepares students for university transfer or certificate attainment. The partnership, which is strongly supported by the college presidents and district superintendent, also examines policies and procedures in order to create a smooth transition from one academic level to the next. Due to successful outcomes, this partnership has been recognized as a national model.

Partnerships With County Government

The Green Initiative is a collaboration that brings leaders from the community college, county offices, and nonprofit groups together in order to support healthy communities by reducing county pollution. The group, which has a collective interest in protecting the environment and promoting earth friendly practices, has been in existence for over 10 years. The collaboration has experienced consistency of membership which has provided stability and allowed the group to respond to evolving community needs. One of the objectives of the partnership is to work with small business owners,
particularly in Latino communities, who may not fully understand the rules and regulations of waste disposal. Instead of taking a punitive approach and penalizing them with hefty fines, the county provides free workshops and mentoring opportunities in Spanish for the owners. Students from the community college who are majoring in environmental science are trained to help with these efforts. The fieldwork provides valuable work experience and often results in employment placements. According to County Operations Supervisor, Megan, the students are instrumental to the program. Because many of them live in the local neighborhoods, the business owners are more responsive and open to their assistance. As a result, the incidence of illegal dumping has decreased. The program is a win-win for the county, the college students, small business owners and, most of all, the greater community.

**Partnerships With Nonprofit Organizations**

Building Together is a partnership between the community college, local businesses, and a nonprofit organization dedicated to the construction industry. While the partnership was formed over 10 years ago, it has become increasingly important due to the poor economy. The shared goal is to promote local construction projects and train workers to meet industry needs. In collaboration, the team has applied for state and federal funds that result in new building and educational projects. One of the career preparation programs developed by the partners was a construction camp that offers 2 weeks of intensive training for students often seen as unemployable. Steven, the director of the nonprofit organization, stressed that the program began after industry leaders consistently complained about the lack of skilled, reliable workers. Partnering with the college and local builders, curriculum was developed that would satisfy
employer needs. Since the program started, over 1,000 students have graduated and received job placement assistance. Many have received additional specialized training, allowing them to pursue higher paying positions. According to Steven, the collaboration was about bringing people together to respond to a local need. The program has been so successful that, when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, the partners were asked to replicate the program in New Orleans in order to accommodate the drastic need for rebuilding.

**Partnerships With Business and Industry**

The Manufacturing Alliance is a partnership that was initiated by a community college. It brings local manufacturing leaders together in an effort to address shared workforce needs. Community college leader, Beth, acknowledged the collaboration was difficult at first because corporate partners came from a culture where it was not acceptable to work with the competition. Bringing leaders together and developing the necessary level of trust was the first step of this successful partnership. The group meets on a regular basis to discuss local workforce needs. Because they encounter the same challenges in recruiting employees with specialized training, they discovered they have a lot in common. Together, they plan and support training job programs that benefit their companies. The college plays an important role in facilitating the dialogue, maintaining relationships with the partners, and responding to corporate identified needs. Instead of finding ways to recruit employees away from each other, they have found ways to strengthen their industry.
These partnerships as well as others will be highlighted throughout the study. Although they differ in purpose, they share certain qualities that contribute to their success.

**Characteristics of a Model Partnership**

When the leaders were asked to identify the key characteristics of a model partnership, a strong consensus emerged. According to the participants, successful collaborations are built on a strong foundation of clearly aligned goals, healthy communication, and trustful relationships. Joanne, the director of a nonprofit organization, stressed that the absence of these qualities is the “kiss of death” to a healthy collaboration. While partnerships differed in purpose and structure, each individual addressed the importance of these qualities as though they shared a common language.

With a wealth of experience from which to draw, the participants identified strategies for achieving these desired outcomes. What does effective communication look like in practice? How does one create trustful and reciprocal relationships with those outside their home institution? These were the processes I hoped to better understand through my conversations with campus and community leaders.

**Clearly Aligned Goals**

Most partners acknowledged that external collaborations are formed in an effort to achieve something that cannot be accomplished by a single institution. According to Joanne, “The problems we face today are great and cannot be solved by people who work in silos.” As the executive director of an organization that provides career exploration opportunities for youth, she builds partnerships with K-12, business and industry, and
higher education. These networks are designed to allow innovative and collaborative projects to emerge that will engage children in learning activities:

So now we have not just community college partners, but university, college, high school, and regional occupation programs, and yesterday in this room, they were all sitting together, coming together on a project that they have never done before. Facilitating multiple not just laterally, but vertically, the educational institutions to do things they never could do before, as single institutions. So, now we are going to be doing a program where the high school, community college, and university students are on the same team to create an alternative fuel vehicle that they will be doing performance testing on next April, and they’ve never worked like that together before.

Joanne stressed that each educational institution has “something unique to offer” that will make the project a reality. The university provides a strong theoretical foundation, the community college has strength in practical application, and the high school has great workshop facilities for building and testing. All three levels of students and institutions benefit from the collective strengths of the group. Working together, the students have the opportunity to be engaged in an innovative program that promotes engineering and technology skills.

Stephanie, a college instructor who teaches environmental sciences, stated that selecting partners who can commit to common goals is essential for success. Stephanie builds community partnerships in order to provide internships and job training placements for students. Identifying partners who are willing to invest in student development is a desirable characteristic:
You really need to have individuals who are as committed as you are about the specific goal. For example, I’ve worked with Bender Communications, and they have also hired students of ours. One of the big pluses was that they wanted to support students, and they wanted to be able to hire students with that kind of training out of our program. With that in mind, I think that’s got to be the bulk of the recipe. You want to be on the same page as far as the commitment that you both have to whatever the common goal is. A lot of times, there aren’t quite common goals. You might have an idea of what you want out of this partner, and this partner has an idea of what they can gain from you, but they may not necessarily be equivalent. That becomes more challenging. So, in order to actually make that great recipe, you want that equivalency. That has to be clear.

The topic of equity was one that was addressed by several of the leaders. Like Stephanie, campus and community participants believed that both parties should benefit in an equal manner. According to nonprofit director, Joanne, “when someone is consistently gaining more from the relationship, then something needs to be fixed.” College director, Roger agreed with this perspective. He noted that quality partnerships occur when everyone benefits from the success:

I like the word reciprocity. I really like that. That’s a very good term, and I think it’s what makes our partnership so strong, because everyone feels like they are gaining because the students are gaining from it. So, really the focus is what’s going to help our students, and it’s not what’s wrong with their students or our students, but it’s the shared sense that all of these students are ours and we are all invested in the success. We all have the potential to benefit equally.
While the alignment of shared goals is a critical process in partnership development, the leaders acknowledged it requires some thoughtful planning and negotiation. Ensuring the needs of all partners are addressed is one way to build and create sustainable relationships. Eduardo, the leader of a nonprofit organization that promotes higher education in the Latino community, noted that:

All partnerships begin with a level of passion and a belief that there’s something that needs to be either corrected or improved, or worked upon. The individuals then set the parameters for the rules of engagement. The rules of engagement have to be very clear. What are the rules? How do we play this game? They’ve got to be outlined very clearly. So, there is always the mundane task of writing out the various goals and objectives. Those need to be very, very clear.

There was agreement that common goals and expectations should be clearly defined at the beginning of the partnership to avoid ulterior motives, unrealistic expectations, and hurt feelings. Many spoke of a vetting process where partners invest time in thoroughly defining goals and objectives, as well as roles and responsibilities. Ruth, a dean of academic programs, stated:

The initial meetings are set at exploring what you can offer and what partners have to bring to the table. You have to spend quite a bit of time flushing that out so that you understand what the constraints and abilities are for both partners.

Some leaders shared prior experiences where goals were not clearly aligned. Often these partnerships were formed in response to a grant application. According to James, “People that typically wouldn’t work together find themselves in the same boat due to funding requirements.” When goals are not clearly aligned and partners have
competing needs, it can be difficult to navigate productive working relationships.

Miranda, a director of a nonprofit organization, shared an example of a partnership where suspected ulterior motives created awkward relationships:

The key for me is that we are aligned, in both goals and values. When I go into a partnership, it works well if we all agree that we are in it for the students; so we’re in it for a common reason. If we are in it to position ourselves—it gets so complicated if people bring different reasons and backgrounds to the table, and so, for example, I am in a different collaboration right now where I would say a number of people are participating because they are positioning themselves for funding. It makes it really awkward to find ways to work together.

The partners acknowledged that it is only natural for organizational leaders to have their own reason for entering a partnership. Even so, the commitment to achieve shared goals is imperative. Joanne noted that “even though people come to the table with self-motivated agendas, it doesn’t mean that they are not compatible.” The key is to locate common ground and identify desired outcomes that will benefit all institutions. The educators and community leaders stated that their most successful partnerships were framed around goals that were directly tied to their institution’s core purpose. The stronger these connections were, the more likely the relationship would be sustained over time. Roger, the director of community and government relations at a community college, described his institution’s long-standing partnership with county high schools and the local university in order to create a seamless educational transition for students. Although the partnership had greatly evolved over time, the goal of student success was central to all partners:
It’s about creating a smooth transition. There’s a large degree of alignment and a large absence of some of the political drama that can suck the energy out of these things. Those of us who are doing the work on a day-to-day basis work very hard to sustain and sort of protect what we feel is a cherished inheritance.

Roger addressed the challenges that community colleges face with low success and transfer rates. Creating a pipeline that will promote student success is a goal that educators at neighboring institutions are eager to support. The relationships are founded on the belief that students will perform better when institutions work together to provide support and resources. When goals are clearly aligned, all partners have much to gain through these collaborations.

The following list summarizes strategies used by campus and community leaders to develop aligned goals.

- Select partners who are invested in student success.
- Facilitate honest dialogue about what each partner brings to the relationship and what they hope to gain from the relationship.
- Take time to clearly define goals and objectives.
- Strive to build equitable benefits

**Effective Communication**

Effective communication plays a critical role in partnership development from making initial contact to the continued nurturing of a relationship. The campus and community leaders emphasized the need for frequent and meaningful interactions. When asked to identify strategies that lead to effective communication, Roger spoke of providing a personal touch. His sentiments were echoed by most of the study participants.
who believed that reliance on electronic communication hinders the type of personal interaction needed to build a meaningful relationship:

Part of the things that I have seen that are helpful is to go beyond email. Email is an essential tool, but take the time to pick up the phone. As much as possible, create some type of face-to-face relationship. If you’re intending to have a partnership last and go a long time, it’s important to really nurture that relationship and be responsive to your partner’s needs, as well as hoping they’ll be responsive to yours. There are several things that I think have helped sustain this partnership for a long time, but one of them is the day-to-day ongoing thing of meeting in person. It’s at least voice communication, it’s at least in-person communication via the telephone phone, but it’s also really important to get together and be around the same people.

While some leaders acknowledged that electronic correspondence is a useful tool, particularly when time is limited, there was agreement that quality relationships require the investment of “face-to-face” time. It’s about making a commitment to meet and develop a rapport that will eventually lead to a deeper level of trust. Sarah, a coordinator of community college outreach stated:

It may sound obvious but I think we have to have people with the right mindset who are by nature interested in good communication and building relationships and the time that that takes. People who are willing to meet and really follow through. It’s that face-to-face time, showing up and being present. We’re all so busy and yet, to be honest, the people who are making it work are consistently meeting.
Samuel, an administrator with a manufacturing company, agreed with this assessment. “Communication is about being there. You have to be there and show up.” He expressed appreciation for his college partner, Beth, for her willingness to visit his work location, have breakfast, and brainstorm ideas. “These things don’t happen overnight. They have to be worked on, and Beth is diligent about keeping on top of it.”

The issue of time was a consistent one when reflecting on the development of both communication and trust. Participants were vocal about the amount of time that is required to build healthy and productive relationships in multi-organizational collaborations. When individuals were willing to make the investment, it was frequently validated by their partner, as demonstrated by Samuel’s acknowledgment of Beth. More importantly, the investment of time allocated to frequent communication often served as a deciding factor when initiating or relinquishing a partnership. “I won’t partner with ghosts,” Samuel noted. “I would have a problem with someone who is nonresponsive, doesn’t come to meetings and all the rest of that. If Beth left and that became a problem, it could change everything.”

Knowing that time is a challenging factor in maintaining communication, the campus and community leaders were asked to describe strategies they implement to foster regular interactions. Sarah stated that the key is to “institutionalize periodic contact.” She expressed the need to “get it on the calendar” and follow through with meetings. This particular strategy was evident in most of the partnerships, as the leaders shared stories of regularly scheduled meetings. According to Sarah, without consistency, “great ideas and relationships die a slow death.” Most teams met on a monthly or bi-monthly schedule to ensure frequent face-to-face communication.
Mary, a coordinator of college outreach, who has served her district for over 26 years, agreed that personal interactions are important. She added that her strategies for ensuring consistent communication are simple: “Be available, be willing, and always answer.” Mary provides outreach and assessment services to over 30 high schools in the region and has maintained some of these partnerships for over 20 years. She attributes her success to a willingness to be responsive to partner needs:

They know that I am really busy and may not be there to pick up the phone or answer an email immediately, but they know within a couple of days, I will always get back to them either by email or phone, usually by phone because I am old and like to talk to people. But for quick things, I can send an email. But I think that’s the most important thing to keeping the communication and the relationship, is to get back to someone as fast as you can. No one wants to wait, and if they took the initiative to contact me, I need to respond right away.

For some campus and community leaders, the ability to attend regularly scheduled meetings and provide personal interaction was extremely challenging. Leaders tasked with maintaining numerous partnerships agreed that delegating responsibility was one effective strategy. Joseph, a community college administrator who oversees workforce development, facilitates new collaborations with business and industry on a consistent basis. To ensure that communication does not suffer, he relies on program coordinators to provide the personal touch of “making phone calls and providing follow-up as needed.” Since many of the relationships are contract based, he also incorporates a specialist into project proposals:
The communication piece is very important as we go back and forth. I actually have in this office two coordinators and they—one of them mainly focuses on just maintaining relationships with the organizations. Then with as many contracts as we develop, we try to write into the project a specialist, so that we actually have a human being right there embedded in the project, and that person is responsible for maintaining the communication with that organization.

Miranda, a director of nonprofit organization, also believed in delegating responsibility as a method of facilitating communication. Her organization, which is committed to promoting higher education in underserved communities, builds partnerships with several community colleges and universities in the area. Frustrated by the multiple levels of programming and bureaucracy at the college level, she found it useful to have staff members actively invested in building and maintaining communication with partners:

Communication and follow up is so important but so hard. I think everyone is overwhelmed with 8,000 emails and a full voice mailbox, and it’s hard to keep up, you know keep everyone in the loop. Well, we’ve done it a few different ways. I think for a while, a lot of the relationship was with—sort of owned by the executive director and the leadership of the institution. But what I have found to be much more effective is to have many levels of relationships. So, I want my staff to be actively involved in communication efforts. Having multiple relationships with a partner is better than having one conduit.

Because Miranda’s organization works with multiple departments at the community college, soliciting the support of staff members to strengthen and maintain
communication is one strategy for “keeping everyone in the loop.” Model partnerships demand healthy communication and facilitators who are willing to invest the necessary time and resources.

A summary of the strategies used by campus and community leaders to foster healthy communication is illustrated below.

- Invest time in “face-to-face” interactions.
- Institutionalize periodic contact (meetings).
- Respond quickly to partners.
- When needed, delegate responsibility.

**Trustful Relationships**

The importance of developing trustful relationships was another central theme in the study. Participants were in agreement that without a foundation of trust, quality partnerships cannot be developed nor sustained. Nonprofit leader, Eduardo, explained that “Every new partnership must begin with an element of trust. It is what cements a relationship.” As leaders spoke about their work, there was a common belief that external partners must be committed to the same purpose (clearly aligned goals) and willing to act in good faith. Steven, the director of a nonprofit organization that supports the local construction industry, appreciated the fact that his college partner “always had his back” and stressed the importance of a trusting relationship:

Trust is big to me. This sounds corny, but in the older days you talked to contractors who were contracting in the 50s and 60s and how they did everything with a handshake, and today you can’t do anything with a handshake. Nothing. What I’ve seen is that you take that same model, and I want to go back to that
point where in my life, my partners, their word is their bond, and I believe that a lot. I believe that a lot and I do that. If I shake your hand, it’s golden.

According to the partners, developing a relationship, where a handshake is perceived as golden, requires time and demonstrated performance. Since trust is typically earned and not blindly given, partners were asked to describe the processes that lead to a foundation of trust. Shared strategies included selecting individuals with common values, engaging in a courting period, and building on small successes.

Creating trustful relationships with a new partner can be a challenging task. According to Gregory, a community college administrator, “relationships are not between organizations, they are between people.” Because of the emphasis on interpersonal relationships, the campus and community leaders both acknowledged the importance of selecting partners who are seen as trustworthy. Ruth, a college dean of academic programs, noted that “even if you do your homework, it still requires a leap of faith.” With many of the leaders, this process started with identifying people who subscribed to certain core values, individuals who demonstrated an interest in common beliefs. Eduardo, the founder of an organization dedicated to promoting higher education in the Latino community, spoke of strategically recruiting people who could resonate with his message. It involved more than just the presence of common goals; it was about selecting individuals who were the right fit for the mission of the organization. Early on, this process began with some initial research:

I know initially, speaking for myself, from my own perspective and experience; before I go see someone like President Johnson, or even Trustee Parker, I got to check him out. Who is this? What is his background? What connection, if any,
can I find to the message that I am trying to deliver that would drive a partnership? You got to do some background work. You just don’t go in cold turkey. The first thing I do is conduct my own research.

Eduardo, who is recognized by educators as a gifted community builder, noted that he is driven by both “passion and anger.” He stated that his organization, which was created in response to the high percentage of male Latino dropouts, is composed of “angry people who want to correct something that’s willfully wrong and damaging to society.” When a potential partner can identify with this issue, it helps build that initial element of trust:

One of the key elements of building any partnership is trust. I come to you and I say, “You know what Carol, there’s a problem I’m seeing and I need your help.” Aside from having some investment on your part, to see what that is, and agree that it’s important, you need to feel a connection to it. Who the hell are you? That to me is one of the keys. It’s not just the theme that you are trying to drive, it’s the relationships that you build, and they begin with an element of trust. And because of the importance of the issue and the passion behind it, trust is given.

Miranda, who also oversees an organization dedicated to promoting higher education in underserved communities, stressed that trust begins with finding people who are “in it for the right reason.” She discussed a scenario she typically encounters when meeting with potential partners:

Well, you don’t always know at first, but I think early on, there comes a moment where there’s a strategic discussion, right? So like, “Oh we should call it this, or should we do this? And if someone says, “Well, what would best serve the
students?” or “How can we each give up just a little bit so it’s better for the students?” That’s a good sign to me and a good place to start.

Knowing that potential partners share the same interests and are committed to positive change allows that initial element of trust to be given. Leaders look for people who are like-minded in their desire to work collaboratively to make a difference.

According to Gregory, a community college dean, “The hardest part is creating that trust. Because in a partnership you have to have that level of trust—you have to know that we’re going to accomplish something.” Once a certain level of comfort is established, many of the partners recommended using a courting period to further the relationship.

According to community college leader, James, “being slow to act” is a smart strategy that allows individuals to “really listen to each other and understand each other’s needs.” During this courting phase, partners spend time meeting to discuss interests and needs, as well as explore possible projects. Yet, no formal action is taken until leaders feel completely comfortable moving forward. Ruth summarized this process:

So you come together and meet for a while. And maybe it takes 8 or 9 months, but you take time and give each person a chance to say, “I need this.” And you talk about ways to work together and maybe prepare and plan for a grant. But it takes time to get to a point where trust is developed, and then you’re willing to move forward.

While intentionally selecting the right partners and allowing time for relationship building is important, most of the campus and community leaders emphasized that deeper levels of trust must be earned over time. One way for this to evolve is by starting with small projects or tasks and then building on success. This approach gives individuals a
chance to prove themselves through low-risk collective efforts. Miranda spoke of how she organizes simple events that are co-hosted by new partners. This provides the opportunity to observe professional habits and work ethics. She talked about a college orientation event that she facilitated with a community college partner:

I saw the event as a success in sort of developing the partnership. We took advantage of whatever opportunity there was and had success. And we can claim it, or they can claim it, it doesn’t matter but it was a success that we shared. So, we can build on that now going forward.

Gregory, who serves as the Dean of Community Advancement and Business Training, also described this process in greater detail. His role involves developing partnerships with business and industry to meet labor demands and provide specialized training. When asked how trust is earned, he spoke of using “deliverables” as a measurement of trustworthiness:

And then when you start working together, there are deliverable things that need to be met for the next meeting, and you go to that next meeting and they deliver, you start building that trust. But if they don’t deliver, you say, “Okay, well, give them another chance.” If you go to the third meeting, and they still haven’t delivered—that trust doesn’t get built. Typically, you have to build that trust over time. They walk the walk, or walk the talk, whatever it’s called. They deliver on what they say they are going to do, because that’s really important to that formation. And then, once you realize that they deliver, and that you deliver, you start building trust and you start getting things done.
According to community college administrator, James, “The measurement of trust determines whether a partnership is worthy of sustaining.” This was evident when the college and community leaders were asked to describe a partnership that went badly. In each story shared, a breach of trust was ultimately the culprit. Steven, the executive director of a nonprofit organization, shared a personal story where he felt betrayed by one of his partners over a fiscal matter:

I don’t know for sure, but I think he was trying to embarrass me and everything else. I don’t know what his motive was, but whatever it was, it was wrong, and I would never do that to an individual. And it was the end of the project after multiple years of working on it. I called him several names and told him that he’ll never ever do business with me again. It absolutely goes back to the issue of trust.

Beth, who is the director of economic development and community education at a community college, also shared a story in which a partnership ended over a breach of trust. Although she noted that she had reservations about the newly formed collaboration, she proceeded with the partnership because she believed it would be good for the institution. In the end, it was unethical practices that ended the relationship:

I didn’t feel good about it because when they did their final report, I knew a lot of what they said wasn’t true. I knew that our training was true, but they used our results to also represent the results in the other two trainings that they had going on. And integrity is really important to me, so that really bothered me, and I wouldn’t partner with them anymore. I just couldn’t trust them.

Once trust is destroyed, it is difficult to rebuild. Stephanie, a college faculty leader, fully understood the ramifications of broken trust. When hired by the college, she
was asked to repair external partnerships that had been severely damaged by her predecessor. She stated that her greatest challenge was convincing community representatives to give the college a second chance:

Everybody hated me. Not me personally but the program. Yeah, it was amazing. But I was really overwhelmed by how angry people were, even people on this campus. Partnerships had been severed, and I don’t think the administration realized that. It was unbelievable to come in, and you want to find someone to work with. That’s got to be key. Coming in and actually working with people who don’t want to work with you, and are very clear that they don’t want anything to do with this particular program; it took a few years off of my life, let’s just say that.

When asked how she repaired these partnerships and rebuilt trustful relationships, Stephanie said it was not an easy task:

I had to go back and make calls after calls after calls, emails after emails, lunch meetings after lunch meetings to convince people that things were different, and that the individual who was here was a thousand miles away, and there was no connectivity that was going to continue. It was very difficult.

As reported by the leaders, trustful relationships are difficult to achieve, and easily lost. Stephanie’s experience demonstrated why partners must work hard to maintain a level of trust in their collaborations.

A summary of the strategies used by campus and community partners to develop trusting relationships is summarized below.
• Do your homework.
• Select partners who are truly committed to success.
• Engage in a courting period.
• Start with small projects and build on successes.

Challenges to Partnership Work

As each partner shared their personal stories, they spoke of the barriers that complicate relationships and practices. Each narrative portrayed challenges that could easily deter many professionals. And while they validated the many difficulties of facilitating external partnerships, it did not prevent them from continuing the work.

When exploring the challenges faced by campus and community leaders who strive to build external partnerships, there were many common struggles. Although the leaders brought a wide range of expertise to the dialogue and represented organizations with differing purposes, they shared similar hardships and frustrations. Emergent themes included a lack of institutional support for partnership efforts, differing expectations, dealing with the loss of a partner, and working with bureaucratic systems that are not structured to support cross-organizational collaborations.

Lack of Institutional Support

The leaders in the study served in a variety of professional roles and varying levels of responsibility. Whether they found themselves near the top of the organizational chart or somewhere in the middle, allocating time for partnership work was a major challenge. As they shared personal narratives of their responsibilities and desired program outcomes, facilitating external collaborations was often recognized as an “extra” or an “add-on.” This was evident with Stephanie, a college faculty member who teaches environmental
sciences. Stephanie builds community collaborations to provide experiential learning opportunities and potential job placements for students. When she was initially hired, she was expected to develop partnerships to make the program more feasible. Yet, there was little room in her professional schedule to make this happen:

I teach full time and I don’t get reassigned time. I don’t get extra time. I sometimes teach overload, and so to run the program and be responsible for all those students and do all the teaching that I do, which is always between 15-18 units a semester, it’s a lot. I don’t have time to extend myself and say, “Let me build partnerships for other opportunities.” Nope, it’s all student driven. For me, it’s an add-on. That does make it a bit of a challenge. I would love for it to be compensated in some way, because it is a lot of work. But it’s not. You just do what you need to do for your students.

Ruth, a college dean, recognized that employees are overextended and that there are “never enough resources.” Full schedules and competing needs present barriers to those dedicated to building external relationships:

Some places have created a niche where they have a person dedicated to this kind of work. They are rare. I could spend all of my time doing this, and right now it’s a fraction of my work load. You know it’s something that you value and you understand how much it can bring to an institution but there are too many other competing needs.

This sentiment was repeatedly echoed by both campus and community leaders. While cultivating community partnerships was viewed as a positive activity by their institutions, it was not a core component of their job function. According to Roger, who
works in the Office of the College President, “There are simply are no resources. It’s just not required; it’s an extra.”

While it takes time to maintain healthy communication and develop trustful, relationships, the leaders were challenged to make these efforts fit into unaccommodating schedules. With no time allotted to the work, the educators and community representatives often responded by facilitating these relationships on their own time. This was demonstrated by Stephanie who builds community partnerships outside of her full teaching schedule. It was also demonstrated in a story told by Ruth, who praised her English and writing faculty members for working with district high school teachers on curriculum development:

This, I think this was a milestone in terms of collaboration between levels of school and a partnership that is going to endure. The faculty spent the day together, so they all know each other. Every one of our department faculty attended. We’re going to do this same thing with other feeder high school districts, and we’ve got two others to work with. But it will make a difference in the preparation of the students coming here. The high school faculty went back and starting talking immediately about how we can incorporate this into what we are doing and what we need to do to effect change at the statewide level.

When Ruth was asked about the logistics and expense of bringing high school teachers and college faculty members together to build productive relationships, she said they were fortunate “that the high school district had the resources to pay for their faculties to have release time.” This was not the case for the college faculty members, however. “I didn’t pay the full time faculty. They volunteered.” Ruth credited her
faculty for being the “most dedicated” and admitted being “awed” by their willingness to make things happen on their own time. Although this collaboration has the potential to greatly decrease the number of students entering the community college requiring basic skills courses, the work is voluntary. While many partners acknowledged frustration with the lack of time and compensation, they perceived the work as being too valuable to relinquish.

Shortage of funding was another challenge encountered by the campus and community partners. In order to fund partnership endeavors, many of the leaders sought grant funding or looked to college administrators to provide small amounts of fiscal support. This was the case with Mary, a community college outreach coordinator, who shared her challenges with funding an annual conference for her high school partners:

I’m short about $200.00 for our high school counselor’s conference. So, I sent an email to our President yesterday, and I asked him if he would give me $250.00, so I am not afraid to ask. And I have been doing this conference for 20 years and always looking for funding from different resources. And this year, I am going to be a little bit short again, so I figured that I would just ask him. I’ve been here long enough that I am not afraid to ask.

Mary believes this conference plays a key role in strengthening relationships and providing networking opportunities. It is one way to bring high school partners to the college campus for information sharing and outreach. As an educator tasked with building relationships with district schools, she acknowledged how difficult “off-campus work can be” without adequate resources and staffing.
Stephanie, a college instructor, confirmed the difficulty of building external partnerships when there are few resources to support collective projects. One way that she responds to this challenge is by intentionally recruiting partners who are truly dedicated to the cause and willing to overlook the absence of funds:

You have to have people who are truly dedicated, because a lot of times there is no monetary support or incentives for these things to be necessarily developed. People might be doing extra work simply because they are willing to do the work. And so you have to have people who are willing to overlook the fact that there is no money. It has to be a group of people who are motivated for the common goal.

Megan, one of Stephanie’s partners, agreed that facilitating partnerships is difficult when the work is not a core job function. “It takes a great deal of time, and although everybody likes it, not everybody can support the time or money for it.” As a county operations supervisor, Megan partners with community colleges, businesses, and environmental agencies to provide pollution prevention programs. The collaborative accomplishments have earned the team numerous awards and recognitions. Even so, the work continues to be an add-on to professional responsibilities.

Due to the lack of fiscal support provided by home institutions, campus and community leaders often rely on grant funding to help them achieve their goals. As Megan summarized her partnership work, she noted that her group of partners, whom she refers to as “the inner circle,” was formed over 10 years ago in response to a federal grant application. Since then, soft money has supported various programs, trainings and outreach efforts facilitated by the group. Because she had recently received a job
promotion, Megan thought learning to write a grant would further improve her professional skills while supporting the collaborative work:

I’ve never written a grant before. And I needed to write a grant just to be better at my job, so when this one in particular came out, the gal at the environmental agency center, she’s a great grant writer; she helped me write it. I would write it, she would proof it, and she kind of, yeah, she gets part of it. And a lot of the grant writing now, for our particular area, collaboration is the best and it supports the work.

While acquiring partnership funding has consistently been a challenge, the leaders agreed that the work has become “increasingly more difficult,” due to the nation’s poor economy. As colleges and organizations struggle to “do more with less,” supporting external work is not a high priority. Roger, the director of community government relations at a community college, noted that “while this work was never easy, the lack of resources has made things even more challenging.” In response to increasing budget constraints, his institution has opted to limit the number of community partnerships that they are willing to support:

The number of external partnerships we have has shrunk significantly in the last probably 2 to 3 years. We really had to scale it back and become very intentional about what we do. Just because the level of resources, both financial and human, have significantly been reduced.

As college leaders retreat from partnership initiatives due to fiscal constraints, community relations may be adversely impacted. According to the educators, shrinking resources make it difficult to “pursue new projects” or even “get off of campus.” And
while college employees find themselves in a “survival mode,” community leaders question why they are not taking a more active role in the regions they serve. These contrasting perceptions about what can be done, and what should be done, often lead to unrealistic expectations and unhealthy feelings between the institutions.

**Differing Perceptions and Unrealistic Expectations**

The personal narratives shared by each partner revealed a common voice and a collective understanding of best practices. Throughout the dialogue with campus and community partners, it was often difficult to distinguish who was employed by a college and who was a community partner, due to this unified approach. The one area where a slight misalignment of perceptions occurred was in the area of organizational expectations. Some community leaders questioned why the college was not more actively engaged in the local region, while educational leaders indicated that community members held unrealistic expectations. While these differing perceptions did not hinder the work of the study participants, they were seen as prohibitive in building new partnerships.

The community leaders spoke very highly of their college partners and valued the relationship they maintained with these individuals. Even so, they were somewhat critical of the community college as an institution for their unwillingness to be more proactive in the region. Steven, a nonprofit leader, referred to his district college as a “country club” and suggested that employees had no reason or incentive to leave the college campus:

> A desirable partner in a community college is really in its name “community.”
>
> Our college hasn’t always had that. It’s located quite a ways outside town, and it’s the longest distance in the world. If it’s 7 miles, it’s the longest 7 miles in the
world. For many, many years, it had the reputation as just a country club for education. I mean good paying jobs. You could go to the gym, you could go to the pool, you could do all these wonderful things out there, and they were completely divorced from the city—the community. You could always tell that when you went to events—social events in town. I’d go there representing the association and seldom was there anyone from the college.

Steven acknowledged that things had greatly improved due to the efforts of his college partner, James. As the dean of workforce development, James developed an “offsite facility in downtown,” which created a greater college presence. According to Steven, while “this has made a tremendous difference,” college outreach should involve more than just one person or one college president:

The president of the college is a great guy. I’ve known him for 40 years, but it’s different. It’s not just the president; it’s the entire staff that needs to take a more active role, I think, in the community and be visible. Whatever your position is, even it’s an instructor, be in a rotary club or trade club or something. Be involved in the community. Build relationships. Build partnerships. Take a bite, take a risk. Instead, it’s always been this little country club out there and that has always been a strike against the college.

Miranda, another nonprofit leader, agreed with this assessment. As the director of an organization that provides scholarships and educational support for at-risk students, she acknowledged the presence of a “country club bubble.” Although Miranda sympathizes with the institution for serving “like a million students,” she questioned the college’s inability to learn more about organizations in the region. Since many of the
students served by her agency will eventually attend the community college as first
generation college students, building healthy connections would be beneficial to both
parties. Although Miranda has an appreciation for the relationship she has with college
outreach coordinator, Sarah, she still cites difficulty in building new collaborations with
the community college:

    I hope it’s not that much work everywhere. But, just right now I think it’s a
constant education process. And having Sarah has been great because she is very
externally-minded and aware of other resources. That’s the other thing. I don’t
think the people at Crestview Community College have taken the time to find out
what is out there. So, we’re going in to learn about them but also tell them about
us, because they are not coming to us.

    Miranda praised the efforts provided by her college partner, Sarah, and recognized
her ability to be “externally-minded.” As someone new to higher education, Sarah came
to the community college system 2 years prior, with a great deal of professional
experience in the area of community building. She disclosed that as a longtime resident
of the area, she never quite understood why the college did not take a more active role in
the educational community:

    I’ll be honest, I think that we’ve lived here since ‘86, and I’ve always—this is a
personal statement—taking off my work cap. I’ve always felt that it was a little
bit of a best kept secret and that the college could have done more. I’m not saying
in terms of blowing your own horn, but showing up at different types of events;
being a part of the process, having a voice in the educational industry here. It’s so
small here in our county. The numbers are so small, and so we really should know each other and work closely together.

The opportunity to build stronger connections between the college and the community was one of the reasons that Sarah was drawn to her position at Crestview College. In her short tenure, she has worked diligently to build better alliances with the K-12 community but acknowledged there was still room for improvement.

Dana, a nonprofit leader, attributed the weak relationships between college and community to a lack of communication. “The problem is that people just don’t talk to each other.” Her professional responsibilities include facilitating partnerships between education and business in order to promote community development. She stated, “There are a lot of business people out there who really want to help community colleges, they just haven’t been asked.” She believes that feelings of intimidation present a real challenge to partnership development:

The business community is intimidated by the educators, and the educators are intimidated by the business and that has been a problem. People get into their own little circles. So, for example, I come from a law enforcement family. Law enforcement officers hang out with law enforcement officers. They don’t really want to venture out and make friends with people outside of that, and I think people are just very comfortable in their own little realm. I’ve seen it for a long time and for the CTA for example, the California Teachers Association, the teachers are very comfortable in their own realm. When I began working for this organization, I have friends in the CTA who were like, “Oh my gosh, you are working for the enemy,” and I will tell them, “You know what guys, this is not the
enemy, this is about opening your mind and opening your world to different things and to meeting new people.”

As someone with a professional history in politics, Dana has a healthy appreciation for the power of collaborative work. “I am driven to do what is best for this community and part of that is connecting the dots.” One of the goals of her agency is to strengthen the ties between college and community by bringing potential partners together to address real community issues. “We have to be able to work together if we hope to build healthy communities that will improve the quality of life for everyone.”

While many of the nonprofit and business leaders found the colleges lacking in terms of developing community relationships, the educational leaders shared a slightly different perspective on the subject. They indicated that the poor economy had greatly increased the number and types of community requests they receive. These demands for time and services were viewed as unrealistic and placed the leaders in a position of having to say “no” to new collaborations and pleas for assistance. Joseph, a college dean, shared a recent experience with an organization who sought free services:

A lot of times we get calls from organizations, and they think that because you are a community college, you should be able to provide the service for free. I know our local lodge just approached us, and they are losing money on their food service operation. So, they wanted someone to come in and do a whole cost analysis and help them revamp their menu and so forth, not realizing how much time that actually takes. And they were looking to us to do that for free, and when I started investigating it, it was a lot more work than you might imagine, and so we have to say no.
Joseph indicated that “having to say no” was something that happened frequently. Although his institution had an impressive history of building community partnerships; particularly in the area of workforce development, it just was not possible to initiate new partnerships to meet the wide range of community needs. “It’s unfortunate,” he added, “but I think sometimes the expectations are greater than what we can deliver.”

The educators were strong in their belief that as community college representatives, it was important to help solve regional needs. Even so, they expressed frustration with the perception that the community college must do it all simply because the word “community” is in their name. When Roger, who works in the Office of the President, was asked about a partnership that went badly, he could not think of any examples. Instead, he expressed frustration with the demands from community leaders to accommodate special needs:

Well, a local official wants to host an event and expects you to move the heaven, the earth, and the stars for them. We feel very strongly that we are the Pacific View Community College District. We have an obligation to serve the community. We’re sitting in a building that was built with taxpayer funds. So, if local taxpayers through a council person, or an equalization member, or an assembly member want to host something on campus or do some of those things here on campus, I feel like we have an obligation to the community to try and do that. Those things tend to be the ones that are really frustrating.

When asked if these types of interactions are viewed as partnerships, he replied, “No, it is more about community relations.” Still, these requests require a certain amount of time and attention. “And in the end,” Roger laughed, “you start to feel like a free
meeting service more than anything else.” Although the desire to build healthy community partnerships was strong, the volume of requests was simply overwhelming. In order to create some sense of balance, the leaders cited the need to be more intentional and selective about the partnerships they choose to adopt. Several of the college leaders spoke of referencing their strategic plan in order to determine the types of partnerships to accept. This was illustrated by Beth, a director of economic development and community education:

I mean, you just can’t do it all. We have to say no all the time. You have to. And I would rather do less and do it well. And we did a strategic plan for our department, and we always go back to it, because it is my natural tendency to take on everything, and so it’s something that I have learned about myself. These things have to be in place, and it has to align with our vision and where we want to go. We can’t afford to go off track and we can’t do everything. You know, we can’t do everything.

Educational leaders like Beth realize it’s problematic to “take on everything.” Finding the appropriate balance between partnership responsibilities and other work demands was a challenge faced on a continuous basis. And while their partners greatly appreciated the dedication to community building, they desired increased involvement by the larger campus community.

Organizational Muck

One of challenges that educational and community leaders encountered in facilitating model partnerships was what nonprofit director, Miranda, referred to as “organizational muck.” This term was used loosely to describe community college
bureaucratic systems that make it difficult to build external relationships or promote new practices. Many of the community leaders viewed the colleges as overly-complex organizations that lack flexibility and a desire to change. Because of this, innovative approaches to lingering problems were commonly “stuck in bureaucracy.” As the leader of an agency committed to promoting higher education for at-risk youth, Miranda shared her struggles with trying to strengthen relationships with the college. She noted that it is difficult to try something new because “the community college has its own agenda and is not very flexible.” Her effort to organize an on-campus orientation for the students she serves was a challenging endeavor:

Well hello, you think they would want to do this, right? It’s just hard to change. I think it’s hard for any large institution to change. I don’t want to say that they are not doing great stuff. I mean there are great people there doing great things for students, but as an organization, my observation is that it’s really hard to do anything that is not business as usual. That it takes sort of an Act of God to turn the ship, if you will.

This observation was shared by Joanne, a nonprofit director, whose organization provides career development activities for youth. She suggested that one “needs a little bit of a degree in abnormal psychology to work with the educational system” and criticized the community colleges for lacking accountability and innovation:

They have different people at different levels within the organization of a community college who have different dynamics. It is structured to probably the most ineffective management style possible. You have an instructor who is autonomous to the point that they don’t have to do what they don’t want to do.
And yet, they are the front line deliverer of your product, which is information to your customer, which is your student. And when the front line deliverer doesn’t have to be accountable, or really show up to things that are outside the pre-described very tightly defined task at hand, you lose innovation capability. “I deliver this on this day, and on this day, I give you a test.” And so innovation of a new program is all outside the box. If you don’t want to do something innovative, you don’t have to. You don’t know how many times I’ve sat in meetings where they say they are going to retire in 3 years and dah, dah, dah. That is, to me, is offensive, from the perspective of what’s in the best interest of a student. From a business perspective, it’s dysfunctional at best.

As a professional with a background in business, Joanne voiced the same concerns shared by several of the campus and community leaders. Since new partnerships are typically developed to address an educational issue or social problem, a willingness to abandon old ideas in favor of new approaches is seen as critical. When organizations are not willing to change, it inhibits the partnership potential. In Joanne’s case, her organization opted to work outside of the bureaucracy while still including leaders from the K-12 system, the community college, and the university:

This whole thing that we do, we said, “Forget the schools. Forget changing the schools. We’re going to create our own sandbox. Because we know this model works and educators who believe in it will come and help us create and design it.” So we started building—it was that we created something from the outside and we’re changing the educational system from outside-in. Not inside-out. Working with the inside is like slogging through molasses in the wintertime.
According to Joanne, this approach has been successful for her nonprofit, but it required a shift in thinking. Partners had to move from thinking “we can’t do it” to believing that “we can do anything that we want.”

The levels of frustration involved more than the hardships caused by bureaucratic systems. Both college and community leaders were disheartened by an educational culture that was perceived as ineffective and complacent. James, a community college dean who oversees workforce development, spoke about this issue as he described his institution’s track record in meeting partner needs:

I started teaching in ’86 and we had an advisory committee meeting, and we asked business and industry what they wanted. And they said, “We want people with basic skills. We want people who have simple, employable experience; basic employability skills.” And then I did a seminar last semester year. And we’re talking 25 years have gone by, and we asked and did formal survey; formal primary data research asking business and industry what they wanted. It was exactly the same thing! So, what have we done as educational provider to address it? Nothing. And so where is our credibility as an educational system, the world’s largest education system, when we can’t even address the most simplistic concept of giving people employability skills? As a system, there is so much inconsistency and ineffectiveness.

James spoke of the need to “prove that his department could deliver what was needed.” He noted that when community colleges develop a reputation for an inability to meet employer needs, potential partners may be hesitant to invest time and resources
working with 2-year institutions. James cited that “we have to do it on a regional level to overcome the system and prove ourselves.”

Another aspect of working through organizational muck included the difficulties of navigating a system composed of “cumbersome layers.” Community representatives addressed the confusion of collaborating with a multi-layered system that they found “incredibly nebulous.” Eduardo, the founder of a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting higher education in the Latino community, summarized the unique challenges of working with the community college:

Their hierarchy is sometimes cumbersome. I’ve met with some of the elected officials, for instance. Nobody wants to step on anybody’s toes, and you really have to understand how that works to get things done. Some things you can’t get moving without having to address the board, or the President of the college; you work with some of the execs on the leadership team and you just have to know how that works without adversely affecting your relationship with the college as a whole. Who do we address for this issue? So you have to have a clear understanding of the organizational lines of authority and the relationships within the institution to effectively meet some of our needs in getting where we want to be. I think that is unique. Whereas some foundations, for instance, or companies that have worked with us, you don’t have to mess with any of that. Go straight to the source; it’s very clear. When you have an elected body overseeing this champion, which is the President CEO, and then you have an executive team and department, you’ve got professors, any oh my God, who do you go see? It’s so cumbersome.
Amelia, the director of federal and state programs for a K-12 unified school district, echoed the challenges of working within the multiple layers of the community college. She partners with the college and greater community to provide experiential learning opportunities for high school students. She also works with Taylor Community College to develop articulation agreements that will benefit students in the district. While she praises her educational partners for their willingness to do something that is a “win-win for both schools,” she admits that it can take a bit of persistence to get things done:

The challenge is that there are so many layers at the administrative level. I think it’s a great idea, and they think it’s a great idea, but it’s not that simple. The articulation agreement has to be agreed upon on at the instructor level, then the administrative level, and then the articulation officer has to agree to it. So, those are all challenges that we have to keep pushing through. Yeah, so as you know, they’re very teacher driven at the community college, and the teachers all have to agree. And if there is a change in staff, you have to start all over again.

Amelia’s experience with articulation agreements demonstrates what many of the community representatives encounter when trying to accomplish goals. The community leaders understood the concept of “collegial governance” but recognized it as a barrier to effective and timely decision making. Nonprofit leader, Joanne expressed her frustration, citing that “it takes forever to get anything accomplished.” The community colleges were described as a place “where everyone must agree” and be careful “not to step on each other’s toes.” The nonprofit and business leaders had great difficulty understanding this culture and stated that this leadership approach “would cripple” their own institutions.
The challenges of dealing with community college bureaucracy were not limited to those working outside the system. Several of the college leaders admitted that their greatest hardships were caused by internal systems and departmental politics that fail to support cross-organizational collaborations. When Foundation Director, Seth, tried to ensure foster care students were receiving the necessary support services, some of his colleagues questioned his actions. According to Seth, student services professionals could not understand why the College Foundation was concerned about helping students:

My challenge is with people not understanding. People thinking that it’s too much about money with the foster kids program when we didn’t have the right things going on in Student Services. So they asked, “Why is the assistant in the Foundation Office helping students in that way?” or that kind of thing. Sometimes it’s hard to get buy-in from the campus. People don’t understand and they don’t see the bigger picture.

For Seth and his staff, the commitment to providing support for foster care students extends beyond collecting money from donors and distributing scholarship funds. There is a holistic approach to the program; one that recognizes it requires more than finances to help high-risk students attain academic success. Yet, when these partnership efforts crossed divisional boundaries, college leaders often found their intentions being questioned by their peers.

When Beth, the director of economic development, addressed the partnership challenges she confronted, she too spoke of internal barriers. Her position involves developing job training programs for local business and industry. These types of contract driven offerings can generate additional income for the college district while meeting the
employment needs of the region. The success of her program is highly dependent on healthy community partnerships. According to industry partners, she works “tirelessly to build positive relationships that benefit college and community.” Therefore, it can be difficult when colleagues fail to appreciate the collaborative achievements and view her program through an “us versus them” lens:

Probably my most frustrating issue is internally on campus, because there is a tug and pull about how we are expanding on this side and cutting classes on that side, and I get that. I really get that. But not doing what we’re doing is not going to make a difference with the classes. We should all be working together to provide the best services possible in both transfer education and workforce development. We shouldn’t be divided.

Beth shared that she had spent income generated from partnerships to build a new computer lab for the business center and hire a faculty member for the nursing program. While she stressed that community partnerships benefit the institution as a whole, she was frustrated by colleagues who “just don’t want to understand.” Beth recognized that a shortage of resources was the culprit in fostering departmental divisions, but wished that some colleagues would value the contributions and be less resentful. To try and build better relations on campus, she considered hiring someone to build better campus relations:

We’re trying to figure out how we can hire someone to help align my department that may be better accepted with some of the other departments, and most of them are great, but we have a few that really resent us, so it’s just keeping out of the political pressure.
College leaders like Beth often find themselves in the position of having to defend their partnership work to colleagues “who fail to understand” or “fail to appreciate” the value of the collaborative work. According to Sarah, “Unless there is a college culture that completely supports community partnerships, the work will always be more difficult than necessary.”

An additional challenge encountered by college leaders was the task of facilitating partnership work in an educational system that is not structured to support cross organizational collaborations. Ruth, a dean of academic programs, noted the difficulties imposed by the California Education Code, labor unions, and institutional policies and procedures. “I have to be ready to explain to our partners why we can’t do certain things” she explained. For several of the educational leaders, these systemic limitations impacted routine business practices such as finance issues. Joseph, a college dean who is tasked with contract education, stated:

My frustration with partnership work is what I pointed out—our internal budgetary system and trying to work with the business office. I think working with the business office at any college is sometimes challenging. When we first started doing the contract education piece, they were used to doing grants in the business office. They looked at everything as a grant when it really was different, and so it took about 2 years to reverse that mindset and try to make everyone understand how contract education works. The frustration has never been with the business and organization partners. It has been from internal systems that make the partnership piece more difficult.
Difficulties with funding practices were a common theme in the study. Both educators and community leaders cited the hardships of working within the community college budgeting system. Any expenditure or employee expense that was not “business as usual” demanded a great deal of time and personal attention. One way that leaders responded to this barrier was to solicit grant funding from outside sources and then designate the community organization as the recipient of the funds. When funds were channeled through the nonprofit or business sector, business practices were greatly simplified. Nonprofit Director, Joanne, provided one example of how this approach was an efficient way to provide additional “manpower” for a collaborative project:

So we said we can hire them because the colleges don’t want to hire them, because you know what it’s like to hire someone at the college. Okay, so I can hire you tomorrow, right? I don’t need Board approval to hire you. I just need your resume and certain stuff to make sure that you are legitimate, and I can hire you. Things are simplified when they are routed through us versus the college.

Finding creative ways to work around college operating systems was a challenge inherent to partnership endeavors. Because community colleges operate with public funds, practices such as hiring personnel and allocating resources created barriers to the work. Several of the leaders stressed that the best partnerships have a blurring of the lines that divide college and organization. Yet, when institutional cultures and operational systems are not created to support external collaborations, partners feel as though they are “battling the organizational muck.”
Losing a Partner

When educators and community leaders shared partnerships challenges, a common thread that linked many of the conversations was the difficulty of losing a partner. Once a relationship is established that is based on trust, open communication, and shared goals, it becomes highly valued by the partners. When one person leaves, the relationship may be difficult to resume with someone new for a number of different reasons. James, a dean of workforce development, spoke of the difficulty of losing a long-time partner:

Cassie was the executive director, and she just left. She called on the telephone, and I wrote her a letter of recommendation. She left because she could retire, and she wanted to engage in consulting. And Diana, who took over, was given her position as executive director. I knew Diana from various meetings, but I didn’t really know her, not like I knew Cassie. It just wasn’t the same anymore. So yeah, it has an effect on things and how things are when they bring in newcomers.

The arrival of someone new to an existing collaboration can require a transition period. During this time, the leaders “get to know each other a little better” and will determine if the partnership is still feasible. Sometimes a change of leadership will cause minimal disruption, while other times, it leads to the dissolution of the collaboration. According to the participants, losing a valued colleague was both “difficult” and “disheartening.” It was particularly troublesome when the “newcomer” was perceived in a negative manner. James shared an example of this when he expressed frustration with a new partner:
So then they hired this guy as the director, and he was in charge of things, and he doesn’t have a freaking clue to what he’s doing, in my opinion. We had a very good working relationship, and then out of the blue, they bring in somebody who doesn’t even really understand the system, from my perspective, and makes decisions. It’s like I just don’t want anything to do with them anymore.

When asked how he responds to a situation like this, James stated that he retreats from the relationship, while still maintaining minimal contact. “No matter what, you don’t want to completely sever ties. Things might eventually turn around.” Even in ideal situations when there are no concerns or objections about the new partner, personnel changes still require an additional investment of time to keep everyone informed and moving in the right direction. Joseph, the dean at a community college, described the process that occurs when working with a new community leader:

Sometimes we’re working with an organization, and the people will leave in the middle of the work, and then you are trying to bring the new person up to speed of where we’ve been and where we need to go, and trying to keep everything on track. And so sometimes we have these very challenging situations that we have to work through.

Amelia, an administrator for a K-12 school district, also shared the difficulties of resuming collaborative work with a new partner. Part of her professional responsibilities includes designing educational academies for high school students where the curriculum revolves around a specific theme such as “biomedical careers.” This provides an opportunity for students to explore a career interest while gaining real world experience through field practicum and internships. As she collaborates with community colleges
on this work, one task she encounters is the development of articulation agreements.
Completing these agreements can be particularly challenging when one partner leaves before the work is completed:

Our Biomedical Careers Academy was working all last year with an instructor to build an articulation agreement, and they told me about a month or 2 months ago, that this person left. So now they are going to start hopefully and pick up, try to re-acclimate, and hopefully the new person; they said the new instructor is open to articulation agreements, and has done it before. But you never know for sure how it’s going to go.

When new leaders enter the collaboration with a lack of knowledge or commitment, it can damage relationships and slow goal attainment. Although many issues can be resolved with time and relationship building, this may not be possible if the newcomer is unwilling to invest in the partnership. Gregory, a college leader, stressed that the work is dependent on personal relationships. And when one leader leaves, there is no guarantee that their replacement will value the work enough to continue the collaboration:

What I find is that you’re not necessarily working with the organization; you’re working with personalities. It’s really relationship building opposed to building a partnership. You build that relationship first, and you create that trust, and then it evolves into a true partnership. I’ve had partnerships that I felt were pretty strong, but an individual leaves, and the new person comes in and doesn’t see the value. And it just kind of unravels.
Like many of the leaders, Gregory acknowledged that developing healthy relationships requires time and commitment. He noted that “real partnerships are the ones where pain is felt equally when the collaboration ends.” Because campus and community leaders value these collaborations and invest heavily in their success, departures can be disappointing. The loss can impact both the continuity of work and quality of relationships.

To summarize the difficulties encountered by campus and community partners, the Table 3 provides an overview of the challenges and the implications for practice.

Table 3

*Implications of Partnership Challenges*

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<th>Partnership challenges</th>
<th>Implications for practice</th>
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| Lack of institutional support         | • Work is viewed as “add-on” and therefore dependent on volunteer labor
|                                      | • Lack of funding creates dependence on grant funds                                        |
| Differing perceptions                 | • Community members see the college as disconnected from the community                   |
|                                      | • College personnel are frustrated by numerous requests for new partnerships/ assistance |
|                                      | • Unhealthy campus and community perceptions hinder the development of new collaborations |
| Organizational muck                  | • Bureaucracy inhibits innovation and creates frustration for both partners               |
|                                      | • Organizational layers impede progress                                                   |
|                                      | • College systems unable to accommodate external work                                      |
|                                      | • Leaders must find ways to work around the system                                         |
| Loss of a partner                    | • Interruption or slowing of progress                                                     |
|                                      | • Partnership dissolves due to change in leadership                                        |
Leadership Practices

One of the goals of this research study was to better understand campus and community partnerships and identify strategies that will help leaders implement model collaborations. In order to determine what successful leaders viewed as important, each participant was asked to share words of advice for emerging leaders tasked with partnership building. Their recommendations, which came from years of professional experience, provided a glimpse of the values and strategies shared by the group. Words of wisdom included: be intentional, seek support, don’t give up, tell your story, and build the partnership to last.

Be Intentional

The practice of being intentional was a recurring theme in the study. The leaders stressed the importance of clarity in choosing partners, making decisions, and adopting projects. While the barriers imposed by limited time and resources were one reason for this approach, it was not the guiding principle. Instead, it was a leadership philosophy that “you define what is important and then do it extremely well.” As a group, the leaders believed that it was critical to identify goals and then make decisions based upon those goals. Many looked to their organizational mission statements to determine whether a potential collaboration would be an appropriate fit for their institution. Sarah, the coordinator of college outreach noted:

To be honest, we try to align ourselves with organizations that have a clear vision; clearly stated. Their work has to be aligned to our mission. Being intentional is the key. One of the first things that we said is let’s be thoughtful and deliberate about what we’re trying to do. Who do we want at the table? What do we want
them to gain? That has made planning so much easier, because you’re not all over the place. You’re not trying to serve everybody all the time, but rather those who will benefit the most from the programs we offer.

Regardless of the position held, there was consensus among the educators that their primary role was to support the mission of the institution. While they understood that some colleagues viewed the development of external partnerships as “unnecessary,” each leader firmly believed that their work strengthened the college by proving better services to students and the local community. Roger, who serves as a director of government and community relations, cited the community college mission when he addressed partnership practices:

We’ve been very selective about the partnerships that we create and really try to be intentional about what we’re doing. If it doesn’t have a direct connection to a workforce need or job training need or transfer education or basic skills, we’re probably not interested. We have to be very selective. The partnerships that we have continued have to go hand in glove with the community college mission.

Eduardo, the founder of a nonprofit organization, addressed the need to be intentional in partnership selection. Because his organization promotes higher education among the Latino community, it is important to recruit partners who can serve as advocates and reflect the mission of the agency. He spoke of having a strategic approach to selecting partners:

So what am I looking for? I have a matrix that I designed that has key values and what I am looking for in leadership, communication skills, statistical abilities, analysis skills, all kinds. And then different professions, I’ll start crossing them,
gender, age, it’s all there. And then I look to the matrix and say “Okay, where do I have holes?” and then I say, “Okay, what are the values that I want in these people? Are they going to match the mission I’m driving?”

According to the partners, “You have to know your priorities.” With a clearly defined purpose and intentional actions, there is a greater chance that the partnership will succeed. James, a college administrator, addressed how easy it is to “get distracted by things that aren’t important or relevant.” During the interview, he pointed to a picture hanging on the wall that had a small black dot located in the center of the paper:

See that? It’s a round dot. When we started an academy at the college, I came up with the idea and then Cabinet approved it about 4 years ago, which is a—we call it an administrative academy. And it’s to train people to be administrators and give them an understanding of the broad picture. And this last year’s group, they gave me that, because my big thing is that you have to have focus. And I use the expression, “You have to have a dot—and a white board with one black dot, if you look at it, what you see? You see the dot. You know where you are going.”

James stated this focused approach was a leadership philosophy that guided his work. As a college leader who is tasked with building numerous partnerships to meet regional workforce needs, he stressed that it is too easy to adopt unnecessary projects. Instead, he recommended that leaders “keep their eye on the dot” in order to stay focused and remind themselves of the organizational goals. As a group, the leaders stressed the need to be intentional and recognized careful decision making as a core component of success.
Build a Foundation of Support

When offering words of advice to emerging leaders who may be tasked with partnership development, many of the campus and community partners emphasized the need to build a foundation of institutional support. According to Mary, who provides college outreach to over 30 different high schools, “Gaining the support of administration is a key factor. If you don’t have the support of administration, you’re done.” This sentiment was echoed by all of the leaders who stressed the need to solicit the backing of governing boards, chief executive officers, faculty members, and colleagues. According to nonprofit leader Joanne, “You must build a contingency of believers to make it work. Once the support is there, it can be built and grown.” Sarah, a college coordinator, agreed with this perspective but emphasized that support must begin at the top: “Building model partnerships starts with top of the house support. The president, the department chairs, the deans, they must value the effort that goes into building and maintaining these relations and allocate resources to support the work.”

Sarah suggested that new leaders spend time meeting with “well established and well respected people” on campus and “ask them some really good questions.” The goal is to determine what is important and what is valued by key campus leaders. Gathering this information is a helpful strategy in terms of planning and selecting partnerships that will be fully supported by faculty and administration.

For community leaders, it was equally important to gain the approval of their supervisors and governing board. According to Megan, who leads environmental protection projects for the county, the collaborative relationships maintained with colleges, business, and community organizations are “only possible because of
administrative support.” Upon meeting with Megan and her supervisor, both acknowledged how important it was to maintain healthy connections with community stakeholders. “We really saw this when our county was impacted by the wildfires, and everyone needed to work together. Having those established relationships was really beneficial and stressed how important it was to work together.” Validation from management that external partnerships serve the institutions’ best interests was viewed as a critical component of partnership success.

When stressing the importance of “administrative buy-in,” many of the educational leaders specifically addressed the role of the college president. Beth, a director of economic development and community education, shared her experience working with the leader of her institution:

I have more support from this college president than I have ever had. I mean my previous president was supportive but aloof. I mean she wasn’t real active in what I would do. She got it, but she really didn’t want to know more than she needed to know. This president is passionate about workforce development and building those community partnerships, so it’s more like working with him versus for him.

Beth recognized the president for his willingness to advocate for the program, even when campus politics made it unpopular. “A lesser leader would have buckled,” she stated. “Not only does he fully support the work, he serves on a community advisory board. That’s really important.” This level of administrative commitment and support was also recognized by Sarah, when she addressed the contributions of her college president:
We have a new president now who is all about community building. Whenever I ask him, “Would you like to come with me to a community college access network meeting?” he’s interested. We did a big college night at a community organization which has a very, very large immigrant population. He was there. He was doing the kickoff. He was doing the welcome. And so he’s allocating time to community partnerships. So, everything is aligned now and it’s a great combination when you have it, and it provides incentives to do even more because you’re not always looking over your shoulder all the time wondering “can we really do this?”

Many of the leaders recognized administrative support when sharing their success stories. Sarah noted that external partnerships must be valued by campus leaders from the “top down.” Both educational and community leaders recognized actively involved presidents or organizational directors as a tremendous benefit to the work. By serving as role models for their institutions, supportive administrators set the right tone for campus and community collaborations.

**Be Persistent**

One characteristic that was demonstrated by educators and community representatives was the ability to be tenacious. All of the partners stressed the importance of working hard to achieve the desired outcomes in spite of numerous hardships and barriers. They emphasized that partnership work is very challenging and, yet, incredibly rewarding. According to nonprofit director Joanne, “You can’t let naysayers impact you. You have to keep your eye on the big prize.” Because the seasoned leaders have facilitated partnership efforts for numerous years and in diverse settings, they fully
understood how easily frustration can hinder or end collaborative relations. Amelia, a K-12 administrator, spoke of why persistence is necessary:

The two main things are to be persistent and flexible. It’s just that it is so worth it though, and so important. You’re right on. I think your whole study is right on because we don’t live in silos. High school students are not just high school students; they’re people that are going to become something, and they live in a community. So, just helping them see outside their own little box is critical. So, you can’t get discouraged. You just have to keep going and not give up because what we’re doing is so important.

The challenges of cross-organizational partnerships are many. Lack of time, resources, and support can make collaborative efforts difficult and time consuming. According to the leaders, those who experience success are willing to “keep it moving forward regardless of the roadblocks.” Many credited their determination to a love of the work and a strong commitment to desired outcomes. Mary, a community college outreach coordinator, explained, “You have to love what you do, because if you don’t, it shows and people know.” Mary has worked for the college for nearly 30 years and enthusiastically acknowledged that she still finds the work extremely rewarding. The desire to serve students is strong, and this quality fuels the determination needed to continually build and maintain healthy partnerships.

Eduardo, the founder of a nonprofit agency, also stressed the need to be persistent. As someone who developed an organization in response to the low numbers of male Latino college graduates, it was necessary to build extensive community partnerships.
When sharing words of advice, he strongly recommended that leaders be both intentional and persistent:

> You have to be effective. In order to do that, you have to have a plan, do your homework. . . . Know exactly what you’re selling because you’re the one selling it. If you don’t have your act together, and aren’t being specific about what you want the partnership to accomplish, you’re not going to get anywhere. So, do your homework, and you’ll always find the right people; they’re out there. I’m persistent. I don’t give up. If you’re committed to the mission, you have to be persistent.

Like Eduardo, many of the leaders stressed the need to have an intentional plan of action and the determination to see it materialize. Community college director Roger captured the sentiments of the group by advising new leaders to “stay with it because it’s all worth the extra effort.” He suggested that the benefits may not be obvious in the beginning, but eventually hard work is rewarded:

> If leaders stuck within the four walls of the institution, we’d be so much less effective. By doing this work, we can have a big impact and so the payoffs are big potentially, but you have to overcome the sort of day-to-day struggle of just doing the work that has to happen within these four walls. There aren’t a lot of incentives. In fact, there are disincentives, right? But you can’t give up, because it is all worth it.

Roger works with K-12 districts to ensure a smooth college transition for students who may not be prepared for higher education. He recognizes that real change can only occur by reaching out and partnering with local schools. And while he is mindful that
there are few resources to support the work, he is confident that it is worth the extra effort.

**Tell the Story**

Like Roger and Eduardo, many of the campus and community leaders collaborate in an effort to create positive change. Whether it is helping underrepresented students be more successful, or providing unemployed workers with new opportunities, these partnerships have the potential to change lives and build healthier communities. Because the work is viewed as something to be valued and recognized, the educators and community partners strongly encouraged future leaders to “tell the story.” They cited the importance of publicizing partnership efforts through the use of media, marketing materials, and public celebrations. According to Amelia, a K-12 administrator, “You have to share the success.” She spoke about an educational academy that her district offers and how the leadership team has worked hard to market their work:

So what they’ve started doing is really taking a business approach to communicating with their partners. And what I mean by that is they are doing like an annual report, where they’re highlighting, and it looks very professional, where they’re highlighting their successes, they’re highlighting what experiences they’ve had with their partners that year, what types of things they are projecting and wanting to do in the following year, and what their needs are.

While these publications are intended for the community partners, Amelia noted the marketing pieces are a valuable tool in recruiting potential partners and documenting the work. Roger, a college director, agreed that it’s important to share success stories with the campus and greater community. He spoke of having a “slick brochure that’s
made public and posted on the website” that validates the positive outcomes of educational partnerships. Informing all stakeholders of the collaborative processes and achievements can provide “credibility, recognition and notoriety.”

As the director of a nonprofit organization dedicated to community development, Dana agreed that it is important to promote programs and partnerships. She proudly recognizes the work that is accomplished when business and higher education work together to design innovative curriculum and workforce training programs. During the interview, Dana shared that she is a community college graduate who has great respect for the institutions. She believes that marketing efforts are necessary to advertise the accomplishments of campus-community partnerships:

Community colleges are almost like the evil stepchild sometimes or the red-headed stepchild, because there’s been so much focus on K-12 and the university level but not a lot of love has been given to the community colleges over the years. So, developing these partnerships has been great because small ideas can turn into big ideas. And then it’s important to market and advertise what you’re doing. You have to get the word out and let people know what you are doing.

For Joanne, a nonprofit leader, telling the partnership story is one way to capture the human impact of the work. Joanne partners with business and industry, as well as education, to provide career development activities for youth. She questioned whether the best interests of students are lost in educational budgets and curriculum planning. Telling the human story reminds others why the work is so important:
When you’re working with students, there is a human story. A lot of people have teenagers. A lot of people have kids in college. So the story resonates. What you’re doing ultimately is benefitting a student or a kid. And I’m doing the same thing. I would say 70% to 80% of the time, the first thing people will say is, “I wish they had this when I was in school.” And the next thing I hear out of them is, “I have a teenager, and how do I get them into one of your programs? Are you coming to my high school?” And finding that story, a human story, is a way to bring people in. For the school, it’s not always about the kids. But it has to be about the kids. You have to tell the story so they don’t forget.

Because multi-organizational partnerships are often developed to enrich the lives of others, Joanne noted that “you can’t lose sight of what is important.” Providing a voice for those who are impacted by the work is one way to remind others why the collaborative efforts are so valuable. It helps partners stay focused and it celebrates shared accomplishments. Roger, a community college leader, stressed that finding ways to celebrate relationships and outcomes are important. He shared that his institution hosts an annual celebration to bring stakeholders together to celebrate a common purpose and recognize achievements:

One of the strategies is to do an annual celebration of the program, and we have students here. We give scholarships and we talk about progress. So, we just celebrate and really try to make it a positive thing and give everybody a chance to feel a little bit of that—the pride of accomplishment and a sense that the work that we are doing matters, because a lot of times it doesn’t. With some of these day-to-day jobs, it’s hard to feel like you’re doing anything but responding to
emails. So, at least when you have these other events, it gives you a chance to share the story and create good moments together.

According to Roger, leaders cannot underestimate the importance of telling the partnership story and finding ways to celebrate accomplishments as a greater community. The participants as a group recognized how challenging it can be to allocate time for marketing tasks and event planning. Yet, they stressed that without these efforts, “this amazing work will continue to be a best kept secret.”

**Build It to Last**

Campus and community leaders recognized that building sustainable partnerships were important in reaching shared goals. The group recommended that “when you build them, you build them to last.” Many shared frustrations over relationships started with great ideas and potential, only to quickly dissolve. According to college administrator Roger, “The secret is to make them strong enough that they are difficult to undo.”

The group recognized that some partnerships are intended to have an “expiration date.” These collaborations are often grant driven or project based. In either case, the goal is to complete the work within a given time frame, achieving short term goals. James noted that “you don’t want the relationships to continue indefinitely when that is not the intended purpose.” In contrast, when partnerships are developed to tackle complex issues that are not easily resolved, time and continuity are critical components for success. When Roger offered words of advice, he recommended that future leaders build partnerships that can weather changes in personnel:

> What’s really interesting is that all three of those folks inherited the partnership. The partnership has outlasted the people who originally founded it. So, you can
create something that will endure. The new folks sort of inherited the program, and the agenda changed slightly, but the structure was there and the relationships between the key stakeholders were in place. So, you can build something that’s sustaining. You can build something that will survive changes.

As the director of government and community relations, Roger oversees educational partnerships that create a smooth transition process for students as they leave high school, enter the community college, and later transfer to the university. The educational partners collaborate to provide scholarship assistance, academic support, and a simplified transfer processes. The goal is to increase the number of degree seeking students and to ensure they receive the support needed for success. Work such as this cannot be accomplished within a limited time frame. It is a continual process that requires a genuine commitment on the part of all partners.

Joanne, the director of a nonprofit organization, echoed the need to develop partnership structures that will ensure sustainability. Her role includes bringing educators and business leaders together to create career development activities for youth. She spoke strongly of keeping the momentum going once a team of dedicated leaders are in place:

So, the model, the takeaway model is finding groups and building collaborative partnerships that are not for a project, but that can have some kind of sustainable mission. Brainstorm and develop task forces to address different issues. These task forces are important for sustainability, because you’ve got this project over here, and when that’s done, do you just disband? And typically the answer is yes. But you don’t want to disband because now you’ve got these task forces doing exciting work.
According to the leaders, bringing a group of dynamic people together who are committed to a common cause puts the emphasis on the work versus the participants. While leaders stressed the importance of interpersonal relations, they were mindful that the focus should always remain on partnership goals. When collaborations are too heavily dependent on specific leaders, they are less likely to endure changes. Megan, who works for county government, noted that her partnership team had been together for a long time and has worked on numerous projects. The group which she refers to as the “inner circle” originally came together to collaborate on a grant funded project. When the team experienced success and recognized the power of collaboration, they continued adopting new projects, addressing county environmental issues:

Our core group is about six to eight people and we’ve been together for about 10 years. And it’s the people who make it work. It’s the people who are involved in the group. And they are the ones that want to be there. That’s it. They want to be there. And we all make time for things that are a priority. When the original grant ended in 2004, we created our own task force. We gave it a Spanish name, a Spanish flair, because most of our customers, our businesses, and the areas we work are Spanish speaking.

Megan spoke of the continuity that is provided when partners focus on a specific issue. Establishing a diverse team of individuals who are dedicated to a common goal builds an increased base of support and allows collaborations to weather changes that may occur. As a group, the educators and community representatives recognized that the more people invested in partnership goals, the greater the chance for success.
Assessing Partnerships

In order to better understand how campus and community leaders measure partnership outcomes; each individual was asked how they assess external collaborations. Some requested clarification as to whether they were being asked to address the personal relationships established or the actual project outcomes. It became apparent that each component could be individually evaluated. Yet, as each partner spoke about their assessment efforts, there was little distinction made between the measurement of quality relationships and goal attainment. They were tightly interconnected. If the relations were healthy and functional, the partnership was more likely to achieve the project goals.

While each leader had a slightly different response to how they assess the work, most partners acknowledged that evaluation processes were informal and anecdotal. Amelia, a K-12 administrator, stated there were few objective measurements when evaluating partnerships between district and community: “It’s mostly just anecdotal. Yeah, there is very little objective. I mean we just look on paper and say, ‘Well, you know, this is what we have done.’ There are no formal processes involved.”

When asked about reporting requirements for grant funded efforts, Amelia acknowledged the adherence to state standards. “You just have to demonstrate that you have partners and that you are building those partnerships.” In order to document these criteria, she meets with staff members on a regular basis and discusses program updates and activities. “But there is no evaluation data or anything like that.”

For several of the educators and community representatives, the assessment process involved reflecting on partner relations and achievements and determining whether organizational needs were met. Lynne, a community representative who works
in the manufacturing industry, stated that college partnerships were deemed successful when the company benefitted from the collaboration:

We don’t have a method, but you know when you are getting something in return. And really what it comes down to is, if you’re not benefitting from it, and it’s not something that is helping you as an employer, then you know it’s not working. You have to have something come out of it that is of interest or value. You have to have some results come out of it.

Ruth, the dean of academic programs at a community college, echoed this approach when addressing the issue of assessment. Although recognizing that a cost-benefit analysis is not the best way to measure relationships or outcomes, it is the method most often utilized:

In an ideal world, you would do some kind of dialogue once a year on “how is this going?” How is it working for everybody? I don’t see that that’s done a lot. We’re just getting to the point of learning to do that routinely on campus and within the district. Usually as an administrator, I look at what we are getting out of the partnership and whether is it worth my time and investment to continue participating at the level that I am. Is it worth sending additional people or should I delegate this to somebody, or should we just kind of drop out all together? And that’s not quite the same as assessing the effectiveness with everybody in the room and talking about what’s working and whether we are accomplishing something worthwhile.

For some of the partners, looking at a “final tally” of accomplishments was the primary form of assessment. How many students received academic support services?
How many employees received job training? Since providing these types of activities were the intended goals for several of the collaborations, this was the type of data collected and utilized to measure success. Stephanie, a college professor who builds partnerships with community organizations in order to provide internship opportunities, examined the number of students who were successful in their placements and eventually obtained employment. Although she acknowledged there were no formal assessment tools or processes in place, she knew when things were working based on student experiences:

It’s really about how many students are successful when they’re coming out of the internships, or how many are actually getting positions and being competitive and being placed within those companies—whether it’s a county, whether it’s a private company, or whether it’s a nonprofit. It’s just how well students end up doing in those types of industries or with those organizations. If our partnerships are pretty good, then I see that students are achieving and actually getting placed. And if the partnership is not as good as it could be, I typically know this because of the students. There’s something there that is limiting our students from getting placed with those organizations and being successful. For me, it’s all driven by the students.

Like Stephanie, college director, Roger, reviews student performance to determine whether partnerships are working. His long-term partnerships with district high schools and universities create a smooth college transition for many who otherwise would not seek higher education. He cited that assessment efforts involve looking at the data that institution collects:
We have an annual progress report where we measure—we identify ahead of time what some of the key measurements of success would be. This includes the number of students who are ready for college, the number of students who go to college, the number of students who enter college and are ready for college level work, and then the degrees and certificates attained. So, we have a handful of very, very obvious measurements.

Roger recognized that assessment efforts could be improved, but cited a lack of time and resources to do more intensive work. He also shared that because the partnership has been in existence for a long period of time, they have been able to make changes and improvements as the program evolves. Dialogue with partners about effective practices was one assessment strategy that was implemented by many of the leaders. These conversations could be as simple as a phone call “wanting to check-in” or could involve a more intense debrief process. Eduardo, a nonprofit director, was one leader who stressed the importance of program evaluation throughout the interview. As someone committed to social change, he was eager to see documented results. When he was asked about specific assessment processes, Eduardo disclosed the conversations he facilitates with partners:

Outcomes. What is the partnership for? You have to have goals and objectives and know who is measuring that. Who’s evaluating that? Who is criticizing? And if we all say that we are doing really great, well who said? Show me the real outcomes. Did we change the behavior of a boy we know is dropping out, to include a culture of learning that absolutely assures that he’s going to graduate from high school? There’s no proof. Show me the proof. If you can’t evaluate
yourself at that level, then you are not a service to the community. You’re not a service to your own mission. So, you have to be real honest with each other. Every year we have the debriefing of the committees that drive the mission, like the outreach team and the Board of Directors. And then the Board pulls away and we digest this information at our annual Board retreat and we hit it. We hit all the programs. “Okay I’ve got this debriefing here from this one outreach leader, and we got to try and get them to be more honest.” And I am sharing a prime example of the process. When I was critical of this one activity at the retreat, it was because it’s not providing outcomes that we need to see that young middle school boys are turning the corner on their attitude. We have to be critical of things that are not getting us to that point. Outcomes, outcomes.

Because proven outcomes are critically important to Eduardo, he also stressed the necessity of hiring an outside evaluator to help with the process. He suggested that leaders “take a risk” and hire an independent evaluator to measure outcomes and determine whether the work is a benefit to the mission.

While Eduardo was passionate about assessment efforts, not all campus and community leaders shared this same level of dedication. There was wide range of evaluation activities that included informal phone conversations, the review of institutional data, periodic debriefings, and examination of costs and benefits. Each leader implemented a strategy that worked for their individual partnership structure and relationships. The one common thread that was woven throughout the dialogue was the need to be more intentional with proactive with assessment efforts. The leaders
understood the value of their campus and community efforts and recognized that improved assessment techniques would strengthen their work.

**Summary**

In summary, the themes that emerged in this qualitative study focused on the strategies and processes necessary for the development of successful campus and community partnerships. The participants shared both philosophical perspectives, such as the importance of equitable relationships, and practical suggestions, such as being quick to respond to correspondence. In addition, the educators and community representatives addressed the many challenges that impede their work and the practical implications of those challenges. Examining the many issues on both a macro and micro level allowed a multi-dimensional view of campus and community partnerships to emerge. The following chapter will provide an analysis and discussion of these findings.
CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In June 2011, I began a dissertation road trip, traveling to different cities located throughout the state of California. After two plane flights, one train ride, and over 600 miles logged on the rental car, I had met a wonderfully generous group of individuals who were dedicated to improving the lives of others through collaborative efforts. Visits to 10 community colleges and nine partnering organizations brought me to places I never would have experienced otherwise. Tours of manufacturing facilities, county offices, public schools, and nonprofit organizations provided a small glimpse into very different work settings. And though the nature of the work differed immensely, a common belief existed that organizations are better when they build productive relationships with other community stakeholders. This exciting process ignited my own passion for honing leadership skills, while deepening an appreciation for the power of qualitative studies.

As the researcher, I appreciated the emergent nature of the work and the flexibility of research design (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Although the study had a clearly defined purpose, there was an element of uncertainty which allowed for multiple possibilities. While the journey began with many unknowns, two things were certain. I was eager to meet the diverse group of individuals and privileged to be trusted with their personal narratives.

Upon meeting each participant, I disclosed that I was a community college employee who developed regional partnerships for the purpose of applied learning experiences and community support services. When I shared my desire to become a more seasoned practitioner, some of the leaders acknowledged the lack of resources available
to guide leaders through the process of facilitating multi-organizational collaborations. One college dean suggested, “You just have to learn it as you go along.” This type of response was echoed by several of the campus and community participants who noted they did not select their positions seeking collaborative opportunities. Instead, they found themselves in positions where developing external partnerships was either an assigned responsibility or a recognized necessity. As a group with a combined 200 years of professional experience, they discovered effective strategies for facilitating partnerships through daily practices and trial and error. An understanding of this history further validated the need for a study of this nature and emphasized the value of learning from those who have knowledge and experience to share.

Subscribing to a constructivist approach, I brought a list of 10 open-ended questions to each interview. Each prompt was intentionally broad so that leaders could easily respond, regardless of their position or work setting. According to Creswell (2007), when questions are general in nature, “participants can construct their own meaning of a situation (p. 21).” This was the intent as each leader was encouraged to share their personal perceptions of collaborative work. The goal was to cast a wide net, allowing a variety of expected and unexpected topics to emerge.

As the campus and community leaders spoke about facilitating multi-organizational partnerships, common themes surfaced that illustrated a collective understanding of what it means to build and maintain successful collaborations. Although a wide net was cast, it quickly became apparent that the participants were unified in their approaches to partnership development. Each new interview yielded similar responses, which increased the level of data saturation. While leaders and
partnerships varied greatly, this shared body of knowledge contributed to a strong compilation of data.

Although one of the goals of the study was to visit different locations in the state of California and determine whether regional differences impacted partnership development, this issue did not emerge as a central theme in the study. I began the research process fully expecting to find contrasts between regions due to size, economics, and cultural factors. Yet, it was surprising to discover that when it came to the topic of partnership building, there were few differences in the recognition of effective practices. Whether one worked in a small farming community or conducted business from the 23rd story of a high rise building, the techniques used to build external relations were greatly aligned and therefore provided a useful framework for understanding model practices.

This final chapter will respond to the four research questions and present a model of recommended practices based upon the findings. In addition, material will be presented about leadership characteristics that were not tied to a specific research question but emerged as a strong theme in the inductive process. Recommendations for practice and future research are also identified in order to support practitioners and encourage further inquiry. The topics covered include: (a) characteristics of a model partnership, (b) challenges inherent to campus and community partnerships, (c) leadership strategies, (d) assessment efforts, and (e) characteristics of partnership champions.

Characteristics of a Model Partnership

Based on the responses from the campus and community participants, the following section addresses the first research question of the study:
What are the characteristics of a model campus and community partnerships and what processes led to the development of these characteristics?

In order to better understand the processes that leaders use to build successful collaborations, it was necessary to identify the partnership qualities they believed were important and strived to attain. The participants were asked to create a recipe for a model partnership, describing the key ingredients. While this prompt solicited some quizzical looks and a few sighs, it evoked some very clear and cohesive responses. Each interview yielded similar information as campus and community leaders stressed the importance of clearly aligned goals, effective communication, and trustful relationships. These three qualities were perceived as the foundation of a healthy and sustainable relationship.

Several of the leaders acknowledged this formula may be misleading due to the simplistic nature. In actuality, achieving each one of these core characteristics was a challenging task that was not easily achieved.

These findings mirrored the information presented in the literature review. Numerous articles stressed the need to build productive collaborations through effective communication, trust, shared goals, and mutual benefits (Amey et al., 2010; Buettner et al., 2001; Miller & Hafner, 2008; Scheibel et al., 2005). While external collaborations are often formed to meet large scale organizational needs, the processes that lead to successful outcomes are dependent upon the interpersonal relationships that occur between members.

This emphasis on interpersonal relations is what led Bringle and Hatcher (2002) to compare a campus and community partnership to that of a romantic relationship. The authors spoke about selecting the right individual, determining the feasibility of the
relationship, and then building a level of trust. What seemed like an odd analogy was validated by the study participants who stressed that model partnerships are not between organizations, but between the individuals who cultivate and nurture them. Building these types of relationships with members of external organizations required what nonprofit leader, Joanne, called a “leap of faith.” Just as romance involves an element of risk, so does the work of campus and community collaborations. Developing a relationship founded on healthy levels of trust and communication requires time, careful planning, and a series of relational processes.

Exploring these processes was a critical piece of the study. As each leader addressed the key ingredients for success, I found myself repeatedly asking questions such as, “What does that look like in practice?” or “How do you, as a leader, make that happen?” Through these dialogues, an increased understanding of the practices that leaders utilized to cultivate relationships began to materialize. As participants described each step used to foster communication, build trust, and create aligned goals, nothing seemed unusual or surprising. There was a logical purpose for each action. What was noteworthy, however, was the amount of attention devoted to these processes in order to create something of value and quality. It was also evident that this investment of time was intended to limit the element of risk. Several of the leaders like nonprofit directors, Joanne and Steven, stressed that collaborations between multiple organizations can be risky business. If the relationship advances as planned, the rewards can be great. If not, a loss of resources, credibility, and community relationships can result. Allotting time and attention to these processes was one way to minimize the chance of failure.
**Aligned Goals**

The campus and community leaders emphasized that common goals provided a purpose for the collaboration. Nonprofit leader, Joanne, summed it up well when she stated that partnerships allow leaders to achieve something that cannot be accomplished alone. The participants stressed that challenging problems will remain unsolved if leaders continue to work in silos or live in ivory towers. The natural tendency to work with those in the same organization or same profession limits the potential to bring new ideas to fruition. In contrast, when leaders work collectively, they bring different strengths, resources, and perspectives to the work (Buettner et al., 2002). According to the campus and community leaders, the process of developing aligned goals begins with “doing your homework.” For some like Eduardo, this involved identifying people who shared the same passion for the cause and were willing to invest time in reaching desired outcomes. For others like college administrator, Ruth, it entailed conducting initial research to determine which community organizations might have complimentary missions. In most cases, partnership selection did not happen randomly but was the result of careful thought and planning. The seasoned leaders knew exactly what they were looking for in the relationship and what they hoped to gain from the collaboration. This intentional approach led to partnerships that were designed specifically to reach institutional goals versus doing work that may have been more about positive public relations.

When the leaders sought partners and created programs that were closely aligned to the institutional mission, there was a greater chance the relationship would be sustained over a long period of time. These types of collaborations were also viewed as worthy
endeavors by colleagues and administrators. One example of this occurred when Roger spoke about his long-standing partnership with the K-12 school districts and the local state university. The goal of the collaboration was to create a pipeline that better prepared students for higher education and academic success. Roger stressed the partnership was sustainable because of the alignment to the college mission statement. The college participants stressed the importance of adhering to what is valued: basic skills, transfer education, and workforce development. Moving away from these areas increases the chance the work will be phased out due to budget constraints and lack of institutional support.

Several of the college and community leaders, like Miranda and Stephanie, recommended that partnership work have a direct connection to student success. Seeking partners who are equally invested in promoting higher education, providing resources, and offering academic support contributes to strong relationships. Faculty member, Stephanie, consistently stressed the work “should always be student driven” while nonprofit leader, Miranda, stated she was uncomfortable partnering with those who did not put student needs first. Identifying individuals who are willing to support student learning was an effective approach. The result was a community of leaders from different sectors who were invested in student success. As community colleges struggle with the issue of college completion, this approach to external work is a direction that community institutions should continue to explore as another way to support students and promote success.

To ensure that goals are clearly aligned, the participants spoke of the need to facilitate honest conversations about what each partner expects from the collaboration.
This is consistent with the recommendation of Amey et al. (2007) for the use of a vetting process which provides each partner the opportunity to identify needs in an open manner. According to nonprofit leader, Eduardo, this task can be both tedious and time consuming. Yet, if goals and expectations are not clearly defined at the beginning stages of a relationship, there could be unwelcome issues later in the collaboration. The partners were pragmatic in recognizing that each individual enters the relationship with their own agenda and self-interests. Their response to this was to provide a safe place where disclosure could occur in an honest manner. Having self-interests were acceptable, as long as they did not interfere or take precedence over group identified goals. Jones (2003) cited member self-interests to be a normal occurrence that was not detrimental to the partnership, as long as group identified goals remained the priority.

One area where the leaders felt the need to be particularly careful with disclosure practices was when dealing with state and federal grants. Sometimes partnerships are formed in response to a grant application which requires a multi-organization commitment. Policymakers often view strategic partnerships as one way to meet the state’s education and economic goals (Amey et al., 2007; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002). Government funds are distributed to organizations willing to work together in an effort to address local needs. While these funds can provide much needed support to campus and community partnerships, it may bring people to the collaboration for conflicting reasons. Leaders like college administrator, James, stressed that whenever large amounts of money are involved or when a new relationship is formed in response to a funding request, disclosure processes become even more critical. Being locked into a long-term grant with
partners who have ulterior motives makes for a painful collaboration and can be detrimental to the reputations of those associated with the partnership.

When identifying common goals, the campus and community leaders suggested that all parties should benefit equally. According to college instructor, Stephanie, when someone is gaining more than the others, an imbalance is created. And while relationships can endure these inequities, they do not lead to model collaborations. The goal is to strive for relationships where all participants are equally invested and rewarded. Stephanie noted this is not always easily accomplished, since partners enter the relationship with varying levels of needs.

It should be noted that Baum (2000) and Maurrasse (2000) addressed the issue of imbalanced partnerships when they discussed the challenges inherent to campus and community collaborations. They cited that institutions of higher education are typically the ones with the power and resources which drives the agenda and minimizes the role of community participants. When beginning this study, I fully expected this issue to surface when community leaders shared their frustrations and challenges. Although they were specifically asked to address the difficulties of partnering with 2-year colleges, concerns over the presence of inequities were not discussed. Instead community leaders were somewhat sympathetic to the hardships faced by the colleges with increasing demands and shrinking budgets. The educational leaders were not viewed as driving the agenda or controlling the resources. Instead, they were perceived as equal partners who shared many of the same economic hardships. It is possible these perceptions were shaped by the efforts invested in locating common ground and developing reciprocal relationships.
It is evident that the processes that lead to the development of shared goals are heavily based on personal interactions. Although the collaboration begins with identifying the right partners, the rest is a series of conversations and disclosures that help structure the work. The educators and community representatives spoke about exploring what others “brought to the table” and what they wanted in return. The more successful they were at identifying partners who were vested in common issues, the more likely they were to create sustainable collaborations.

**Trusting Relationships**

When campus and community leaders addressed the importance of developing trustful relationships, some of the processes they described mirrored those used to create aligned goals. Although there was an element of sequential order to building model collaborations, practices were also fluid and overlapping. For example, the steps that leaders utilized to define desired outcomes also contributed to the development of trust and effective communication. This was demonstrated when the leaders spoke of carefully selecting the right partners. When nonprofit leader, Eduardo, emphasized the need to “do your homework” and the importance of finding someone who “resonates with the message,” these recommendations were not limited to the task of identifying common goals. They re-emerged later in the interview as he addressed the topic of building trust. This was also the case with nonprofit leader, Miranda, who continually stressed that her priority was serving students. When evaluating a potential partner, a demonstrated commitment to student success earns initial trust while also validating the desire to achieve shared goals. Recognizing that relational processes can serve multiple purposes
in partnership development became evident when the data was coded for common themes. Each action served to strengthen the collaboration on multiple levels.

According to the educational and community leaders, building a level of trust was seen as crucial to healthy relationships. In a study conducted by White-Cooper et al. (2009), researchers noted that a history of poor performance can hinder relationships due to weakened levels of trust. This was illustrated by the study participants when they were asked why they might choose to end a partnership. In each given scenario, a breach of trust was the reason for dissolution. Several of the leaders openly shared their personal experiences which usually involved the occurrence of unethical practices. College leader, Beth, shared an example where her community partner submitted false data on a grant report. After this happened, she no longer wanted to work with the organization even though repeated pleas were made to continue the relationship. Nonprofit leader, Steven, also shared a story where he felt a partner had intentionally embarrassed him over financial issues. In both situations, the individuals were unable to forgive and move forward. As a group, the college and community leaders valued honesty, fairness, and ethical practices. These proven qualities contributed to the development of trustful relationships. While partners were willing to work hard to achieve desired goals, they were unwilling to compromise standards. Understanding the importance of these values provided a greater appreciation for the effort invested in creating solid relationships.

Once the campus and community leaders identified individuals they believed shared common goals and values, the partners often relied on a courting period to further advance the relationship. For some, this period lasted a month, while others stated it continued for 6 to 9 months. The purpose of courting a potential partner was to allow
time for a relationship to develop and for aligned goals and expectations to be fully
defined. College administrator, James, stated the secret is to be “slow to act.” He
cautioned future leaders to invest time in strategic planning and relationship building
before fully committing. Model partnerships were seen as time intensive endeavors, and
those willing to make the commitment were more likely to achieve successful and
sustainable collaborations.

Ultimately trust was earned when partners were able to prove themselves. This
process began early in partnership selection, continued through the courting process, and
then occurred when partners consistently delivered. The leaders spoke of building trust
through low-risk collaborative projects, so they could evaluate partnership performance.
This was demonstrated when nonprofit director, Miranda, shared her practice of initiating
special events that allowed her to observe potential partners in action. By planning short
term collaborations with clearly defined start and end dates, she was able to assess
planning and organizational skills, reliability, and team work. Committing to these
projects minimized the level of risk, while allowing trust to be earned through
demonstrated actions. College administrator, Gregory, also echoed the importance of
deliverables. Gregory stated that trust is earned in the initial stages of collaboration when
new partners deliver on the tasks they are assigned. Each time a partner follows through
on their responsibilities, the level of trust increases. The idea was to start small and then
build upon proven efforts.

The processes described by the leaders to build trustful partnerships reflect the
work of Bringle and Hatcher (2002), who stressed the relational nature of campus and
community collaborations. A series of personal interactions ultimately leads to stable and
committed partnerships. This was evident when the educational and community leaders stressed that trust was awarded to specific individuals versus the organizations they represented. White-Cooper et al. (2009) and Holland (2001) emphasized that community members often see themselves as partnering with a trusted college employee versus the institution of higher education. The fact that these partnerships rely so heavily on personal relationships underscores the importance of allocating time to these relational processes.

**Healthy Communication**

When identifying characteristics of a model partnership, the leaders stressed the importance of communication. Each participant recognized that productive collaborations cannot exist if facilitators are not consistently meeting and exchanging ideas and information. This perspective strongly supported previous studies which emphasized the importance of open and transparent communication in successful campus and community partnerships (Bracken, 2007; Miller, 2007; Scheibel et al., 2005). When the participants were asked to describe what “effective communication” looked like in practice, the leaders cited it was about “face to face interactions.” The partners criticized reliance electronic communication as a hindrance to the development of personal relationships. While this method of interaction was recognized as a tool of convenience, it was not seen as the ideal way to build partnerships of depth. Meeting in person or even talking on the telephone provided the personal touch that helped build a level of comfort, respect, and trust.

The campus and community participants shared different strategies for developing healthy communication practices. Sarah, who serves as a college outreach coordinator,
stressed the need to “institutionalize periodic contact.” Others agreed with this assessment, understanding that a laissez-faire approach to communication can be problematic. The partners suggested that a regularly scheduled allotment of time ensures that relationships are not neglected. Without a firm commitment to meet on a regular basis, it was too easy for external work to fall victim to other pressing organizational needs. Periodic contact reserved a space in busy schedules for partners to strengthen relationships, assess partnership goals, problem solve, and make future plans.

Another strategy that was recommended for healthy communication was the ability to delegate. When nonprofit leader, Miranda, spoke of encouraging staff members to help with communication efforts, she cited it was beneficial to have multiple levels of relationships with a college partner. This approach alleviated one person from having full ownership of the collaborative work and engaged an entire organization versus one or two people. While some leaders recommended delegation as a way to avoid “dropping the ball” with communication efforts, Miranda viewed it as a way to strengthen organizational ties. As campus and community leaders build external partnerships, this approach may be worthy of consideration. A greater investment of personnel could lead to a larger population of stakeholders within an organization who are committed to partnership success.

When the group spoke about the importance of developing healthy communication, they failed to address some of the topics that were prevalent in the literature review. Conflicts over communication styles, power inequities (Miller & Hafner, 2008), and the inability to form a common language (Bracken, 2007), did not emerge in the participants’ narratives. In an attempt to delve a little deeper into these
issues, I asked about the challenges caused by differing organizational languages and understandings. Either the group did not recognize these issues as problematic in their partnerships or they simply chose not to disclose them. Instead, they focused on the importance of frequent and personal interactions. Through these continuous communications, they made plans and solved conflicts. Many cited how important it was to speak on the telephone or meet over a cup of coffee. According to college leader, Mary, model partnerships do not require an anonymous survey to measure success when partners have a solid relationship built on open and honest communication. Mary noted that the goal is to establish a level of comfort where participants can freely communicate when needed. One should not have to wait until a meeting is scheduled to address issues, express appreciation, or discuss progress. A continuum of interaction leads to healthy and productive communication.

The role that communication plays in the development of model partnerships cannot be underestimated. College coordinator, Sarah, spoke of relationships “dying a slow death” due to lack of interaction. She noted that too often individuals meet, discuss great ideas, and then fail to keep the momentum going. Sarah recognized that healthy communication demands a great deal of time and that most leaders have over-scheduled calendars. Yet, according to the campus and community representatives, the willingness to make the investment is one determinant in whether a partnership will thrive and achieve the desired outcomes.

**Partnership Challenges**

Allocating time and resources to external collaborations was one of the many challenges the leaders addressed. When asked about the barriers that hinder partnership
efforts, the group shared a number of issues that complicate the work. The following section summarizes the data that respond to the second research question of the study.

*What are the challenges encountered by community college leaders and their partners when facilitating campus and community partnerships?*

To gain an increased understanding of the barriers that might prohibit campus and community leaders from engaging in external collaborations, it was important to identify the difficulties encountered. Because the study focused on the efforts of successful leaders, learning how these individuals responded to barriers was a critical component of the study. The challenges identified by the participants included: a lack of institutional support, differing perceptions/unrealistic expectations, community college muck, and loss of a partner.

**Lack of Institutional Support**

Lack of institutional support was a problem cited by 17 of the 19 study participants. Whether one was employed at a college or community organization, there was little time, support or resources allocated for the development of external collaborations. The work was often seen as an add-on or an extra to higher priority responsibilities. While the partners believed their efforts were appreciated by their supervisors and administrators, the work was not valued enough to become an essential job function. Those committed to external collaborations were required to develop coping strategies or make sacrifices that allowed them to pursue the work. Without these dedicated efforts, it would be easy for campus and community collaborations to become casualties of declining budgets.
Stephanie, a college faculty member who teaches environmental sciences, spoke of the need to develop external partnerships in order to provide experiential learning opportunities for the students in her program. Not only do these relationships support student learning, they allow faculty members to collaborate with industry partners developing curriculum that reflects workforce standards. While the facilitation of these relationships is part of Stephanie’s professional responsibilities, no time has been allotted for the work. She is expected to cultivate these partnerships in addition to teaching a full load of courses and serving as the department chair. In order to meet the demands, Stephanie builds external relationships on her personal time.

Megan, the county operations supervisor who partners with Stephanie, faced the same challenge. She acknowledged that partnering with community colleges and other regional organizations was good for the county and helped achieve desired goals. Even so, the collaborative work was not part of her formal job responsibilities. There were too many tasks to be completed and external work was viewed as secondary or extra. Megan admitted that she facilitates community relations on her own time because she values the work and understands the importance of regional connections. She urged future leaders to make partnerships “fun,” so that others will be willing to donate their time to the cause.

The consistent theme of leaders conducting partnership work on their own time is a troubling one. Miller (2007) addressed this issue when he defined the challenges that impede quality partnerships. He noted that faculty members often go unrecognized for their external work and fail to be adequately compensated. This lack of institutional support partnered with the complex nature of partnership building is a deterrent to many educators. Unless organizations acknowledge this issue as problematic and take
measures to correct it, the work of campus and community partnerships will depend on those willing to make it a volunteer activity.

When examining the issue of institutional support, another area that leaders addressed was the lack of resources to support collaborative projects. In a time when budgets are stretched thin, securing funds for external partnerships was even more difficult. Several of the participants cited a reliance on grant funding to accomplish their goals. This had both positive and negative impacts on the work. Leaders such as county supervisor, Megan, acknowledged that she had never written a grant proposal prior to working with her regional partners and was able to learn this valuable skill under their guidance. Applying for soft funds also allowed the leaders to clarify shared goals, define benchmarks for success, and allocate funding for what they defined as important. Without grant funds, some of the leaders stated their external partnerships would not exist.

Although outside funding played an important role in campus and community partnerships, the reliance on soft funds created a level of uncertainty in the work. There was a lack of ownership demonstrated by organizations through their inability to institutionalize these efforts. For some leaders, the continuous quest to attain funding became tiresome and demanded valuable time. When college leader, James, cited the difficulties he had experienced with his external partners, he stated that many were caused over the distribution of grant funds. Both he and nonprofit leader, Miranda, warned of organizations who seek partnerships for the sole intention of acquiring resources. With funders and policymakers promoting regional collaborations as a way to attain limited resources (Amey et al., 2010; Baum, 2000; Miller & Hafner, 2008), it was
not surprising these issues existed. Even so, the pursuit of outside funding was seen as a valuable tool in supporting campus and community collaborations. While partners appreciated the support, they stressed the difficulty of sustaining long-term, meaningful partnerships when this is the only form of support.

**Differing Perceptions/Unrealistic Expectations**

While leaders consistently stressed the need for strong relationships, the existence of unhealthy perceptions surfaced during the interview process. This was the only area where the college and community leaders viewed things slightly differently. The contrasting perceptions arose over expectations for community engagement. Several of the community representatives expressed frustration with college leadership for their unwillingness to forge a greater presence in the region. They believed that 2-year institutions were shirking their responsibilities to support primary education, business and industry, and community services. This sentiment was demonstrated when nonprofit leaders, Miranda and Steven, referred to district colleges as “country clubs,” where employees have everything they need and never have to leave campus. According to the community representatives, college administrators should be more committed to addressing social issues and building strategic alliances that will promote healthier and more fiscally sound communities.

It is important to note the community leaders who voiced these concerns saw their college partners as the exception. For example, while nonprofit leader, Steven, was critical of the local college, he stated that his college partner, James, was different. Steven and James shared common values and were equally committed to regional issues. Steven appreciated the fact that James had been a business owner prior to becoming an
educator and, therefore, had a “business mind” and understood the importance of networking. This was also the situation with nonprofit vice president, Miranda. She valued the efforts of her college partner, Sarah, but felt the college as an institution failed to fully engage with the community they served. She recognized Sarah as someone who understood the importance of building strong connections in order to help students be more academically successful.

When reflecting on the issue of organizational cultures and the impact on partnership building, the notion of having a partner who is somehow the same, is worth exploration. Both Steven and James attributed their success to the fact that they both came from the business world and shared common understandings, work ethics, and values. This was also true when College Outreach Coordinator, Sarah, emphasized her long history of community development prior to employment at the college. She stressed that her many years working with county and nonprofit organizations helped her better understand partners’ perspectives. Many of the college leaders in the study held prior positions where collaborative work was essential. Perhaps one of the reasons the college leaders in the study were exceptional at cultivating external relationships is because they fully understood the organizational cultures and values of their partners. They joined the field of higher education with a healthy appreciation for the power of collaborative work and the role it serves in assisting organizations achieve desired goals.

While many of the nonprofit and business leaders wanted to see their community colleges more actively engaged in local issues, the college leaders held a slightly different perspective. As a group, they voiced frustration over the increasing demands placed on community colleges. Several of the leaders stated that their name “community college”
leads people to believe they exist to meet every need in the region. As institutions of higher education struggle with increasing enrollments, low success rates, dwindling resources, and greater demands for accountability, college leaders cited a need to be more focused and intentional. The partnerships they create have to be directly linked to the community college mission statement. While the educators expressed a deep commitment to the districts they served, they simply could not over-commit time and resources.

With community representatives expecting more from community colleges and colleges unable to deliver, an unhealthy dynamic was created. While this had little impact on the partnerships highlighted in the study, it inhibited the development of new collaborations and led to negative perceptions between college and community. According to nonprofit leaders, Steven and Joanne, there comes a time when one stops expecting the community college to become a serious leader in the area of educational and community advancement. Unfortunately, these types of observations reflect negatively on the college and lead to misunderstandings that can impede campus and community relations.

**Community College Muck**

One of the core themes of the study was the challenge inherent to working within the community college system. Both college and community representatives addressed the barriers imposed by a bureaucratic system that is slow to change and fraught with administrative layers. According to nonprofit leader, Miranda, there is so much “muck” that it “takes an act of God” to do anything new or different. What was particularly interesting about these frustrations is that they were shared equally by the college
employees and their partners. In contrast, there were few concerns raised about the institutional cultures or practices of the community organizations. With criticisms placed directly on the 2-year colleges, it painted a portrait of higher education as being unprepared and unwilling to fully support multi-organizational collaborations. Some researchers have questioned whether educational leaders are adequately prepared to lead external partnerships (Amey et al., 2007; Sink & Jackson, 2002; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002). Perhaps the question that should be addressed is whether institutions have the desire and capacity to accommodate this work. When those who are eager to promote external relations must navigate a maze of bureaucratic processes and an educational culture resistant to change, it makes the work of campus and community partners incredibly difficult.

The college representatives spoke of working in an institution where operational systems were not partnership friendly. This was demonstrated by administrator, Joseph, who stated his greatest challenge was dealing with the budgeting office. As a dean who directs contract education, money management is a large part of his work responsibilities. Yet, fiscal practices were not established to accommodate the work of external collaborations. When Joseph was asked about additional challenges he encounters, he could not think of any. Instead he reiterated his deep frustration with internal limitations. College administrator, James, shared similar criticisms when he spoke of operating in a college culture that is unable to adapt and respond to evolving community needs. Several of the leaders acknowledged that it is hard to change bureaucratic practices that have been in place for decades. Others, like instructional dean, Ruth, stated that restrictions
imposed by the California Education Code, funding regulations, and union contracts can inhibit partnership practices even when the college is fully committed to the work.

Kisker and Carducci (2003) addressed these types of frustrations when they spoke of the challenges inherent to campus and community partnerships. The integration of organizational missions, human resources, funding, and administrative practices can hinder the operational processes necessary for smooth collaborations. And while it was understandable that bureaucratic systems impede the work, it was surprising to hear the college leaders discuss the lack of support they received from their own colleagues.

When program director Beth spoke about divisive relationships created over funding issues, she felt her work was misunderstood and undervalued by faculty leaders. As someone charged with contract and community education, Beth brings money to the college that supports a number of departments on campus. Yet, some colleagues viewed her program as suspect due to the external nature of the work.

Foundation Director, Seth, also acknowledged challenges with colleagues who failed to appreciate his work with foster care youth. Although his initial involvement began with the processing of scholarship funds, Seth continued to build solid relationships with the Lucht Foundation and the students. Because he worked to support their success, colleagues from the Student Services Division questioned whether divisional boundaries were being crossed. Having to navigate these perceptions added another dimension of relationship building to the work. Some college leaders had to continually explain their work and their intentions almost apologetically to fellow employees. This troubling component of partnership involvement illustrated a college culture that failed to fully understand the importance of external collaborations. Without
an appreciation for what can be accomplished through collective efforts, educators will continue to address the same issues as though they live in silos.

The community leaders were well aware of the challenges imposed by the community college system. They spoke in great detail about the layers of bureaucracy that hinder forward progress and stymie innovative thought. When nonprofit leader, Joanne, spoke of creating multi-organizational collaborations, she stated that one needs a degree in abnormal psychology to fully understand how educational institutions operate. According to the community representatives, the colleges work at a “snail’s pace” due to hierarchical structures and collegial processes. Nonprofit leader, Eduardo, addressed this when he spoke of initiating new partnerships with regional schools. He summarized the time and effort required to attain approval from multiple divisions, followed by a presentation to the Board of Trustees. As a group, the community leaders continually stressed that their organizations could not stay in business if they operated in the same manner. For many of them, time was equated to money, and when simple tasks required months to complete, it was perceived as indulgent and inefficient. This was one area where organizational work cultures conflicted. The community leaders could not understand why it “took a village” to make a decision. While they were frustrated by the barriers imposed by bureaucratic systems and collegial governance, they felt bad for their college partners, believing them to be disempowered by the system.

The Loss of a Partner

Of all the challenges faced by the campus and community leaders, the loss of a valued partner was often the most difficult. When leaders spent a great deal of time building trust and working towards common goals, a bond often developed between the
individuals. This was evident when County Operations Supervisor, Megan, fondly referred to her college and community partners as the “inner circle.” She noted these relationships began 10 years prior when the group came together to apply for federal funds. Since then, they have met frequently, applied for additional grants and worked towards common goals. Like Megan, several of the leaders acknowledged their partners had become respected friends. Through a shared passion for community involvement and a history of collaborative efforts, they came to trust and appreciate each other. Unlike other partnership challenges, the hardship of losing a partner was neither caused by internal or external sources. Instead, it was something that occurred naturally as people moved on to new positions and opportunities. Even so, partners noted it was challenging to replace these valued relationships.

Not only was it disappointing to lose an established partner, it was also difficult to deal with the repercussions of the loss. An example of this occurred when college administrator, James, claimed the individuals replacing his respected partners were incompetent and uninterested in collaborative work. According to the campus and community leaders, the ideal scenario is to keep the partnership work on task and moving towards goal attainment. This becomes incredibly difficult when new partners lack necessary skills, do not mesh with existing team members, or fail to value the collaboration. Relationships that have taken years to develop can be jeopardized when someone exits the partnership prematurely.

Even in the best case scenario, where no concerns exist over the assignment of a new partner, a transition process was required that slowed the momentum of the work. College administrator, Joseph, addressed the issue of having to invest time in acclimating
new arrivals. Because he cultivates numerous partnerships with business and industry, a turnover in personnel is always a possibility in one of the partnerships. While he viewed this as a natural occurrence in multi-organizational work, he acknowledged that it required additional efforts to ensure new partners were fully informed and engaged.

Amelia, a K-12 administrator, also shared her challenges with shifting college partners. When one of the college instructors leaves the collaboration, there is no guarantee the faculty replacement will want to continue the partnership. Not only is this disruptive, it can be demoralizing to those who have worked so hard to achieve something of value.

**Leadership Strategies for Partnership Development**

Once the campus and community leaders had defined the processes necessary for model partnerships and the challenges encountered in the work, the next step of the analysis process was to better understand the leadership perspectives and practices that contribute to their success. Not only was each participant asked to discuss recommended strategies, they were also encouraged to share words of advice for new and emerging leaders. The following section responds to the third research question of the study.

*What strategies do leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations use in order to develop successful partnerships?*

When the leaders were asked to share strategies for the facilitation of successful partnerships, there were five areas where they focused their attention. These included: being intentional, building a foundation of support, being persistent, telling the story, and building a partnership to last. Their recommendations responded to the themes previously discussed when addressing model relationships and partnership challenges. Each strategy was somewhat broad in nature and conveyed a clear message about the
processes and leadership approaches necessary to build strong collaborations. If the ability to cultivate external partnerships is a core leadership competency, as cited by the American Association of Community Colleges (2012), educational leaders would be wise to learn from those who have excelled in this area.

**Be Intentional**

Many of the participants stressed the need to be intentional in all aspects of partnership work, including the interview process, project adoption, partnership selection, and goal identification. The overlying message delivered by the leaders is that clarity of purpose is important. According to college administrator, Roger, the limitations imposed by the lack of time and resources require leaders to focus on the things that are in the best interest of the institution. Many referred back to their community college mission statements to determine whether a potential partnership would best support organizational goals. It was apparent that the collaborations represented in the study were carefully selected and evaluated for feasibility. These recommendations supported the work of Kisner et al. (1997) who suggested that community college leaders begin the partnership process by reviewing the institution’s mission statement and then strategically selecting relationships that can enhance the college’s mission.

The strategy of being intentional served two purposes. The first was to provide a clear direction on all partnership facets. The second was to provide a coping mechanism that allowed leaders to be selective with the way they invested their time. As a group, the college participants shared their frustrations with the numerous partnership requests they received on an annual basis. College directors, Beth and Sarah, both acknowledged that it would be easy to over commit to worthwhile projects due to critical community needs.
Having a clearly defined purpose enabled them to stay focused and reject proposals that were not in the best interest of their programs or institutions. Since many of the leaders were not fully compensated for facilitating external partnerships, it was particularly important that they be wary of assuming too many responsibilities.

When reflecting on the need to be intentional in partnership work, it should be noted that the literature cited an increase in partnership formation during periods of economic strife (Buettner et al., 2002; Sink & Jackson, 2002; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002). Given the current poor economic climate, it was anticipated that colleges and community organizations would be experiencing a flurry of partnership building in order to pool resources, build supportive networks, and continue necessary services. This did not turn out to be the case. In contrast, the participants spoke of the need to reduce collaborative relationships due to decreasing resources and personnel. It was during these conversations that the participants introduced the strategy of being intentional in all phases of partnership development. Without the resources needed to support the work, leaders had to be much more deliberate in planning and actions.

While the need to be intentional with partnership facilitation may have resulted from economic hardships, it was a strategy that served the group well. The leaders were forced to make prudent decisions on all aspects of partnership work. They had to focus on what was defined as important and be cautious to not assume additional responsibilities. This approach was effective in keeping the partnership on task while constantly reinforcing common goals. College administrator, James, captured this strategy when he spoke of keeping his eye on the dot. “It’s all about knowing what you
want to achieve and keeping your eye on the dot.” This clarity of purpose helped leaders be successful and was a useful strategy even in times of economic prosperity.

**Building a Foundation of Support**

When Sarah, a college coordinator, was asked to identify strategies for the development of successful partnerships, she stressed the importance of building a foundation of support. According to Sarah, it is essential to gain the approval of the college president and top administrators. Without leaders who recognize the value of external partnerships, it can be difficult to build sustainable collaborations. Although the leaders encountered a number of internal challenges, they still felt confident their efforts were appreciated by college administrators.

This perspective was shared equally by the community representatives. It did not matter if one worked in the nonprofit, government, or corporate setting; the leaders recognized that regional collaborations demanded institutional support. When business leader, Lynne, spoke about the relationship she had established with her college partner, she acknowledged her employer for allowing her to take time from her schedule to meet with education and industry partners. This gift of time allowed Lynne to serve as the chair of a business council that was developed by the college and manufacturing partners in order to provide industry workforce training.

As leaders addressed their challenges, it became apparent that administrative support was not enough to remove internal barriers. This was demonstrated by college leaders, Seth and Beth, who spoke of hardships caused by colleagues who failed to understand or value the work. While Beth attempted to build strong relationships with faculty colleagues, Seth responded to Student Services personnel who felt divisional
boundaries were being crossed. Not only did these efforts demand time and attention, they portrayed a college culture where multi-organizational partnerships were not viewed as an asset to the institution. While the literature review stressed the difficulties of blending two organizational cultures and their personnel (Amey et al., 2010; Baum, 2000; Bracken, 2007; Prins, 2005; E. S. Weiss et al., 2002), little was presented about the internal challenges caused by colleagues within one’s own organization. According to the partners, their fellow employees often questioned why projects that involved campus outsiders would be relevant or allowed to interfere with business as usual.

Knowing these attitudes exist, it is not surprising the participants stressed the need to build a broad base of campus support. Although most acknowledged they received moral support from superiors, they were also honest about the difficulties imposed by limited time and compensation. While moral support cannot be minimized, this is not enough to provide what is truly needed to build strong and lasting collaborations. If campus and community organizations are serious about building productive partnerships, further thought must be given to how these efforts can be unilaterally supported and woven into the institutional fabric. A political and social climate that favors external work is critical for success (Sink & Jackson, 2002).

**Be Persistent**

The recommendation most suggested by the educators and community representatives centered on an attitude and work ethic. The leaders emphasized the need to be persistent and tenacious in order to reach desired goals. This message resonated throughout each interview as participants acknowledged the complexity of facilitating multi-organizational partnerships.
With an understanding of how difficult the work can be, this leadership strategy made perfect sense. First, the leaders were required to engage in a number of interpersonal processes in order to develop trustful relationships. They had to select the right partners, agree on common goals, solicit organizational support, and maintain consistent communication. For several of the individuals, these time-intensive responsibilities were conducted as an “add-on” to other job functions. Given the demands placed on partnership leaders, it was not surprising they identified persistence was a necessary leadership trait. To make things even more complicated, the campus and community leaders were required to overcome numerous barriers which demanded problem solving skills and personal sacrifices. The ability to stay on course even when there are dozens of reasons to retreat requires a leader with a “never say die” attitude. It was clear why the leaders valued the ability to be tenacious and respected others who shared the same trait.

**Tell the Story**

An additional strategy proposed by the campus and community leaders was the practice of telling the story. The group stressed how important it was to inform others about collaborative efforts and accomplishments. Several noted that community partnerships should not be an institution’s best kept secret. Instead, leaders must find creative ways to spotlight the work and bring it to the forefront. Because external collaborations are often unrecognized and undervalued, media efforts and public relations processes are critical in advocating for the work.

The educators and community representatives shared several different approaches to promoting their programs and projects. Several recommended the use of celebrations
as a way to honor relationships and recognize achievements. College leader, Roger, spoke of an annual celebration which brings students, donors, and educators together and allows everyone to feel a “part of it.” These public gatherings built camaraderie while validating a shared purpose.

Others leaders like K-12 administrator, Amelia, spoke of designing marketing materials that would recognize current partners, highlight success stories, and recruit new partners. Because the target audience was business and industry, she wanted these promotional pieces to be as professional as possible. In contrast, nonprofit leader, Joanne, was concerned about a different audience. When she cited the importance of telling the story, the goal was to ensure the voices of students were not lost in educational bureaucracy. She wanted to remind the community of the organizational purpose and provide a message that any parent could appreciate and support.

Each leader had their own method of marketing partnership efforts to target audiences. Regardless of the approach selected, they understood how critical it was to inform the campus and greater community of the work and intended goals. Although implementing a marketing plan was an additional responsibility, it was a task that leaders could not afford to ignore. Gaining the recognition of colleagues and community members served to strengthen the partnership foundation.

Build It to Last

The final piece of advice offered to emerging leaders was to build partnerships that can be sustained. While participants recognized that external collaborations are not intended to last indefinitely, the goal is to build solid relationships that can endure a multitude of challenges. When college leader, Roger, spoke about his institution’s
long-standing partnerships with the local K-12 district and state university, he noted that “you have to build them to last.” This perspective was shared by many of the participants, who noted that collaborations must be hearty enough to endure detractors, budget shortages, changes in personnel, and time limitations. Without organizational support and dedicated leaders who are fully invested in the relationship, it is likely the partnership will fail. According to Miller and Hafner (2008), too many people underestimate the complexities of campus and community partnerships. While the literature highlights the problems that arise due to interpersonal relationships and organizational work cultures (Baum, 2000; Bracken, 2007; Prins, 2005), the data generated in this study emphasized the barriers caused by internal issues and systemic structures. When the participants spoke about building a lasting collaboration, they stressed the importance of building a strong foundation that includes institutional support, time for relationship building, and the investment of multiple stakeholders.

The common thread that is woven throughout the five recommended leadership strategies is that of partnership survival. Whether it is being deliberate in actions, building it to last, or having tenacious leaders, these approaches and practices are intended to protect relationships that seem vulnerable in their organizational settings. The evidence from this study demonstrates how difficult it is to build and sustain external partnerships and those who excel at the work know that effective strategies can add layers of protection. Actions that advance and strengthen the collaborative work can mitigate the damage caused by detractors and those who view partnership work as unnecessary.
The Assessment of Partnership Efforts

One way to validate the importance of multi-organizational collaborations is to document what is achieved through collective efforts. The compilation of data can be a helpful tool when determining whether external partnerships are worth the investment of time and human resources. In order to better understand how partners measured success, it was necessary to explore assessment practices. The following section addresses this issue and responds to the data collected for the fourth and final research question.

*How do leaders from community colleges and their partnering organizations define and measure success?*

When the campus and community partners were asked how they assess partnerships, their responses varied greatly. A few of the college leaders released a heavy sigh as though they were hesitant to address the question. While they acknowledged they had collected data on the collaborative work, it was often limited to numerical counts and anecdotal information. In most cases, success was measured by the number of students who received academic support or job training services. Even so, the college representatives recognized they could be doing more. According to college administrator, Roger, collecting additional data would be helpful in better understanding the impact of his program, but time and resources were a barrier. One of the challenges was to find ways to incorporate user-friendly assessment practices into limited schedules.

Many of the college leaders relied on data collected by the institution. Statistical information regarding student performance and retention rates were already compiled by the institutional research offices. While these data were useful, it was not enough to capture the totality of the work accomplished by each partnership. What was missing was
the examination of the many processes and practices the leaders implemented and valued. Each partnership team had their own approach to reaching desired outcomes and each was successful. The ability to document their stories through data analysis would serve to further strengthen the partnerships and build credibility with college administrators.

When some of the community representatives were asked about assessment efforts, they asked for clarification in terms of what this meant. This was one of the few research areas where differences in organizational understandings could be observed. For the educators, it seemed the continuous push for accountability had become a burden. In comparison, several of the community representatives claimed to know little of formal assessment processes but indicated they knew “when something worked.” When business leaders, Samuel and Lynne, were asked how they determined whether a partnership was successful, they responded, “It’s what you get in return.”

For several participants, success was measured in terms of costs and benefits. Regardless of the sector, leaders knew when their organizations were gaining something of value in return for their participation. College administrator, Ruth, acknowledged there should be opportunities for dialogue to occur between partners in evaluating effective practices. Even so, she measured success by examining rewards and determining whether they were worth the investment of staff and resources. She stated this approach was used due to the lack of time for full assessment processes.

While many struggled with implementing assessment processes, nonprofit leader, Eduardo, embraced the opportunity to evaluate his program and the partnerships built. As the founder of a nonprofit organization designed to create social change, he was committed to ensuring resources were invested in activities and programs that produced
results. He spoke of meeting with his leadership team on a regular basis and taking a critical look at practices. “Show me the proof!” he stated, “Show me real outcomes.” These words were spoken as he addressed all phases of partnership development. His desire to cultivate a Latino culture that values higher education was a goal he was committed to attaining. He understood that advancing the cause required a continuous evaluation of effective practices. Eduardo also recommended that campus and community leaders “take a risk” and hire outside evaluators to help with assessment processes. He noted it was important to be honest with evaluation practices, and employing outside help can provide an unbiased perspective.

It was not surprising there were mixed responses to the issue of partnership assessment. According to Maurrasse (2002), assessing multi-organizational partnerships is very difficult. He cited that while most leaders can identify indicators of success, few have actually determined how to measure these complicated efforts. Because campus and community partnerships are relationship intensive and process driven, leaders were somewhat hesitant and uncertain about critically examining the work. Some even questioned what they should be measuring. Evaluating intended outcomes was expected, but critically examining relational processes seemed somewhat uncomfortable and taboo.

While these issues can be challenging, Gelmon (2003) cited the necessity of assessment efforts in order to legitimize the work. She noted that partnerships are not just entities; they are processes which need to explored and measured. While the campus and community partners had different approaches and perspectives when it came to assessment, they knew their partnership efforts were making a difference in the lives of
others. The challenge was to document these efforts in order to validate the outcomes and advocate for the work.

**The Campus and Community Leaders**

When designing the research agenda, I purposefully avoided asking questions that might place emphasis on the personal traits or characteristics of the individual leaders. Instead, the intent was to focus on the strategies and processes that these partners employ to cultivate successful collaborations. What I discovered through the interview process was that it was difficult to compartmentalize the two. When listening to the personal narratives of those fully engaged in the work, it was challenging to examine the practices without honoring the personal values that shape those practices. As a qualitative researcher, it was necessary to fully embrace and validate the core themes that emerged in study and not be limited by the four research questions. According to Merriam (2009), the inductive process allows the researcher to respect, respond, and validate the human experience. So, while examining leadership characteristics was not a predefined area of exploration, it was an impossible theme to ignore. The following section summarizes the characteristics demonstrated by the study participants.

During the interview process, campus and community leaders spoke about their organizations, their work, and a deep commitment to solving issues through a collaborative approach. Although the group was diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and professional paths, they seemed to share certain qualities that transcended differences. These qualities emerged when each individual was asked to tell a story about a partnership that made them particularly proud. As they spoke about the relationships they nurtured or the outcomes achieved, there was an obvious passion for the work. Their
desire to make a difference in whatever realm they deemed important permeated through their narratives. When Foundation Director, Seth, shared his experiences helping foster youth, he stated it was the right thing to do even though the work did not generate large amounts of funding. Although he provided an extensive list of the many partnerships he facilitates, this one was different. While other collaborations yielded fiscal rewards and generated positive community relations, this one evoked the intrinsic satisfaction of helping others be successful. This emotional connection to the collaborative work was also evident when nonprofit director, Eduardo, spoke about motivating Latino youth to seek higher education. He cited his initial efforts began as a result of anger when he learned of the dismal graduation rates for Latino males. With a desire to create social change, he founded an organization that develops strategic educational alliances in order to provide mentoring and academic support. Eduardo spoke passionately about the work, the relationships developed, and dreams for a different future. The passion and emotional connection to the work demonstrated by these two individuals were present in many of the leaders’ narratives. As a group, they were driven by a desire to help others succeed in school, work, and life.

Because the campus and community leaders were personally invested in the work and determined to make positive change occur, they worked extremely hard to reach the desired outcomes. As each one shared the numerous challenges they encountered, I found myself wondering why they continued to move forward when so many others may have chosen to quit. The answer to this became clear as several of the leaders discussed their ability to be tenacious or persistent. When college instructor, Stephanie, shared her experiences having to rebuild community partnerships that had been destroyed by a
predecessor, she illustrated the tenacity required to be successful. According to Stephanie, she made repeated phone calls, sent numerous messages, and continually requested meetings in order to repair severed relationships. These actions demonstrated a willingness to advance the work even when it seemed impossible. There was a belief among the leaders that worthy goals cannot be abandoned, even if it takes time for them to actualize. This was documented in many of the interviews as leaders took pride in recognizing their talent for “never giving up.” Sheer determination and a “never say die” attitude served the partners well as they navigated the interpersonal and systemic challenges inherent in multi-organizational partnerships.

Another quality shared by the participants was the ability to think creatively in order to seek solutions to difficult problems. The issues that brought leaders together in collaboration were complex and demanded innovative approaches. This was evident as they addressed their desired goals. For college leader Beth, it was about offering job training that increases earning potential for students while being responsive to local industry needs. For county leader Megan, collaborative efforts were a way to create healthier communities by lowering the incidents of toxic waste dumping in the region. And for nonprofit leader, Miranda, the goal was to provide support services that enable underrepresented students to earn college degrees. Ten different partnerships were represented in the study and each had a unique purpose. Yet, they all existed to address lingering issues that had not been solved in the past. The leaders stressed the importance of “thinking outside the box” as the only hope for moving beyond a history of failed practices. As a group, they piloted new programs, even when this meant working on their own time or causing rifts with colleagues who felt they were overstepping organizational
boundaries. These new offerings were demonstrated by Steven who developed a construction training program which prepared over 1,000 students for employment. It was also documented by nonprofit leader, Joanne, who brought high school, community college, and university leaders together so that students could design and build an electric car. These innovative ideas yielded successful outcomes due to determination and collaborative synergy.

The educators and community representative expressed frustration with colleagues who fear change or want to continue with the same ineffective practices. They criticized systems that were paralyzed by bureaucracy and collegial governance. These were individuals who valued the art of brainstorming and implementing new approaches even when “naysayers” critiqued them. There was a leadership practice of continuously asking “What if?” or “Why not?” As they summarized their leadership approaches and what was accomplished through external relationships, it was clearly apparent why they were recognized by peers for being exceptional at partnership work.

When Amey (2010) stressed the importance of partnership champions, she stated that leaders must be passionate about the collaborative process and willing to work diligently towards desired outcomes. Roles and responsibilities are numerous and include creating a vision, facilitating processes, soliciting campus support, and serving as an advocate. The partners in the study exemplified these qualities and illustrated the practices and perspectives of true partnership champions.

I began this study wondering if there were certain types of people who had a natural gift for collaborative work. Knowing that external partnerships are built on interpersonal relations, I questioned whether some individuals had an innate ability to
bring people together and foster a commitment to a common cause. After meeting each leader and reflecting on their narratives, I cannot pretend to know whether a natural talent exists. What was learned though, through conversations with each leader and the analysis of data, is that there are certain leadership characteristics that contribute to the successful facilitation of external partnerships. First and foremost, those who excel at multi-organizational collaborations, care deeply about the work. There is a passion that comes from wanting to create change and improve the lives of students and community. Because of this commitment, there is a willingness to work tirelessly to reach the intended outcomes. And though there are numerous barriers along the way, they accept each one as a challenge that demands creative problem-solving and innovative thought. As a community college leader, it gives me great hope to think that the secret to successful partnerships begins with passion, determination, and creative thinking. These three qualities are not unique to a select group of individuals but can be found in college and community leaders throughout the nation. Therefore, the potential for new partnerships to emerge and respond to educational and social ills is promising.

A Model of Recommended Practices

The findings presented in this study capture the many themes that emerged during the research process. As campus and community leaders shared their experiences developing external partnerships, they offered words of advice that derived from years of experience. This culmination of data painted a portrait of the time-intensive art of developing model collaborations.

In order to illustrate the numerous themes addressed in the study, a model was created that summarizes the many strategies utilized by the leaders (see Table 4). The
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<th>Phase</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Clarity of purpose</td>
<td>• Do your homework</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Seek partners w/common concerns</td>
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<td>• Solicit support from organizational leaders</td>
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<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Clearly aligned goals</td>
<td>• Identify partners who can resonate with message</td>
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<td>building</td>
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<td>• Seek partners invested in student success</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate honest dialogue about what each partner brings to the relationship and what they hope to gain (vetting process)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Take time to clearly define goals and objectives</td>
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<td>• Strive to build equitable benefits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Healthy communication</td>
<td>• Invest in face-to-face interactions</td>
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<td>• Institutionalize periodic contact</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Respond quickly</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• When needed, delegate responsibility for communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trustful relationships</td>
<td>• Identify partners with shared core values</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Select partners committed to success</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate a courting period</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Start small, build on success</td>
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<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Progress, sustainability</td>
<td>• Stay focused</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Schedule regular meetings</td>
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<td>• Market partnership efforts</td>
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<td>• Be persistent</td>
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<td>• Recruit multiple stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Build organizational support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>• Utilize existing data provided by the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Consider soliciting outside help</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Find time for assessment</td>
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purpose is to provide a macro view of all the data presented. It is hopeful this table of recommended practices will offer useful information to current and future practitioners. It also serves to validate the intense processes required to build meaningful campus and community partnerships.

When the interview process began, the intent was to gain a multi-faceted perspective of collaborative relationships. Assumptions were made that campus and community leaders might view partnership processes in a slightly different manner due to differing organizational cultures. This was not the case. Instead, there was a unified voice, demonstrating a common knowledge of effective partnerships practices and processes.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Based upon the research findings, the following actions are recommended for leaders and their institutions. While the data presented in this study focused on the perspectives of campus and community leaders, the recommendations are heavily directed at the community college. The reason for this is twofold. First, the primary purpose of the study was to identify strategies that would support the efforts of community college leaders tasked with facilitating external partnerships. Secondly, many of the concerns raised in the study were linked to community college practices. The recommendations include (a) act intentionally and plan accordingly, (b) provide necessary support and resources, (c) develop a comprehensive marketing plan, (d) engage multiple stakeholders, (e) examine internal barriers to partnership development, and (f) be mindful of assessment efforts.
Recommendation 1: Invest Time in the Examination and Planning of Campus and Community Partnerships

Given the consistent theme throughout the study of “intentionality,” one core recommendation is for community college leaders to invest time in the examination and planning of campus and community partnerships. First and foremost, it is important for institutions to determine if the development of external collaborations is something they are willing to embrace and support. Without a campus culture that understands the purpose and value of these relationships, the work will continue to be an afterthought. The data presented in this study illustrated the problems that plagued partnerships when practitioners operated in a vacuum and failed to be integrated into the organizational fabric. If community college leaders are serious about the development of external partnerships, strategic planning is a critical first step.

One suggestion is to create a task force composed of board members, administrators, faculty leaders and program directors. The responsibility of this team would be to determine what types of external partnerships the college would like to pursue. The goal is to be deliberate when identifying college needs and selecting potential partners. One way to initiate this effort is to refer to the college mission statement and address the four main charges: basic skills, career and technical education, transfer education, and lifelong learning. After considering each area with the necessary campus employees engaged in the conversation, the team can craft a strategic plan for the development of external partnerships. Creating an institutional culture that assumes ownership of these outreach efforts would be preferable to having pockets of educators who are cultivating community relationships on their own time. As long as the brunt of
the responsibilities lies on the shoulders of a few passionate leaders, it is likely the work will not be fully supported to the extent needed.

Identifying partnership goals through an intensive planning process would provide the opportunity to engage multiple stakeholders, raise awareness of community relations, and sanction external collaborations as a college priority. When these partnerships are carefully adopted with the intent to advance institutional goals, clarity of purpose emerges which becomes invaluable when allocating campus resources.

This study illustrates that partnership development begins with conducting research to identify potential partners. I would recommend that partnership development begins prior to this phase. Before looking outward, it is wise to facilitate campus conversations about external partnerships, followed with a carefully crafted plan of action. When this occurs, the institution will be more prepared to fully engage with community representatives, having first secured a base of support and clarity of purpose.

**Recommendation 2: Provide the Necessary Support and Resources for the Development of Successful External Partnerships**

Once external partnerships are a component of the integrated planning system, the next step is to ensure that adequate resources are provided for the work. While the attainment of outside funding can be helpful in supporting these endeavors, it cannot be the sole source of support. The data provided in this study illustrated that collaborations reliant on soft funds are not fully owned by the institutions. Instead, the work which is intended to advance college goals is dependent on the funding decisions of outside donors. Community colleges seeking to build external partnerships as a method of enhancing educational programs must consider investing resources to support these
projects. By incorporating these partnerships into institutional planning efforts, the allotment of resources may be more likely.

Another theme identified in the study was the occurrence of college and community leaders facilitating external partnerships on their own time. Too often the practitioners cited the absence of scheduled work hours to cultivate these relationships. When the development of external collaborations is seen as voluntary or extra, it signifies a lack of importance and value. With an understanding of the time intensive processes required to build quality relationships, it is essential that college leaders are compensated for their efforts. Keeping with the theme of intentionality, it is further recommended that these responsibilities be clearly defined in one’s job description and recognized as a core function. This is another component of institutionalizing partnership efforts. Ideally, the work of campus and community collaborations would be present in institutional planning, job descriptions, and assessment efforts. When partnership responsibilities are not funded nor properly delegated, the work is more susceptible to neglect and failure.

**Recommendation 3: Develop a Comprehensive Marketing Plan That Informs and Educates the Campus and Greater Community About Partnership Efforts**

One of the messages delivered by the campus and community leaders was to “tell the story.” As simple as it may seem, this strategy is one that cannot be underestimated. Without strategic marketing practices, external collaborations are at risk of becoming invisible. Community colleges are often large institutions where it is difficult for employees to keep abreast of worthwhile programs and admirable accomplishments. The same is true with the nonprofit, corporate, and government sectors. Yet, if external collaborations are to become part of the institutional culture, people need to be informed
in order to understand and appreciate the work. The development of a comprehensive marketing plan would help with these efforts.

The educators and community representatives who participated in the study were deliberate when marketing to specific populations. Each leader knew who they wanted to reach with promotional efforts and the best methods to accomplish this task. While one of the K-12 leaders designed glossy publications to appeal to corporate partners, one of the college leaders hosted community celebrations to highlight achievements. Learning from their lead, the goal is to develop a multi-faceted approach to telling the story. By considering the intended audience and developing appropriate materials and events, these stories can inform, inspire, validate, and promote the work.

A strategic marketing plan is also an effective tool in addressing the misperceptions of community members who cite the colleges as being disengaged from those they serve. It was both disturbing and disheartening to hear nonprofit and business leaders refer to community colleges as country clubs where employees care little about the districts surrounding them. Once an institution determines where they are going to focus their external work, comprehensive marketing efforts can relay this message to the greater community. These collaborations cannot be an institution’s best kept secret. It is the responsibility of the colleges to inform their regions of the partnerships developed in an effort to strengthen the institution and community.

**Recommendation 4: Engage Multiple Stakeholders in Order to Build a Strong Base of Support for Campus and Community Partnerships**

When the leaders addressed the challenges of losing a valued partner, one of the concerns raised was the uncertainty that surrounds a new member. There was no
guarantee that someone new would be interested or committed to continuing external relations. In worst case scenarios, the addition of a new partner was enough to end a long-standing partnership. These situations were demoralizing for those who had invested so much time and effort into the collaboration. The issue of risk was mentioned several times throughout the study and this was one area where partnerships were very risky business. In order to minimize the damage caused by personnel exits and protect established relationships, it is recommended that college and community organizations designate multiple stakeholders to each external partnership. While this may seem unreasonable given the lack of funds and resources designated to partnership efforts, it deserves serious consideration.

The leaders represented in the study were dedicated to their partnerships, and many acted in isolation when it came to facilitating these relationships. The problem with this approach is that ownership of the collaboration lies with one dedicated individual. When this person moves on or retires, the investment of time and progress can be lost. If institutions are serious about supporting external partnerships and linking them to organizational goals and objectives, it is important the responsibility be a shared one. This does not mean that efforts have to duplicated by multiple people; it simply means that multiple employees should be invested, informed, and play some type of supportive role in the endeavor.

When nonprofit vice president, Miranda, spoke of having different employees assist with communication efforts so that executive leadership was not the sole owner, this was an effective approach that worked well for her organization. In this scenario, the exit of one partner would not devastate the collaboration due to the multiple levels of
investment. While this strategy was geared to help with communication efforts, it is one that has the potential to strengthen the overall partnership, while cultivating a community of stakeholders.

It should be noted that assigning multiple stakeholders to a partnership does not guarantee collaborations will remain unchanged when confronted with the arrival of a replacement partner. The data presented in this study underscore the importance of developing trustful relationships over a period of time. Because partnerships are the product of interpersonal processes, a transition period is necessary. Even so, the goal is for college and community leaders to minimize the risk caused by having one individual operating in isolation.

**Recommendation 4: Examine and Address the Internal Barriers That Impede Partnership Efforts**

In order to create simplified processes for the work of external partnerships, it is recommended that college leaders examine internal systems that may impede or delay the work. Several of the partners addressed the challenges caused by overly bureaucratic systems. This issue was demonstrated by leaders such as college administrator, Joseph, who stressed the difficulties encountered when dealing with the college budget office. When practices such as managing a budget for community related projects results in high levels of frustration, it is time to examine these practices and explore possible solutions.

Unfortunately, many of the responses in the study portray community colleges as inefficient and slow to change. Some of the educators attributed this complacency to regulations beyond their control, such as the California Education Code and collective bargaining agreements. While institutions may be large and inflexible, changes are
needed to better accommodate partnership processes. It is imperative to examine each barrier and determine ways to lessen the hardships on practitioners.

Developing policies and procedures that are partnership friendly is one more component of cultivating an organizational culture that values and embraces the potential of campus and community collaborations. With intentional planning and adequate resources, the challenges that leaders face will be greatly reduced. This will serve to build stronger and more successful partnerships.

**Recommendation 5: Be More Proactive With Assessment Efforts**

As each leader spoke passionately about what they had accomplished through collaborative efforts, they shared some impressive results. From helping underrepresented students earn college degrees to developing job training programs for displaced workers, the leaders delivered remarkable outcomes. Although many were able to count success stories, they admitted further assessment efforts were needed in order to better document the totality of the work. With an understanding of how important it is to investigate current practices for continuous improvement, it is recommended that campus and community leaders be more proactive with assessment efforts.

One of the consistent themes in the study was the undervaluing of external partnerships. These collaborations were often given few resources and little recognition. With improved assessment measures, inspirational success stories can be further validated with data that reflects effective practices and measured results. This type of information could be invaluable in earning credibility and advocating for further support. Too often there is a misperception that the purpose of external partnerships is to generate positive public relations. This was not the case with the collaborations highlighted in the
study. Their purpose was to provide much needed educational and community services. It is important for leaders to move beyond anecdotal summaries and be more intentional with the collection and analysis of data that will advance their work.

It should be reiterated that many of the community representatives did not see a need for structured assessment efforts. Knowing what worked for their organizations and what was gained through their participation was enough. As the researcher, I want to be respectful of those voices. While I think assessment efforts are a healthy occurrence for both college and community, the recommendation to increase assessment practices are particularly geared for community college leaders who work in an educational culture that demands accountability.

Recommendations for Further Research

When this research study was designed, the intent was to cast a wide net in order to allow a wide range of topics and themes to emerge. The interview questions were purposefully broad so that participants would have the option of responding in numerous ways. With an appreciation for the diversity within the group, I had expected the conversations to take many different twists and turns. Interestingly, this was not the case. The campus and community leaders followed the same path and even spoke through a somewhat unified voice. While this level of data saturation made a strong case for defining model practices, there was a feeling that much was left uncovered.

I discovered that the danger of casting a wide net is that one captures the things that float near the surface. As the data were analyzed, a general introduction to the development of campus and community partnerships emerged. And while the intent was to gather information that would be helpful to future practitioners, there is still a great
deal to learn. The following recommendations address some of the issues that begged further consideration during the research process.

**Research Recommendation 1: Explore the Occurrence and Characteristics of Authentic Campus and Community Partnerships**

One of the topics that I had hoped to explore was the existence of authentic partnerships. According to the national organization Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH, 2007), authentic partnerships occur when there is a blurring of organizational boundaries. Leaders from different sectors are equally invested in shared goals, develop a common language, and merge institutional resources. According to the CCPH, these types of partnerships are extremely difficult to attain and yet represent the ideal type of collaboration. Since one of the goals of this study was to examine model partnerships, this is one area where further research is recommended. Do authentic partnerships really exist or are the defined criteria unrealistic? During three of the interviews with campus and community leaders, I saw glimpses of what may have been authentic partnerships but there were not enough data to pursue this strand. If the literature portrays these relationships as ideal, it would be useful to identify examples and learn from their practices.

**Research Recommendation 2: Examine the Role of the College President in the Development of Campus and Community Partnerships**

One of the issues that surfaced during the study was the role of the college president in the establishment of campus and community partnerships. Brief comments were made in several of the interviews regarding the political agendas and personal interests of the president and how these factors shape external relations. Unfortunately,
not enough detail was provided to make this a central theme in the study. Nevertheless, it is a topic worth further investigation. While the research findings stressed the importance of presidential support in the building of external partnerships, it became apparent that there were other issues to uncover. Knowing that executive leaders can set the tone and agenda for a campus, this would make an interesting and informative study.

**Research Recommendation 3: Identify User-Friendly Assessment Strategies and Tools for the Assessment of Campus and Community Partnerships**

Many leaders within the group acknowledged they struggled with assessment processes. Limited time, resources, and knowledge impeded participants from fully measuring and documenting their collective efforts. One of the questions that arose in the interview process was whether to assess the relationship or what is achieved through the collaboration. While it seems desirable for both to be examined, leaders felt uncomfortable evaluating the personal relationships they had established with their partners. And while many knew “what was gained,” through their efforts, these accomplishments went undocumented as well. Leaders were comfortable providing the minimal assessment information required by grant funders, but failed to do much more.

As I observed the discomfort caused by the topic of assessment, it was apparent that further study is required on the subject. Instead of telling campus and community leaders how and why they need to assess external partnerships, researchers need to determine what tools and methods would be useful and relevant to practitioners. These important processes have to be informed by those who will benefit from the assessment process. A research study that gives voice to practitioners and results in user-friendly assessment practices would be incredibly valuable.
Conclusion

As I reflect on the research experience and think about the people I met and the experiences they shared, there are certain lingering messages. The first is that complex social problems cannot be solved by a single institution. Challenges such as educating a diverse citizenry to meet social needs require the efforts of multiple stakeholders who are equally invested in achieving desired outcomes. Anthropologist, Margaret Mead, once suggested that the only thing to change the world was a small group of thoughtful and committed individuals. The partnerships illustrated in this study provided a glimpse of what is possible when individuals are willing to cross organizational boundaries to advocate for a common cause. The dreams they shared about creating a better future were both admirable and informative.

While the campus and community leaders had much knowledge to contribute, one of the great lessons they offered was the power of passion and determination. These were individuals who worked tirelessly to improve the lives of others. In a time when organizations are required to do more with less, the partners worked diligently to create innovative solutions to nagging problems. Their leadership style provided a model from which others could strive to emulate. There is no doubt that developing future leaders with this commitment to change could make a real difference in improving educational and community institutions.

Some of the greatest challenges faced by the partners are the barriers imposed by the community college system. While college websites proudly display their commitment to community partnerships, the facilitators of these relationships are tasked with navigating a culture that provides little assistance and support. As I listened to the leaders
address the hardships they encountered, I kept thinking “it shouldn’t be this hard.” While the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) advocates for leaders with the ability to develop external partnerships, it is questionable whether institutions are ready or willing to support the work.

The unique and positive aspects of the community colleges are that the door is always open to those who dream of a better future. As college leaders face impending budget cuts and difficult decisions, it would be wise to seek the support of community stakeholders. Developing model collaborative has the potential to build community, offer supportive networks, and strengthen academic programs.
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Recruitment Email to Community College Personnel Asking for Subject Referrals

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at San Diego State University (SDSU), and I am conducting my dissertation research on the development of campus-community partnerships. My goal is to identify both processes and strategies that educators and community leaders use in order facilitate successful collaborations.

I am writing to ask for assistance in identifying individuals at your institution who have done an exceptional job facilitating partnerships with community organizations (such as K-12 school districts, non-profit organizations, and business and industry). Is there a colleague that you recognize as a role model in this area? If so, I would be interested in learning more about them. I am hoping identify 8-10 community college leaders throughout the state who would be willing to share their expertise in a 60-minute interview.

Selected participants will not receive any incentives for participation and are free to withdraw from the study at any point in the research process. And whether someone chooses to participate or not participate will not affect future relations with SDSU or any researchers in the study. Maintaining confidentiality will be critical and therefore the names of participants and their institutions will not be used in the study.

If you have any questions or have someone to recommend for the study, please feel free to contact me at (760) 717-5309 or sdsu4cwilkinson@gmail.com
Recruitment Email to College Leaders Who Have Been Referred by Their Colleagues

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at San Diego State University (SDSU), and I am conducting my dissertation research on the development of campus-community partnerships. My goal is to identify both processes and strategies that educators and community leaders use in order facilitate successful collaborations.

I was given your information by one of your colleagues who identified you as a role model in area of building and maintaining community partnerships. And because you have been recognized as someone who has expertise to share, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

Participation is strictly voluntary and will involve a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked a series of 10 open-ended questions about partnership work. Interview questions will be provided prior to the interview which will last approximately one hour. Participants will not receive any incentives for participation and are free to withdraw from the study at any point in the research process. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not affect future relations with SDSU or any researchers in the study. The names of participants and their institutions will not be used. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (760) 717-5309 or sdsu4cwilkinson@gmail.com.
Recruitment Email to Community Leaders Who Have Been

Referred by College Participants

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at San Diego State University (SDSU), and I am conducting my dissertation research on the development of campus-community partnerships. My goal is to identify both processes and strategies that educators and community leaders use in order facilitate successful collaborations.

You have been recognized by your college partner as someone who is a role model in area of building and maintaining campus-community partnerships. And because you have been recognized as someone who has expertise to share, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

Participation is strictly voluntary and will involve a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked a series of 10 open-ended questions about partnership work. Interview questions will be provided prior to the interview which will last approximately one hour. Participants will not receive any incentives for participation and are free to withdraw from the study at any point in the research process. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not affect future relations with SDSU or any researchers in the study. The actual names of participants and their institutions will not be used. If you would like to participate in the study or have further questions, please feel free to contact me at (760) 717-5309 or sdsu4cwilkinson@gmail.com
July 26, 2011
Student Researcher: Carol Wilkinson
Faculty Sponsor/Thesis Chair:
Dr. Marjorie Olney
Department: Educational Leadership

vIRB Number: 690078
Title: Partnership Perspectives: Exploring Strategies for the Development of Successful Campus-Community Collaborations
Risk Level: Minimal
Exemption: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Dear Ms. Wilkinson:

The project referenced was reviewed and verified as exempt in accordance with SDSU’s Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46.101). This review applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol.

The determination of exemption is final and requests for continuing review (Progress Reports) are not required for this study. However, if any changes to your study are planned, you must submit a modification request and receive either IRB approval (per 45 CFR 46.110 or 46.111) or IRB verification that the modification is exempt (per 45 CFR 46.101). To submit a modification request, access the protocol via the WebPortal, on the
protocol Main Page, you will need to click on "Modifications" under Protocol Maintenance and enter a report. Once you have filled in your responses on the report form, click "submit". Additionally, notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student).

Please note the following for all exempt studies:

a) If this research involves the use of existing or secondary data sources, information obtained must be recorded so that subjects cannot be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

b) If information will be obtained from individual medical records, please check with the organization authorized to provide access to these records to determine whether regulations relating to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) pertain to your research. Likewise, if academic records are accessed, Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements must be respected. Notify the SDSU IRB office if protocol revisions are necessary to comply with HIPAA regulations.

c) If recruitment will take place through an outside agency or organization, confirm with that institution that you have permission to conduct the study prior to initiation of any study activities. If this research involves the use of existing or secondary data sources, confirm with the data owner that you have permission to access the data.

d) Approval is contingent upon the completion of the SDSU human subjects tutorial (found at: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~gra/login.php) by all members of the research team. This certification must be renewed every 2 years.

For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office ((619) 594-6622 or email irb@mail.sdsu.edu). To access IRB review application materials, SDSU's Assurance, the 45 CFR 46, the Belmont Report, and/or any other relevant policies and guidelines related to the involvement of human subjects in research, please visit the IRB web site at http://gra.sdsu.edu/research.php.
Graduate Students: This notification may be used as documentation to register in Thesis 799A. Attach a hard copy of this notice to your Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee form prior to submitting the completed form to Graduate and Research Affairs - Student Services Division.

Sincerely,

Brianne Larsen-Mongeon
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Jeanne Nichols
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Amy McDaniel
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Choya Washington
Regulatory Compliance Analyst
APPENDIX C

Consent Form for Interviews

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject for One-on-One Interviews

Exploring Strategies for the Development of Successful
Campus-Community Collaborations

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure that you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators: I, Carol Wilkinson, am the only investigator for this research study and I am currently enrolled in the San Diego State University’s Ed.D. program. I hold a Bachelors of Arts Degree in sociology and a Masters of Arts Degree in sociological practice, both from California State University San Marcos. My dissertation advisor at San Diego State University is Professor Dr. Marjorie Olney, who has Ph.D. and a Masters of Science Degree in Rehabilitative Counseling from Syracuse University.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to identify the strategies and processes that leaders from community colleges and community organizations use in order to develop, maintain and evaluate successful campus-community partnerships.

Description of the Study: This study will seek to understand how college and community leaders build and maintain quality campus-community partnerships. One-on-one interviews will be conducted with approximately 16-20 college and community leaders in an effort to identify strategies for success. You have been selected to participate because of your history of facilitating model partnerships. As a participant, you will be interviewed for a 60-minute period and will be asked a series of 10 open-ended questions about your experiences in developing and maintaining partnerships.

Risks or Discomfort: Some participants may feel discomfort disclosing information about partnership practices and/or challenges because of the desire to protect these valued relationships. If you begin to feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview process, you have the right to discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.
Benefits of the Study: The anticipated benefits of this project are: (1) strategies will be identified that will help educators and community leaders build healthy and productive campus-community partnerships, (2) the findings will be useful in promoting shared understandings about partnership practices and expectations between college and community leaders.

Confidentiality: As the researcher, I realize the importance of maintaining confidentiality and (1) I will personally collect all the consent forms and secure them along with all the researcher notes and tapes in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I am the only person who will have access to the key. (2) I will maintain your confidentiality by not using your actual name or the name of your institution. (3) I will assign codes to all participants, and will never identify you by name when I take notes and write my findings. (4) I will audio record the interviews to ensure information accuracy. You can review these tapes for up to 30 days of the date of recording. (5) I will destroy all of the tapes after my dissertation is completed. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. Federal regulations require that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) periodically review all approved and continuing projects that involve human subjects. To ensure that your rights as a subject are being protected in this study, it is possible that representatives of the Institutional Review Board may inspect study records.

Incentives to Participate: There are no incentives of any kind for participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and stop your participation at any time in the study without penalty.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact: Carol Wilkinson at (760) 717-5309 or sdsu4cwilkinson@gmail.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at San Diego State University (telephone: 619) 594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu

Consent to Participate: The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board’s stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form. You have been told that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.
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APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Questions for Community College Leaders

1) Can you tell me about the types of campus and community partnerships that you facilitate and how you came to be involved in this work?

2) When you are seeking to build new partnerships, what makes a community organization a desirable partner?

3) If you were creating a recipe for model campus and community partnerships, what would you identify as the key ingredients?

4) What are some of the strategies and/or process that you have found to be particularly effective when developing campus and community collaborations?

5) Can you tell me about a campus and community partnership that you facilitate that makes you particularly proud?

6) What are some of the frustrations or challenges that you have encountered in partnering with community organizations?

7) Can you tell me about a time when a partnership went badly? Were you able to resolve the problems or issues?

8) How do you access partnerships to determine if they are working?

9) Do you have words of advice for emerging leaders who are tasked with building external partnerships?

10) Is there anything that I have forgotten to ask, but would be important to know?

Questions for Community Leaders

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