Strategies for Developing and Sustaining Partnerships with Underrepresented communities

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Learning objectives

- Discuss the nature of “collaboration” in partnerships with underrepresented communities
- Review a model for developing and sustaining partnerships – 3 main phases: entry into the community, developing and sustaining the partnership, benefits and follow up.
- Analyze challenges and ways to overcome them
- Review strategies for sustaining partnerships overtime
What is collaboration?

“...is a mutually beneficial and well defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals”

(Mattessich & Monsey, 1997)

Recognizes the unique strengths that each partner brings to the collaboration

“Understanding is a two-way street” –Eleanor Roosevelt
What are underrepresented communities?

- Minorities (racially and ethnically diverse)
- Low-income individuals
- Rural communities
- Marginalized communities because of gender, sexual preference, religion, race, age or any other characteristic
- Individuals with disabilities
- Groups of individuals who share a common predicament different from the mainstream
Why the need for collaborations with multicultural communities?

- Complex problems
- Addressing social problems need to come from a collaboration among different sectors, organizations, partners, and disciplines
- Coming together of scientific knowledge and experiential knowledge
- Need for evidence-based practice
- Increase gaps in well-being, health and rehabilitation outcomes
- New ways of thinking, doing, and conceptualizing research, evaluation & practice activities
Who is involved in a collaboration?

- Collaborations involve different stakeholders: consumers, grassroots groups, community activist, researchers, and community gatekeepers learning from one–another.

  Ready to form learning communities
“To make a significant difference in the lives of individuals and communities, their voices count on what matters most”

Suarez-Balcazar, Y.
Approaches to collaboration

- Participatory strategies (PAR, community-engagement, )
- Asset/strengths based approach
- Community-centered model
- Empowerment based
- Focus on sustainability & utilization
- Capacity building (develop competencies)
- Translate knowledge into real practices that improve community service & programs
Interactive and contextual model of collaboration: Process of Developing and Sustaining a Community Partnerships

Suarez-Balcazar, Harper & Lewis (2005)
I. Gaining entry into the community

- Volunteer
- Tour
- Visit
- Develop a relationship with gate keepers
- Learn about the community
- One-on-one contact
Continuation... Gaining entry into the community

- Recognize your level of multicultural competence
  - Biases, ideas or preconceived notions of the community.
  - Willingness to learn about the community and new ways of doing.
- Recognize your level of knowledge and awareness about the community
- Recognize your level of skills – being able to communicate with the community
- Identify the level of organizational support, from your own organization, to engage with the community
2. Developing & sustaining mutual collaborations

- Develop trust
  - Clarify expectations, identify common goals, plan
- Develop open & honest communication
- Respect for each others abilities, knowledge and strengths
- Open-mindedness to adapt to political, social and cultural atmosphere
- Partners need to be invested equally
- Sensitivity to diversity
- Team needs to reflect the community
- Transparency, balance of power
Recognize factors that impact multicultural communities

- **PHYSICAL**
  - Race/ethnicity, gender, age, disability, appearance
  - Socioeconomic status, level of urbanicity, national origin, oppression experience, immigration status

- **COGNITIVE**
  - Knowledge of rights & services, sense of entitlement, beliefs & values, social identity, personal history, perceptions of time & personal space, disability

- **CONTEXTUAL**

- **BEHAVIORAL**
  - Education, religion, sexual orientation, family & community support, language proficiency, political involvement, level of acculturation, occupation
3. Strategies for sustaining collaboration

- Create reinforcers/incentives/small wins for participating
- Give something back to the community – in-service, training/capacity building in areas of need.
- Recruit individuals from the same ethnic/racial background into your group
- Outreach to multicultural communities in settings within the community (faith-based organizations, ethnic clubs and organizations, community fairs).
More on strategies ....

- Create Joint ownership over the project/partnerships
- Determine roles and responsibilities of partners
- Discuss fiscal considerations
- Recognize unequal power dynamics

- Create structures and processes for communicating between partners
- Develop agreed upon norms & processes
- Develop plans to evaluate partnership & celebrate success
Benefits of collaborating with Multicultural communities

- Leads to a more authentic understanding of the social reality of the community and potential solutions to social issues.
- Fosters dialogue which leads to critical awareness.
- It builds on community assets and strengths. The collaboration process can liberate the outsider of his/her own biases. Outsiders are encouraged to recognize that, as cultural beings, we hold attitudes and beliefs that can influence our perceptions and interactions with individuals who are different from ourselves.
- Enhance the understanding of diversity issues and cultural and ethnic differences among individuals – celebrate diversity
Considerations for outside partners

- Linear thinkers beware
- Defining and redefining boundaries and roles
- “Address the entrenched conservatism of discipline-defined research and the reticence to allow non-academics at the research table”

- Start small
- Tailor partnership to the needs of the community and the institution
Challenges and barriers to collaborations

- University/organizational bureaucracy
- Budget cuts, lack of staff at the agency
- Transitioning from a university driven project to an agency driven project.
- Lack of follow after project is completed
Challenges...

- Issues of control. Research/project protocol clashes with the philosophy of the organization (like control groups)

- “Time frame for research projects is often too short to accomplish tasks (timeframe), keeping up with all projects”

- “Sometime researchers are not prepared to go into the community.” Lack of community experience and cultural competency.

- Often partners expect community partners to be expert researchers and “we are not”
  - Community dynamics
  - Overextended community stakeholders
Collaborations with the community

- Capacity for interdisciplinary multilevel/diverse thought
- Principles and Values
- Capacity building – individual, organizational and cultural & contextual
- Engagement is community concerns/need driven, Assets/strengths focused
- Ownership and control of the process and outcomes
- Ongoing support and TA

Knowledge Translation

- Changes in services, practices & policies
- Knowledge utilization, Institutionalization, mainstreaming
- Sustainability
- Dissemination of practices that work
Conclusions

‣ Commit resources, time, and supports
‣ Engage in ongoing brainstorming to build learning climate and open communication
‣ Be accountable
‣ Check pulse
‣ Celebrate success
‣ Address challenges

It is not easy, it takes time, it is worth!
Resources