

# WORKING PAPER SERIES

## **BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS SECTORS: A RESOURCE TO HELP CREATE COMMUNITY AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS**

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**In Collaboration with:**

**Disabilities and Physical Differences Initiative  
Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women  
Intercede: For the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers  
and Newcomers  
North York Women's Centre  
Older Women's Network  
Women and Rural Economic Development  
Women and Substance Abuse**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This protocol is intended to be an introductory guide to help community and academic groups create and sustain successful research partnerships. Seventy-five community, academic and funding representatives from across Ontario were interviewed about their experiences with community and academic research projects. Interviews explored the conditions and strategies used by groups that enable research partnerships to either thrive or expire. By examining the structural and individual contexts within which collaborative understandings emerge, we provide greater insight into how social and cultural meanings of collaboration are constructed and thus help partnerships avoid many of the pitfalls that may lie in wait for them. *Building Bridges Across Sectors* is a protocol or resource guide designed to help community and academic research partnerships flourish. In the protocol, we identify key elements of research partner relationships, such as relationship building, clarity of process, roles and responsibilities, communication, resource planning, and research outcomes. These issues often threaten to derail partnerships. Each of these issues is discussed and recommendations are presented. Partners are urged to talk about these issues and figure out ways to resolve their differences so that successful research collaborations can emerge. An example of an actual agreement between academics and several community partners is included as a template.

**KEY WORDS:** Research Partnerships, Collaboration, Academic, Community, Protocol.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *How can you get partners to speak or partner across their many differences?*

Parties come to the table with vast differences in resources, goals, and backgrounds such as years of schooling, lack of experience, and ethno-cultural clashes and misunderstandings. Acknowledging these differences is key to developing harmonious partnerships (Dilmaghani, 2003).

### *Given these differences, is it possible for partnerships between academics and community groups to be equal?*

Developing equal partnerships is ideal; however, it might be more realistic to emphasize bringing balance to partnerships. Partnerships won't automatically eliminate discrepancies, but partners can achieve balance by acknowledging their differences and committing to working across them.

### *Do partners face competing loyalties?*

Absolutely! Partnering is like walking a tight rope. Whether it's an activist or academic group, partners have multiple responsibilities and many audiences to whom they are accountable.

### *Does the pressure to partner shape the relationship?*

External pressures to partner have created, what one academic researcher referred to as the "Hit and Run Academic" (Tyyskä, 2004), a situation in which little respect is given to the complexity or time involved in building relationships. Too often community groups feel bruised and demoralized, which can create barriers with their academic partners. These barriers can make academic partners feel isolated as 'outsiders,' and not accepted as part of the communities with whom they work. Misunderstandings may lead to "bad" research projects and outcomes.

### *Can all partnership problems be resolved?*

Having a good heart and good intentions won't solve all problems. Partners are advised to think about ways to mediate disputes when they occur - and they will occur!

### *Are partnerships risky?*

Partnerships are a lot like marriage contracts. You're not always totally satisfied, but you try to remain open to change. While far from ideal, if nothing works and the partnership is fraught with multiple problems, have an 'annulment' clause for those wishing to remove themselves from the project. Remember, always leave the backdoor unlocked!

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Establishing research partnerships between community and academic groups can be a difficult, yet rewarding, experience. Collaboration offers enormous potential for sharing information, pooling resources, training personnel, and strategizing for social change. But too often groups enter into collaborations with little understanding of the ways organizational demands, scarce resources, and time pressures shape the needs of different groups. What often starts off with good will and high expectations ends up collapsing under the weight of unresolved differences. Consider this comment by one of our community participants:

*You have to get the two groups together where neither has a power advantage. I think that is really imperative. You've got to have people involved that aren't on a power trip, that have and want to get to that same goal, to get that pure research, to not let their personalities dilute from that research.... It's hard, and it doesn't matter if the people are from grassroots or academics, people are people – we all have egos.*

There exist very few guidelines on how to handle the enormous differences in people's experiences, motivations, needs, and skills, all of which underlie collaborative efforts. This "how-to" guide assumes that differences in gender, race/ethnicity, class, region (urban versus rural), age, and dis/ability exist and that these differences can be ameliorated through negotiation. We attempt to make transparent that which has been ambiguous, namely, the process by which we can create successful research alliances among diverse groups of people.

## **BACKGROUND**

This protocol is based on an SSHRC-funded research project undertaken by principal investigator Nancy Mandell and seven community groups in Ontario: the Disabilities and Physical Differences Initiative; the Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women; Intercede: For the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers, and Newcomers; the North York Women's Centre; the Older Women's Network; Women and Rural Economic Development; and Women and Substance Abuse (see Appendix A). Between 1999 and 2002, information was gathered by four community researchers and six York University graduate students through a combination of individual interviews, phone interviews, focus groups and community meetings. In the end, we conducted a total of fifty-seven interviews: forty-seven with community members in Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; five with feminist academics who have worked extensively in research partnerships; and five with provincial and state funders whose mandates encouraged research partnering.

In lengthy face-to-face and phone interviews, researchers asked participants to tell them about the benefits and problems that they encounter in trying to establish partnerships. Participants answered questions about: the role of research in their organization; the goal of research partnering; their recent experiences with partnering; what worked in their partnerships and what did not work; strategies and mechanisms they used to ensure success; and the conditions under which strong collaboration could take place. Community researchers also held many individual meetings and focus groups with members of the seven community groups involved in designing and carrying out this research project with the goal of devising recommendations for successful community-academic research partnerships. Initial information gathered by researchers was disseminated to research participants and interested Ontario and Ottawa funders at a large meeting held at York University. Based on feedback from this meeting, a draft protocol was designed by York sociology graduate student Fiona Whittington-Walsh and presented at Ryerson University to a different group of community and academic researchers in the fall of 2003.

It is impossible to propose one protocol that fits every type of community-academic research partnership. Collaborations involve different situations and different relationships, meaning they need their own protocols. What we have produced here offers practical and useful guidelines. It is grounded in the experiences of community and academic researchers who have forged successful alliances among seemingly unlikely partners often across social, cultural, and economic differences. We thank all our participants for helping us create this protocol, and for helping research partners avoid many of the pitfalls that lie in wait.

## **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

*I don't think you have to be best friends or anything, but there has to be some kind of a connection there in order for it to work. Unless you get to see what a person's strengths and vulnerabilities are and see them as a human being, things they say make you want to put them into certain categories.*

As this academic reminds us, research projects involving community partners are often shaped by hierarchical structures which position the academic researcher as holding all decision-making power and as being the primary beneficiary of the research. Too often, community groups are seen as the “subjects” of the research; they are given little, if any, decision-making power, and feel they benefit little from either the research or its outcomes. This traditional model has created mistrust of both academics and the research process by community groups. Mistrust often can lead to conflict within a collaboration, which, in turn, reduces the quality of both the research and the ability to create social change.

Community partners say that their experiences with researchers and the traditional research process is similar to the relationship between patients and doctors. The researcher is consulted to provide a “skilled” opinion or “diagnosis,” with little emotional attachment

to the organization's practical outcomes or activist goals. As one community researcher comments:

*It would be fabulous if academic researchers became more involved. They have skill and expertise and they could benefit by seeing how useful their work can be.*

Similarly, academics proclaim that they feel like “outsiders” when working in conjunction with community groups. They say they never really feel part of the framework and never really feel accepted - just allowed limited “access”. Furthermore, academics often find it difficult to balance their relationships with other academics, policymakers, the public, and community groups. Due to the fact that traditional research models still permeate all areas of academic life, including what happens at the university level, community participation is seen as less “valid,” thereby placing enormous strain on researchers’ relationships within academia. Given all these tensions resulting from their differing social locations, one community researcher suggests that:

*What doesn't work is where there is a hierarchical structure in place. That can create problems around people not being acknowledged for what they have to offer.... Building a relationship from the beginning, as opposed to thinking it might develop during the process – it is really important to have it before you set out.*

## **Recommendations**

*There really has to be some strenuous effort and openness in order to recognize those kinds of obstacles to working together, and in order to arrive at a point when you can respect the other person. And respecting the other person is allowing them to show you who they are and what they are about, rather than making a preconceived judgment.*

As this community researcher acknowledges, not understanding the organizational pressures partners face may be interpreted as lack of respect. The most important ingredient to a successful community and academic partnership is building a positive, mutually-respectful, and trusting relationship with each other. Making sure that the partnership-building process receives appropriate time and attention helps foster an effective working relationship, which helps ensure that research goals are achieved. Building a partnership involves a lot of “emotional” work, including listening to each other and being mutually polite, courteous, and respectful. It is important to understand how the “other” works by spending additional time finding out why each partner is there, and what their underlying beliefs are about the project.

Some recommendations for building a positive relationship are:

- **Avoid hierarchical relationships** where one person takes control of the project. Having one person as the authority works against the “collective empowerment” of a true partnership;
- **Validate and support**, know and respect each other’s limitations, skills, and needs. This will help develop a trusting and fruitful partnership;
- **Be willing to share** one’s own knowledge as this will bring unique opportunities to **learn from others**;
- **Don’t be afraid to partner**. Academics need to remove their positions of “authority.” Community partners need to abandon feelings of inadequacy and fear of the research process in order for a true partnership to occur;
- **Commit** to the research partnership process. Acknowledge that each partner comes to the project with valid knowledge and expertise; and
- **Create an atmosphere of balance**. Ensure proportional representation within the physical makeup of the partnership.

As a community activist skilled in bringing alliances together suggests:

*If the community is sitting right there at the table, there’s a certain ownership from both parties and that’s very meaningful.... By doing this you break those myths that have happened between communities and universities. So, you are working very slowly at building those bridges that need to happen.*

## **CLARITY OF PROCESS**

*I hope that academics start to listen to communities and that communities start to drive research. My concern is in spending resources that have nothing to do with community development. Also, the community needs to be open to research. It’s a two-way street and it’s about building relationships.*

This funder emphasizes the importance of partners being clear about what they want out of research partnerships. Embarking on a research collaboration with community and academic membership requires sustained commitment to building strong and trusting relationships and sharing common visions and goals. The framework of traditional research

methods makes it extremely difficult to share not only the authority over a research project, but also research outcomes. If attention is not given to the nature of the research process, then power dynamics will take over the partnership, silencing one group, while simultaneously granting authority to another. Issues of power imbalances affect all areas of the partnership and limit research outcomes.

A variety of considerations and pressures have made some academics reluctant to form partnerships with community-based researchers. For example, very narrow notions of academic “productivity” determine promotions, tenure track positions, and publications. Competition for scarce resources in funding and grants, as well as the pressure to publish in peer-reviewed, academic journals, contribute to academics’ fear of sharing authority and authorship. Community activism and involvement are seldom seen as “valid” academic production, and therefore not valued within most academic settings. One academic researcher involved in a partnership with a community group states:

*I felt as though I was seen as not doing ‘valid’ research by my colleagues. It was as if they were in shock that I was actually out there in the community speaking and working with community members, rather than sitting inside theorizing social relations.*

In contrast, community members are often left out of the research process entirely, even though they are central to it. They believe that their removal from the process is a reflection of not only how the researcher sees their community and themselves, but it is also an indication of what the final product will look like. Therefore, the community wonders if the outcomes of the research project will be of any interest to their members and if participation in such collaborative research efforts will offer them any benefits. Such suspicion ultimately can create conflict, and may lead to the withdrawal of community research from participation and can foster a reluctance to allow further access. Commenting on this tension, a community researcher notes that:

*One academic stated [in a meeting] that what they were doing was pursuing ‘The Truth.’ The reaction from some of the community people who were there, you can imagine. The first question is ‘whose truth?’ and, your truth may not be of any benefit to us, or reflect our experience.*

## **Recommendations**

*I’m reluctant given the overuse of the word ‘partnership’ to use it very often. To me, a partnership isn’t a partnership unless each partner is equal and has equal decision-making ability.*

Community members, such as the one quoted above, remind us that partnership implies sharing. This means that we must make sure that the decision-making, ethical

considerations, research outcomes, positions of authority, risk taking, responsibilities, and accountability are all shared equally among partners. During the initial design stage for any collaborative research project, partners need to sit down as a collective and figure out projects goals and how the process should unfold. Having a well-organized, mutually-agreed-upon process will help reduce disagreements which might jeopardize the project later on. A collective agreement to share the work, risk, and products is absolutely necessary if a partnership is to work effectively. Academics who have forged successful partnerships, like the one quoted below, understand this reality:

*A commitment towards collaboration if you are really committed, means being open about power and really trying to recreate ways of relating because if we don't stop and be explicit and re-examine and recreate these things, we're going to replicate the status quo.*

Some important first steps, which should be decided upon and discussed openly as a collective, include the need to:

- **Acknowledge** everyone's skills and contributions;
- **Appreciate** each member's involvement. Create an environment where everyone feels as though their involvement and ideas are deemed important;
- **Identify** each member's own particular goals and interests for the project and for the research outcomes;
- **Ask:** Does the project **benefit** all partners?;
- **Be flexible** when determining the research goals. Put in place a process which will help ensure that the entire collective is accommodated. This will help the partnership to develop a shared vision and common goals;
- **Openly discuss 'power'** or lack of 'power';
- **Rectify** any possible triggers of conflict and discuss solutions including whether the collective wants to use a consensus discussion or an outside facilitator to help resolve conflict; and
- **Establish from the outset a partnership termination agreement.**

Spending extra time examining the social environment (day-to-day interactions) will be beneficial to the overall success of the research partnership and outcomes. Community members, like this one, understand the importance of investing time in emotional relationships:

*The most recent project I worked on worked really well, because I think some of the people who had the knowledge also had been involved in academic settings. So, it was more of a fusion and more of a merging of the two. And, I think it was done with a greater awareness of the participatory nature of the research.*

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

*What doesn't work is when there is not a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities at the outset. What doesn't work is when there is a hierarchical structure in place. That can also create some problems around people not being acknowledged for what they have to offer, because they are community members and might not have the letters or accreditation. And, not validating that lived experience.*

As the above quote from a community activist notes, one of the most crucial aspects of a successful community and academic partnership is the identification and distribution of roles and responsibilities. What is expected from each member? Who is to do which tasks? Are there both joint responsibilities for the project as well as individual responsibilities? When partners are unclear of their roles and responsibilities, as well as those of others, disputes can arise. By establishing, through a democratic process, the roles and responsibilities for each research partner, active participation by all can be achieved. This helps to create an uncomplicated collective, devoid of inconsistencies and disparities.

Many community members interviewed who had been involved with academic partnerships expressed disappointment with the roles to which they were “relegated,” frequently feeling as though they have been given mundane tasks while the academic partners receive all the prominent positions. Such a negative form of organization reinforces the myth that community members are not coming to the research project with any “valid” knowledge and skills. If community partners do not have an equal say in the distribution of roles and responsibilities, then the partnership has not successfully abandoned traditional models of research.

*Often partners didn't feel that their roles were either shared or equal within the project. It's that old way of looking at it, you know, the academic gets the money and the partner gets studied. Rather than it being an equal relationship, it's often a one-sided relationship. So there's a lack of shared responsibility.*

As this academic observes, for academic partners, sharing roles and responsibilities is just as difficult as sharing authority. An academic who engages in a community partnership must be committed both to an egalitarian methodology and to sharing positions and tasks through a democratic decision-making process. A strong belief in the knowledge

and skills that communities bring into the research process also is mandatory. If any of these ingredients are missing from the project, power discrepancies and controversies may arise, limiting both the quality of the experience as well as the project's outcomes.

## Recommendations

*Getting non-majority people to do the facilitating, so you don't create an environment that feels intimidating. I get like that myself, if I am around certain groups of people. I feel like I don't want to talk, even though I know I can, but I feel like.... I'm being judged. That comes from being relegated to a lower position in society. I think acknowledging that and designing meetings with this in mind is important.*

When difficulties of communication arise, as this community researcher suggests, outside facilitation may be required to resolve conflicts. Following through with the rules of conduct established in the "Clarity of Process" stage, partners should use the same democratic process for deciding upon roles and responsibilities. Here are some additional recommendations concerning matters that should be decided upon as a collective:

- Have an **equal representation** from both the community and academic partnership sitting around the meeting table;
- Have a **rotating chair position** to ensure that everyone has a chance to facilitate meetings. If a large project has two acting directors, they should be drawn from both the academic and the community members;
- Choose a **recorder** who will record and distribute the minutes of each meeting as well as a treasurer, who will report the financial information to the partnership;
- Meet on a **regular basis** to discuss and evaluate the progress of the project; and
- **Report back** to the partnership. This is crucial, especially if there are sub/groups or sub-committees.

One of the key components of a collaborative research process is the belief that the acquisition of knowledge and skills will be obtained and shared by all. Therefore, make sure that any research assistant positions are not just given to graduate and undergraduate students. Community members should also be involved, and subsequently trained, if needed, to help work alongside students. One of the community advocates who was interviewed spoke about the positive spin-offs from sharing responsibility:

*What I like is when a group comes together and people take on basic roles and jobs within the particular group that moves towards getting the work done so there is some accountability. But the sharing of work means there is a need to be sharing the power. Someone needs to take on a 'leadership' role, but it becomes a consensual leadership as opposed to an imposed one.*

## COMMUNICATION

*You may say the same phrase, but it has different meanings for different people and people have different perspectives. It is coming to a common understanding of what you really mean, and so that takes work and some reflection. And people aren't always willing. It hasn't really been a part of the process.*

One of the most important components for any successful relationship, as this community activist notes, is open, positive communication. Communication allows for the ongoing exchange of information and knowledge. How individual members communicate both formally and informally can have dramatic effects on both the overall partnership and the quality of research outcomes. Formal communication directly shapes the research process and progress, including disseminating information to the collective during meetings or to individuals, as well as writing progress reports. Informal communication is extremely important for sustaining relationships and keeping everyone feeling connected and valued. One-on-one conversations involving "checking-in" with each member helps everyone feel supported, validated, and respected.

Research partnerships involve the giving and receiving of great quantities of information. If there isn't a formal plan drawn up to disseminate this information, members can feel alienated and powerless, which will ultimately lead to mistrust. As this academic suggests, the jargon-filled, theoretical language of academia can be very intimidating and can create power inequities, which lead to an imbalance in research relationships:

*We are constantly in touch with our groups – they constantly ask us for help. It is not financial, but it is very much developmental. Our doors are always open as such, for them to call and say: 'What do you think about this? Would you like to look at my first copy? Can you come to a meeting? Can you brainstorm?' So I think having been in touch all the time is really the key that is really relevant.*

## Recommendations

*The most important thing for me was to listen and not interrupt people. Like being a good speaking or good listening partner. When I did disagree with what people were saying, to bring up the disagreement in such a way that it is not in a put-down mode.*

Make sure that your partners agree with how and when information will be disseminated. Taking extra time and care to make sure that every partner is comfortable and clear with the formal and informal means of communication helps ensure active participation by everyone. As this community researcher states:

*The way you make sure that everyone is heard and feels validated is to create a forum for that to happen. Even if you don't want to, and you think it's the same old thing, you still create the forum and let people speak what they need to speak, then have a solution-oriented attitude. How can we work through this, or how can we resolve this? If something is breaking down somewhere, you've got to deal with it.*

### As a collective, agree to:

- **Share** the responsibility for a communication strategy;
- **Disseminate information.** It is crucial to decide how this should be done, paying particular attention to issues of accessibility;
- **Discuss candidly** what information and how much information should be shared and with whom;
- **“Open door”** policies that encourage ongoing communication between partners;
- **Define** frequently utilized words or terms;
- **Allocate extra time** during meetings so information is thoroughly explained; and
- **Maintain a communication plan** following the end of a project.

**Tips for effective communication:**

- **Be clear and concise** when communicating;
- **Distribute information** to all members;
- **Do not use jargon-filled language**;
- **Use active listening skills**, such as making eye contact, nodding and appropriately acknowledging (and, therefore, validating) what others have to say;
- **Be accessible**. It is vitally important that information is transparent and accessible to all partners;
- **Use multiple communication systems**, including conference calls and augmentative communicative strategies for those with special needs. Pay close attention to anyone needing reading or hearing adaptation devices; and
- **Develop cross-cultural communication strategies**, which ensure active participation by all members.

**Avoid:**

- **Giving advice** unless directly asked;
- **Blaming** and patronizing individuals or groups;
- **Judging** people;
- **Using** unexplained acronyms;
- **Interrupting** speakers; and
- **Speaking for anyone** else unless directly asked to by that particular person.

**RESOURCE PLANNING**

*If partners are unable to commit to the project, this is usually a matter of time and resources. Often with small organizations, they simply don't have the ability, the resources, the time, or the money to be full participants in the partnership itself.*

As this funder notes, both community groups and universities are experiencing cut-backs and massive restructuring, which is having a negative effect not only on the allocation and distribution of money for research projects, but also on the amount of time participants have to invest in projects. Therefore, the planning and distribution of both human and financial resources are crucial issues that need to be discussed as part of the overall research planning process.

Academic time is tied up with teaching, writing, publishing, committee work, and involvement in research projects. Competition for scarce resources creates an individualistic and highly-competitive working environment which means that individual academics are under pressure to be involved in multiple projects at the same time. Similarly, community partners experience significant time constraints that limit their involvement in any one project. As one community interviewee states, it is just a “fact of life” that community groups are under-staffed and under-funded, which results in extremely overworked individuals who may not have any ‘extra’ time to attend meetings. Furthermore:

*If academics want to be successful in getting community people involved, they need to recognize that the time constraints that people are under are extreme.*

As in all relationships, the presence of money has the capacity to add mistrust and power to the overall harmony of a community-academic partnership. Lack of trust translates into tension and has the potential to destroy the relationship and jeopardize completion of the project. The one who receives the funds generally controls the research process and research agenda, in addition to controlling the decision-making process. Because most government-sponsored partnerships allocate funds directly to universities, community groups can be left with few, if any, financial resources, and often end up feeling powerless and unequal.

Academics and government researchers are financially compensated for their time in community-based research through their salaries. In contrast, community members are usually volunteers whose time and effort in research partnerships is often not remunerated. This financial contrast creates animosity, and may lead to partners withdrawing from projects unless differences are resolved. As one community researcher warns:

*One of the ways that money gets allocated in a research project is in a proposal. The community groups talk about it a lot. Don't go as academics and write your proposal, with all of your money allocated, with all of your design, and then come to us after the fact and say, 'Now will you be a partner?'*

## Recommendations

*If you are going to have community groups work, they are going to need the resources to do it. They don't inherently have the resources because they are already strapped for resources.*

This community activist reminds us that community groups normally operate with very limited resources. It is important to remove any element of authority or power that often goes to the group who manages the money. Make sure that all issues related to human and financial resources are discussed and agreed upon democratically. Issues in this regard include:

- **All budgetary decisions**, including writing the budget proposal, must be jointly decided;
- **All costs**. Who will pay for what or whom? Work out *all* the costs the project might encounter;
- **Account** for every expense. In some instances, over-budget to make sure that if the project runs longer than initially thought (and such things do happen!) you will not run out of money;
- **Decide** who will have signing authority;
- **Compensate** participants for their expenses. Some community members may have to be compensated for expenses, such as babysitting and travel, if they are not getting paid above their community wage;
- **Do not miss deadlines**. Make sure everyone is aware of the penalties for missing deadlines, which, in some circumstances, can have financial consequences;
- **Inform members** regularly of budget expenditures;
- **Account** for partner's needs so they are compensated for their time and work;
- **Assign a coordinator**. In some cases, it is beneficial to have one person who can dedicate a significant amount of time to coordinating the project;
- **Remember diverse priorities and time**. Pay attention to the fact that community partners have significantly different time constraints and priorities than do their academic partners; and

- **Ensure accessibility.** Where should meetings take place? For some community members, meeting at the university or research centre is intimidating, resulting in poor attendance or emotional withdrawal from the project. Make sure the physical space accommodates the needs of all partners.

## RESEARCH OUTCOMES

*I think in the past sometimes academic researchers have benefited, because they get to publish papers and present at conferences so in that sense it increases their knowledge and their awareness. Does the community develop? Does it go back to the community and do they see any rewards from it?*

Perhaps, as this community researcher notes, one of the most difficult areas to resolve in any kind of partnership is the question of who writes the report and who benefits from the project. The contrast between academic work, which emphasizes the production of narrowly defined “scholarly work,” and community-based activism, which is driven by practical needs for social change, leads to difficulties when trying to decide on the purpose and outcome of collaborative research. Ownership of the research, as well as agreeing on how knowledge will be produced, remain critical issues that need to be jointly addressed. If these issues are not openly discussed and collectively agreed upon, hostility may result and the partnership may disintegrate. As this academic researcher points out, authorship and ownership are important issues:

*It's not so much in terms of who controls the data, but who claims to be an authority on it, and who claims to have done all the work, who claims the credit for the work. I think it is the credit for the work that is the big issue.*

## Recommendations

*We did have one negative experience with a researcher coming in and wanting to join one of our groups and it was about research and designing a particular study. And this academic came in, took the information and presented it at a conference and published it without telling us. As far as we are concerned, we would never pretend to be the researcher, but we would want our name on the research as a participant, along with the knowledge that we contributed to the design and the progress, and the whole deal.*

This community researcher reminds us that research partners should never lose sight of the collective nature of their work. Partnerships succeed when members are respectful,

open, and straightforward about the different types of skills and knowledge members bring to a project. As with all the other themes found within this document, all of these recommendations need to be openly discussed and agreed upon at the beginning of the research collaboration.

As a collective, create an authorship/ownership policy that will:

- Decide about the **ownership** and use of data;
- **Bring satisfaction.** Discuss ways to make sure that both community and academic partners are satisfied with the outcomes;
- **Acknowledge contributions.** Develop a plan for recognizing different forms of contributions by research partners;
- **Confer recognition.** Decide whether partners want individual or institutional/organizational and/or private or public recognition for their work;
- **Share ownership.** It is vital to make sure that everyone has a sense of ownership of the project; and
- **Create joint authorship.** Develop a way in which members can participate in joint authorship of publications, conference presentations, media briefings, and public documents.

**Make sure to:**

- **Be open** about your plans about research products and be open about any grievances that may arise along the way;
- **Discuss and decide** whose names will appear on every written document; and
- **Put in place post-research support** for partners. Create a mechanism to follow through with a project evaluation tool once the project has ended. Were all the research goals achieved? Was the partnership effective?

All of these initiatives are extensions of an equitable partnership and further demonstrate the importance of bridging the gaps between academia and community groups. Partnerships only work, says this community researcher, if:

*All parties have to feel that they are getting something out of it, that it is not purely altruistic, or that it is not purely that they want to take something and run. Everyone has to feel that they are getting something out of it, and that that something is valuable to them. I think that is the basic stance or reality that everyone needs to feel in order for it to work. And then a lot of discussion.*

## APPENDIX A: Description of Community Partners

**Disabilities and Physical Differences Initiative** was established in 1996 as a partnership project between the Regional Women's Health Centre, Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre, and AboutFace International, a community-based organization providing services to persons with facial differences. The focus of the project is to examine everyday experiences related to appearance and ability of women with facial and physical differences and/or disabilities. Through activities such as outreach, needs assessments, workshops, and health provider training, the Initiative works to remove systematic barriers encountered by women with differences and disabilities in their institutional and interpersonal interactions.

**Elsbeth Heyworth Centre for Women**, founded in 1992, offers educational, guidance, counseling and skills development services to women residing in North York confronting problems of racism, immigration, domestic violence, and cultural and linguistic problems arising out of being visible minority women in a multicultural society. The Centre has arranged English classes for immigrant women, workshops to enhance women's self-esteem, human rights seminars on preserving basic legal and cultural rights, settlement services for newcomers and assistance for basic needs of seniors. Centre materials are distributed citywide in Hindi, English, Punjabi, Urdu, and certain other South Asian languages.

**Intercede: For the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers and Newcomers** was founded in 1979 as a community-based, non-profit organization to provide assistance and to advocate for improvements in immigration, employment and other policies for domestic workers. Servicing mostly the Filipino and Caribbean community in Toronto, Intercede offers advice and assistance to new immigrants on job search, employment, education, career planning, housing, health issues, community resources, family reunification, family violence, and diploma accreditation. Intercede receives annually about 4,500 calls and appointments about these issues.

**North York Women's Centre** is a community-based non-profit agency that has been providing support services to women since 1988. Feminism, anti-racism and social justice are core values of the Centre. Answering over 3,000 calls a year, the Centre offers information and referral services, a legal clinic and support group courses and workshops addressing the well-being of women in the community. The Centre offers a safe, supportive place where women can voice their concerns, share experiences, learn skills, gain information and work with other women.

**Older Women's Network** was originally started by a group of women in 1988. OWN has over 400 members organized in chapters in Toronto, Hamilton and Peterborough. OWN is a community group focused on abuse, pensions, family law, health care, health, housing, mobility, women in power and decision-making, poverty, employment, education and training. It provides information, public discussion, exchange, education, research and advocacy on issues relating to justice and security for older women.

**Women and Rural Economic Development (WRED)** was a federally incorporated, non-profit community economic development organization dedicated to enhancing the sustainability of rural Ontario communities. With a central office in Stratford and sub-offices in Markdale, Lindsay and Kemptonville, WRED ensured women's participation by sustaining local capacity and offering rural perspectives on contemporary socio-economic problems. WRED provided a wide range of programs that enhanced business development, life skills, networking, access to capital, business diversification including agriculture, and awareness of rural community economic development. Due to lack of funding, WRED disbanded in 2003.

**Women and Substance Abuse (WASA)** represented a community of women dealing with a lifetime of substance abuse as well as family and partner violence. Its mandate was to provide educational, counseling and research on the extent to which violence, substance abuse and social alienation have acted as barriers to women's social mobility. WASA used women's knowledge and skills around recovery to find solutions for local and regional educational, health and financial problems which women encounter. Originating in 1994 in New Brunswick, WASA opened a branch at the Donwood Treatment Centre, Toronto, Ontario in 1998. Due to limited funding, WASA disbanded in 1999.

**APPENDIX B: Sample Protocol: An example of a protocol that was developed in support of a collaborative research project**

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FOR SEAC  
Between  
The School of Women's Studies, York University  
and  
Disabilities and Physical Differences Initiative  
Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women  
Intercede: For the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers and Newcomers  
North York Women's Centre  
Older Women's Network  
Women and Rural Economic Development  
Women and Substance Abuse

**I PROJECT SUMMARY**

The SEAC Project (Social and Economic Advancement for Communities: Promoting Equity for Women through Partnerships) will build a research and development bridge between women's groups and academic theorists. Their collaboration will lead to developing an historical record of effective strategies used by women's groups as they organize for social change.

The project will provide a multidimensional analysis of women's organizing, exploring the ways race, ethnicity, class, region (urban versus rural), age, and disability intersect with gender in shaping community action.

**II CORE VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Our vision is that all people, regardless of differences, participate fully in their communities and fulfill their potential. All participants contribute to development, planning, and decision-making.

Our goal is to build connections across different sectors from which new ideas and structures can emerge. We want to foster effective women's organizing by creating real and immediate change in the groups and people who participate.

Values central to the project include:

- respect for diversity and differences;
- maintaining equitable relationships; and
- working toward social change.

### **III OBJECTIVES**

The following are SEAC's objectives:

1. strengthen the research capacities of both community and academic groups through research, data gathering, training, and publishing;
2. analyze factors that help and hinder women's economic and social advancement in order to improve the lives of marginalized women;
3. Develop evaluation techniques that will measure the capacity of community groups to implement effective social and economic change;
4. Provide an opportunity for research partners to discuss community and academic research methods;
5. Create and disseminate social policy;
6. Create a local partnership resource centre;
7. Offer an annual graduate course on academic/community partnership;
8. Train graduate students through placements and internships; and
9. Publish books, working papers, conference papers.

### **IV BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP**

#### **For community groups:**

1. Build across racial and class differences by forging alliances and thus learning new methods of organizing and fostering change;
2. Examine processes of community organizing, distinguishing effective from non-effective strategies;
3. Assess community capacity-building and the ways it can be strengthened through; information sharing and pooling of resources;
4. Assess participants' needs through data gathering and training of community researchers;
5. Analyze particular social problems in-depth; and
6. Create useful social policy.

#### **For academics:**

1. Engage as "activists researchers;"
2. Create new understandings of the intersection of gender, race, and class;
3. Advance feminist theories;
4. Test and apply research methods, such as conversation-research, participatory action research, collaborative analysis and writing;
5. Analyze particular social problems in-depth; and
6. Create social policies.

## V PARTNERS' NEEDS

(1) *York University:*

- research on marginal community women's organizing for change;
- leverage academic and community resources to create new knowledge; and
- transfer and include research skills and resources to community activists

(2) *Disabilities and Physical Differences Initiative:*

- research expertise and support from the university;
- financial support for research to pay for time, software, research assistants;
- access to supportive feminist network/community; and
- support for community researchers in developing theory, disseminating findings, and making policy/practice recommendations

(3) *Elsbeth Heyworth Centre for Women:*

- research and action programs to resolve parent-child conflicts over cultural values occurring in immigrant families;
- help in preparing education and training programs such as bridging and skills development courses for mid-life women to help them move from dependence on their families to economic independence; and
- research that will help impact government policies.

(4) *Intercede: For the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers and Newcomers:*

- research on racism and language barriers faced by immigrant women;
- research in three key areas – immigrant youth, immigrant seniors, and policy changes for domestic women;

(5) *North York Women's Centre:*

- access to information on funding sources;
- research on accountability measures, especially the criteria used in evaluating women's centres across the province; and
- working towards introducing Social Justice Policy into accountability procedures.

(6) *Older Women's Network (OWN):*

- help in effectively communicating OWN's concerns to policy makers;
- research on how to improve quality of life for older women; and
- research on how to overcome differences and power imbalances among women.

(7) *Women and Rural Economic Development (WRED):*

- research on the impact of government policies on women's economic development
- research to back up demands;
- help in evaluation of projects; and
- access to data on gender and development.

(8) *Women and Substance Abuse (WASA):*

- improvement in communication and information;
- access to email and to information about educational and training programs; and
- research on harm reduction.

## **VI PARTNERS' ROLES**

a. Academic partners have a role in:

- developing and overseeing particular research projects;
- synthesizing information from individual research projects into more general understanding at the alliance table;
- advancing research ideas in the community; and
- furthering new ways of gathering and disseminating information as activists/researchers in the university.

b. Community partners have a role in:

- decision making, sharing of resources, and allocation of funds at the alliance table;
- providing direction for individual research projects and synthesizing common elements of research;
- facilitating access to data, setting up concrete action such as participants for interviews, obtaining consent forms, and so on;
- identifying relationships to other groups, monitoring the process of partnership operation, and developing common tools; and
- bringing back to academics knowledge about community life.

## **VII COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

### **A. Internal Communication Plan**

The decision-making structure will consist of the advisory board composed of two directors (the academic director and the community director), the executive directors of the seven participating community groups, the seven academic/community liaison people, and the seven York academic faculty, for a total of twenty-three members. The board will meet on a regular basis (monthly) at the alliance table to discuss and evaluate the project's listserve. SEAC will hire a Professional Coordinator and an Administrative Assistant, who will manage, coordinate, and direct this project.

Each member of the alliance will be fully informed about the development, progress, and conditions of individual research projects and individual partnerships formed within the alliance. Academic and community researchers, as well as graduate students assigned to individual projects, will be responsible for communicating this information to the alliance.

### **B. Decision Making**

All decisions concerning the process of partnership formation, principles of cooperation, ethical standards, sharing of resources, and the role of particular members will be made equitably and collegially at the alliance table, to the satisfaction of all participating partners, where possible, using the principles of consensus building. Should consensus not be reached, a vote (under the principle of one board member/one vote) will be taken.

In the first stage of research, issues of design, collection, and interpretation of data, ownership and dissemination of research findings/data will be negotiated among participants in individual research projects undertaken within the alliance.

### **C. Mediation/Conflict**

We agree that the partnership is built upon trust and respect, with clear communication. Problems/conflicts will be negotiated with openness and in the spirit of compromise. Complaints or issues of concern will be taken back to the alliance table and discussed by the board members. If necessary, the board members may be requested to vote on the resolution of a specific issue.

## APPENDIX C: HELPFUL HINTS

### Do:

- avoid hierarchical relationships;
- validate and support all partners;
- acknowledge the knowledge and expertise of each partner;
- have equitable contributions from partners;
- clarify research outcomes;
- discuss openly issues of power discrepancies that may exist within the partnership;
- be flexible;
- identify challenges;
- have a conflict strategy;
- make sure there is a partnership termination agreement;
- have equal representative from both community and academic members;
- establish roles and responsibilities in a collective way
- rotate chairs at meetings;
- meet on a regular basis;
- devise communication strategies;
- decide on the best ways to disseminate information;
- have a clear and ongoing communication plan;
- be clear and concise;
- use positive, active listening skills;
- make sure information is accessible;
- decide all budgetary issues as a collective;
- over-budget so you will not run out of money;
- decide who has signing authority;
- pay attention to different time constraints and priorities;
- make sure the physical space is accessible to everyone's needs;
- decide about the ownership and use of data;
- develop a plan for acknowledging different types of contributions by all research partners;
- make sure there is "post-support;" and
- create evaluation tools.

### Don't:

- use jargon;
- give advice unless asked;
- blame and be patronizing;
- judge people;
- interrupt or speak for anyone else unless asked to do so;
- have a hidden agenda.

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## **CERIS**

**The Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement - Toronto (CERIS) is one of five Canadian Metropolis centres dedicated to ensuring that scientific expertise contributes to the improvement of migration and diversity policy.**

**CERIS is a collaboration of Ryerson University, York University, and the University of Toronto, as well as the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the United Way of Greater Toronto, and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.**

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## **The Metropolis Project**

**Launched in 1996, the Metropolis Project strives to improve policies for managing migration and diversity by focusing scholarly attention on critical issues. All project initiatives involve policymakers, researchers, and members of non-governmental organizations.**

**Metropolis Project goals are to:**

- **Enhance academic research capacity;**
- **Focus academic research on critical policy issues and policy options;**
- **Develop ways to facilitate the use of research in decision-making.**

**The Canadian and international components of the Metropolis Project encourage and facilitate communication between interested stakeholders at the annual national and international conferences and at topical workshops, seminars, and roundtables organized by project members.**

**For more information about the Metropolis Project  
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