Community-University Boundary Spanners

June 6, 2014
CU Boulder

A FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING, QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT STAFF

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Engagement Scholarship consortium
Committed to excellence in the scholarship and practice of engagement locally and globally
Who We Are

- Katherine Loving, MSSW, works in the Prevention Services Division of University Health Services to address civic engagement as a public health issue. With campus and community partners, she builds UW-Madison’s capacity to offer high-quality opportunities for students to develop and apply attitudes and aptitudes for effective, engaged citizenship, and supports institutional effectiveness and alignment in the practice of public engagement. She founded UW-Madison’s Community Partnerships and Outreach (CPO) Staff Network and the Outreach and Engagement Staff Workshop of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium. *(Engagement Goddess)*

- Susan B. Harden, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Education at UNC Charlotte and the Coordinator for the Civic Minor in Urban Youth and Communities. She is an original member of the Outreach and Engagement Staff Workshop of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium and founding member of the planning and content committee serving as chair in 2012 and 2013. *(Engagement Queen)*
Katherine - The Accidental Boundary Spanner

- What happened to my career?
- When will someone tell me what I’m supposed to do?
- How do I explain my job?
- What am I good at?
- Where is everybody?
- When will they discover I’m an impostor?
Susan – The Artistic Boundary Spanner

- What do I want my job to be today?
- What rules?
- Who are my partners?
- What is my career path?
The Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC), a 501 (c) (3) non-profit educational organization, is composed of higher education member institutions, a mix of state-public and private institutions. Our goal is to work collaboratively to build strong university-community partnerships anchored in the rigor of scholarship, and designed to help build community capacity.

http://engagementscholarship.org/
Today’s Learning Goals

1. Identify and articulate your distinct roles, skills and values;
2. Strategize around leveraging opportunities and minimizing the challenges inherent in the boundary-spanning role;
3. Identify professional development needs and set priorities; and
4. Review and apply community-of-practice theory and principles as a strategy for strengthening outreach and engagement practice

Workshop pedagogy involves reflection, engagement with peers, and insight as mechanisms for learning.
Agenda review

- Engaged campus trends
- Boundary spanning roles, functions, skills and values
- Professional identity
- Common challenges & opportunities
- Addressing practice issues
- Campus organizing for professional development, support and advocacy

- Break at 10; Lunch at Noon; Break at 2:30
- Give yourself a gift today
Collaboration Collision, part 1

1) Find a conversation partner you don’t already know well.

2) Spend 10 minutes getting to know each other and designing a collaborative project that you could collaborate on (in reality or in an ideal world).

- Be intentional about communicating “who you are” as a professional (values, approaches, world views, strengths).
- Look beyond “good ideas” - toward who this person is that you are collaborating with.
1) With your partner, find another pair. Spend 15 minutes getting to know each other and designing a collaborative project on which all four of you could collaborate.

2) Briefly report out your project, or what you learned about yourselves in this process.

- How hard/easy was it to do this activity and why?
- What did you have in common with others?
1) **Definition**

“The ways faculty, staff and students collaborate with external groups in mutually beneficial partnerships that are grounded in scholarship and consistent with our role and mission as a comprehensive public research university.”

*(CU Boulder Office of University Outreach)*

“Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.”

*(Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)*

2) **Entry points**

3) **Trends**
Entry points to community-university engagement

1) Professional education (content focus)
2) Service-learning & engaged pedagogies (student focus)
3) Institution outreach & community engagement (non-student focus)
4) Research & scholarship (faculty focus)
5) Diversity & inclusivity (internal focus)
6) Extension (external focus)
7) External/state relations (communications focus)

What are the entry points at CU Boulder?
Trends in community-university engagement

1) Outreach vs. engagement

2) Metrics, measurement & evaluation
   - Community impact
   - Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

3) Faculty roles & rewards
   - Community-engaged research

4) Renewal of civic mission
   - Student civic learning

5) Institutionalization (Serving Colorado, Engaged in the World)

6) Staff roles
What are the trends at CU Boulder?

How critical are staff to the successful attainment of engagement goals?
Reflection

Develop an analogy or metaphor to describe your relationship to the university. Create a 3-D sculpture that represents that relationship.
Boundary spanning
Naming the work

teacher, facilitator, convener, translator, communication channel, clearinghouse, catalyst, keeps things on course/moving in common direction, maintains trust of group/trusting relationships, surrogate (the outcome belongs to someone else, not you), agitator of system to fight inertia, has strategic foresight/anticipates opportunity, advocate, ensures sustainability by getting others to take responsibility, mediator/ conflict resolver, interpreter, “idea” person

(2007 NOSC, Sandmann & Weerts workshop)
Figure 1: University-community engagement boundary spanning roles at public research universities (Weerts & Sandmann, 2007)

- **Community-based problem solver**
  - Focus on site based problem support, resource acquisition, partnership development
  - *Field agents, outreach staff, clinical faculty*

- **Community focused**
  - *Engagement champion*
  - Focus on building external, political, intra-organizational support, roles may be symbolic
  - *Presidents, Vice Presidents for Engagement, Center Directors, Deans*

- **Technical, practical tasks**
  - Emphasis on knowledge creation for applied purposes (disciplinary or multidisciplinary)
  - *Faculty, disciplinary based*

- **Institutionally focused**
  - *Technical expert*

- **Socio-emotional, leadership tasks**
  - Build campus capacity for engagement (rewards, promotion, tenure, budget, hiring)
  - *Provosts, academic deans*

- **Internal engagement advocate**
How did we get here?

The emergence of a professional identity
- National Outreach Scholarship Conference (now the Engagement Scholarship Consortium conference) 2007
- Formation of the Community Partnerships and Outreach (CPO) Staff Network at UW-Madison

The creation of professional development opportunities
- Establishing a preconference at NOSC/ESC conference (Outreach & Engagement Staff Workshop)

The formation of a national community of practice
- Spoke Network listserv
- NOSC/ESC conference gatherings
Who are we?: What we want to say…

Superheroes of the Outreach World

You know you’re an outreach & engagement superhero when…

- You are a community crusader and your alter ego is on the university payroll,
- You spin webs connecting university resources with community needs,
- You leap institutional barriers to effective engagement in a single bound,
- Your special powers in facilitating diverse partnerships go unrecognized,
- You can decode university-speak and are fluent in community voice, and
- You have saved the day—and repaired key relationships—on more than one occasion!
Who are we?: What we actually say…

The Outreach and Engagement Staff Workshop is designed for university staff and non-tenure-track faculty members who, in roles distinct from those of tenure-track faculty, facilitate and manage [and administrate?] ongoing projects, programs, services, research and relationships with community partners.
An emerging professional identity

1) Deserving of support, recognition & customized professional development
2) Similar roles, functions & status in the university structure
3) Shared skills and values
4) Common challenges and strengths
1) Deserving of support

- The work of engagement is typically led by boundary spanners in academic staff positions rather than tenure-track faculty (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008).

- Community partners evaluate the effectiveness of institutional engagement through their relationship with boundary spanners (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008).

- Multiple boundary spanning roles must be aligned and work in harmony for engagement to work effectively (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

- Institutional commitment to outreach and engagement was associated with increased levels of state appropriations for public research universities during the 1990s (Weerts & Ronca, 2006).
2) Similar roles, functions & status

Spanning multiple boundaries:
- University ↔ Community
- Faculty ↔ Staff
- Content expertise ↔ Engagement expertise
- Research ↔ Practice
- Individual ↔ Collective
- Positional power ↔ Functional power
- Quantitative ↔ Qualitative
- Positivism ↔ Constructivism
2) Similar roles, functions & status

Examples of boundary-spanning roles:

- Facilitator and convener
- Broker and mediator
- Translator, interpreter and diplomat
- Catalyst and surrogate
- Shepherd
- Community organizer and capacity builder
- Networker, connector and cultivator
- Clearinghouse and communication hub
- Advocate of system change
- Entrepreneur and innovator
3) Shared **skills** & values

**The 10 “–ates”:**

1) **Relate:** Bring people together, understand common interests
2) **Cultivate:** Build capacity, prepare environment, develop leadership, build infrastructure
3) **Innovate:** Create new solutions, develop new approaches
4) **Collaborate:** Structure partnerships, create inclusive environments, maintain relationships
5) **Facilitate:** Lead and design processes, advance initiatives
6) **Evaluate:** Document, describe, improve
7) **Communicate:** Understand, share, exchange
8) **Educate:** Learn, apply, disseminate
9) **Advocate:** Change systems, acquire resources, protect partnerships
10) **Administrate:** Demonstrate accountability, manage resources
Does the model fit?

Turn to someone at your table and discuss:
1) What about the roles, functions & skills resonates for you?
2) Does your work fit into this model?
3) How is it useful for you?
4) What gaps need to be explored?
3) Shared skills & values

Values, principles, standards, ethics, best practices…PLEASE?
3) Shared skills & values

- What are the partnership values or principles at CU Boulder?
- What are the points of tension between what the institution says and what it does?
- Do you have a stake and/or a role in shaping the values/principles that are advanced?
  - If so, how might you go about it?
  - Who might you engage?
Articulating our professional identities

- Elevator speech
4) Common challenges & strengths

Where do you stand?

Position yourself along the continuum.
Review boundary-spanning tensions

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4) Common challenges & strengths: Examples

1) Professional identity
   - Diverse professional backgrounds and broad, generalist skill sets
   - Yet, our roles and work may be overlooked, undervalued, or misunderstood

2) Creating, building and sustaining new programs and projects
   - Freedom to innovate and try new ideas, practices
   - Yet, surrogate role means that credit for successes goes to others or to the collaborative, but it may be politically prudent to individually take responsibility for failures

3) Measuring progress and success
   - We are highly adaptable to changing and emerging conditions,
   - Yet, the work is difficult to measure, traditional evaluation tools may not fit, and we may struggle to show progress.

4) Collaboration
   - Practitioners facilitate effective collaborations that can produce excellent solutions
   - Yet, playing a surrogate role means credit for success goes to others.

5) Leadership and accountability
   - We excel in roles with functional leadership
   - Yet we may not be the person with positional power
Identifying our specific practice challenges

- At your tables, generate a list of at least 5 recurring practice challenges that you encounter in your community-university partnership work
- Write one challenge per sticky note, and post them on the wall
Break!
Communities of Practice: Implementing a Framework for Supporting Engagement Practitioners
In the past three decades, American higher education has expanded commitments to serving the public good (Chambers, 2005; Jacoby, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

Much of the conversation has centered on the institutionalization of community-engagement (Battistoni & Longo, 2011).

As a result of this call for a deeper commitment to the public good, there has been an increase in the number of the academic staff and non-tenure-track faculty members recently hired to facilitate community-university partnerships (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012).

However, research institutions have been lagging their private college and public community liberal arts college and university counterparts in commitments to community engagement (Stanton, 2007).

The complexity and decentralized nature of research universities contribute to uneven resource allocations of engagement resources and therefore “despite strategic steps taken by institutional leaders to advance engagement at research institutions, the level of implementation on these campuses is likely to vary considerably across units” (Weerts & Sandman, 2010, p. 703).

Consequently, community engagement practitioners at research institutions work in isolation in unique roles compared to their co-workers, often in new and innovative positions.
Engagement Staff: Invisible in Engagement Literature

- While recent research is rich regarding the impact of civic or community engagement initiatives on students (Jacoby, 2009) and faculty (Boyte and Fretz, 2011; Presley, 2011; O’Meara, 2011), the implications of the expansion of the engagement mission on staff is less known (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012).

What is known about outreach and engagement staff roles relies on relatively small samples and case studies. Still, these findings indicate that staff play critical roles in advancing community engagement on their campuses.
As described by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), communities of practice are “groups of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p.4).
Reflection

What infrastructure exists at CU Boulder to support your engagement practice?
Three Elements of Communities of Practice

1. Domain of Knowledge
2. Social Experience
3. Learning: a shared practice that makes work within the domain more effective and efficient.
Communities of practice help to create a sense of belonging, encourage a spirit of inquiry, and instill confidence.

“communities of practice are a natural part of organizational life. They will develop on their own and many will flourish, whether or not the organization recognizes them” (p. 12).

Learn to harness and leverage the desire for community.
Possible Activities for CoP

- Problem Solving
- Information Gathering
- Seeking expertise in a specific situation
- Sharing materials or resources
- Improving / creating institutional processes
- Discussing trends
- Documenting projects or impacts
- Identifying overlaps or gaps (partnership mapping)
Figure 1.
Community Partnerships and Outreach (CPO) Staff Network
Purpose & Structure

Achieve Vertical Alignment
Structures & policies
Leadership
Planning & decision making
Communication
Responsiveness to communities

Facilitate Horizontal Connections
Collaboration & innovation
Resource & information sharing
Learning & professional development
Technical assistance & problem solving
Evidence-based and emerging practices
Case study: UW-Madison
Community Partnerships and Outreach Staff Network
 Goals of the UW-Madison CoP

- facilitate communication and collaboration,
- share information and resources,
- improve the quality of outreach and engagement staff’s work,
- support professional development,
- improve the ability of the campus to meet community needs,
- advocate for campus decisions and policies that support partnerships and outreach work.
UW-Madison: The context

- At the large public research universities outreach and community engagement staff work in relative isolation from other engagement colleagues, in decentralized institutions where operations are primarily unit and discipline based.
- Administrative mechanisms do not exist for horizontal, cross-campus connections, resource sharing, or even communication that would benefit practitioners performing similar roles and functions on behalf of their home units.
- Informally connecting with other outreach and engagement is challenging. While some of these staff members do hold titles that indicate their outreach and community engagement responsibilities, many do not, and as such are not easily identified.
Common Set of Challenges and Opportunities

- professional identity and isolation
- the power of innovation
- the burden of bureaucracy
- the challenge of measuring and describing progress and success
- the risks and benefits of collaboration
- functional leadership versus positional power.
Nuts and Bolts

Meeting frequency?
- Monthly on topics; annual PD workshop

Core leadership?
- Leader and 8 person steering committee

Programming?
- Occasional campus-wide promotion and programming

Communication
- Listserv, email, and in-person.

Outcomes – response of administration? Any vertical influence?
- Have achieved some measure of vertical integration/leverage, and now returning to strengthen our base of members/stakeholders to ensure we are advocating for agreed-upon conditions

Budget?
- Plan for multi-unit, cross-campus funding, but to date have not achieved. Majority of support coming from 1 campus unit.
Organizing?

Get into your quads from the collaboration collision. Identify 3 to 4 responses for:

- The cost of maintaining the status quo?
- The benefit of maintaining the status quo?
- The cost of organizing as a distinct group of outreach and engagement professionals?
- The benefit of organizing as a distinct group of professionals?

Is the value from professional community > status quo?
Leveraging CU Boulder Resources

What can the Office of University Outreach do to address challenges and opportunities?

- Formal professional development
- Informal socializing
- Strengthening relationships with partners
- Funding / Grants
- Vertical support (advocacy)
- Evaluation / Reporting / Telling the Stories
- Coordinate
References


