Continuous connection, flexibility and formality: Lessons of community-academic partnership

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• Community-academic partnership

• Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning

• Latinos in a Network for Cancer Control

• Methods

• Results

• Discussion

• Conclusions
Community-Campus Collaboration

• Effective health promotion practice requires a commitment to developing and disseminating evidence-based programs (EBP) (Grimshaw, Eccles, & Tetroe, 2004).

• Community engagement in this work is necessary to ensure research is relevant to real-life practice environments and to create networks for studying and disseminating emerging EBP efforts.
The Case

Latinos in a Network for Cancer Control (LINCC)

- LINCC was established in 2002
- LINCC represents over 130 individuals from 65 organizations in academic and community settings.
- Funded by the US Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI)
- LINCC is a part of the National Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network (CPCRN)
- LINCC has expanded its work by incorporating the activities of another community-network research initiative, the National Cancer Institute’s Community Network Program (CNP).
Methods

Research Design

• The study followed participatory evaluation and action research approaches which are distinctive in their involvement of stakeholders and in the intention to improve practice as well as study it (Green & Thorogood, 2009)
Methods

Data Collection

- 19 in-depth interviews
  - September 2012 and January 2013
  - Semi-structured interviews including a mix of open-ended questions and more guided questions addressing the major elements of the theoretical frame

Data Analysis

- Transcripts were examined to identify themes
- Theme categories were refined
- Quotes supporting and negating themes were classified and coded
Results

Continuous connection

- Long-term network, engaged partners
  - You're talking on the phone and you're e-mailing all of the time and you're sharing resources. So then you become great partners and friends in the process. For example with this (one project), I participated, working closely with (LINCC partner) on that. But then I branch out and I work with the national group. So, again, you bring together people with common interests and you just get to know them. It's ongoing work... It becomes very meaningful. It's a meaningful relationship.
Results

Flexibility

• Leadership
• Creative Funding
• Mission
  • *We do some tangible things that anybody can get their brain around, which is good when you’re working with communities. Research is a little less tangible. How long do we have to study before we get an outcome? So we have a mix of things. There’s the more obvious and demonstrated kinds of interventions and then there’s our longer term... It can live through the length of time it takes to do that kind of research because we’re doing a mix of things.*
Results

Formality/informality

• LINCC had a rather informal structure according to the study participants, including loosely defined roles, intermittent communication and multiple missions.

• This allowed the network to be flexible in some important ways—incorporating new funding streams and including many diverse partners, for instance.

• Partners
  • I think that there were times when I did not feel that I had a clear role; I wasn’t quite sure what my role was supposed to be, which may have made me less involved than I might have been.
Discussion

- **INPUT**
  - PARTNER RESOURCES
  - THE MISSION
  - FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- **THROUGHPUT**
  - PARTNERSHIP CONTEXT
    - Leadership
  - MAINTENANCE TASKS
  - PRODUCTION TASKS
    - Roles/structure

- **OUTPUT**
  - ADDITIVE RESULTS
  - SYNERGY
  - ANTAGONISTIC RESULTS

**Tasks**
- **Input interaction**
- **Communication**

**Results**
- **+**
- **-**
Discussion

Limitations:

• The finding point to some factors that may be relevant to practitioners seeking to strengthen their community-academic partnerships, however, the findings here may not be generalizable since they convey data from a single case.

• It should also be noted that the external examiner may have been seen by community partners as an “academic” and that this may have impacted the responses they gave.

• Another limitation of this study was the use of the Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning while the purpose of the study was to apply the framework to examine functioning systematically it is also possible that the application of the model limited the analysis and that we failed to observe interactions that the frame does not depict.
Conclusions

Recommendations for practice can be suggested:

1. Long-lasting, informal, inclusive networks provide a steady, fertile soil from which smaller, production-oriented partnership can blossom.

2. Long-term interaction of this kind creates meaningful connections where partners can see people work, consistently over time and know who to go to when projects or funding opportunities arise.

3. It is important to recognize the trade-offs in partnership in terms of formality, flexibility and inclusiveness and to make thoughtful decisions about the benefits and drawbacks of making choices one way or the other.

4. This kind of network is valuable and funding needs to be available to support the infrastructure enabling the cultivation of such networks.
References


References


