Equitable University–Community Research Partnerships

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Context & Objectives

Why: Academic and community partnerships are critical to effective community-engaged research, but these partnerships can be difficult to cultivate and sustain.

What: We define "Community-Engaged Research" as research activities involving university researchers (faculty, staff, or students) and community collaborators on issues of shared concern.

How: We conducted research to understand more about community-engaged research practices, structures, and lessons from current partnerships between community organizations and Duke researchers to determine the best practices that should be encouraged.

Change Over Time: This year marked the second cohort of students working on the Community-University Research Partnerships team. While the 2021-22 group sourced the data and performed initial analyses, the 2022-23 students dug in further between their respective qualitative and quantitative strands.

- **2021-22 Team** — Data Collection Duke & Community Strands
- **2022-23 Team** — Data Analysis Qualitative & Quantitative Strands
- **Informing CER Across Campus**

Data Collection & Analysis

Data Collection: During the 2021-22 school year, the previous cohort of students captured survey data from 122 Duke researchers and conducted in-depth interviews with 9 Duke researchers and 12 community partners.

122 Survey Respondents

21 In-Depth Interviews

Quantitative Analysis: The research team utilized Stata to analyze Duke survey data on questions related to motivators to initiating CER projects, barriers to initiating CER, and challenges implementing such projects. Analyses included descriptive statistics, t-tests, and multivariate regressions to understand subgroup differences across question components.

Qualitative Analysis: The team analyzed interviews using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software. To improve coding agreement, the team conducted two rounds of intercoder reliability. Codes were developed both deductively based on research questions and inductively based on themes emerging from the data; the team continued to add codes over the course of analysis. The team identified thematic differences between Duke researchers and community partners.

Duke Researcher Findings

Barriers

Aligning Interests:
- Struggled to strike the balance between their own interests and community partners.
- CER projects often must prioritize practicality over academic interest.

Administration:
- Duke's decentralized nature caused researchers to have to pull on a variety of offices and continue to search for resources to gather together resources.
- IRB, Data Use Agreements, and irrelevant trainings added to this bureaucracy.

Time and Cost:
- CER leading to slower research and publication, funding sources not supporting CER activities or community expenses, and concern about rigor.
- Academic schedules may not align with CER needs.

> "A few years ago I succeeded in getting community partners paid for their time and was told then that it was the first time this had come up. That faculty think community members have the time and stomach to get to Duke and sit around our tables without compensation is laughable."
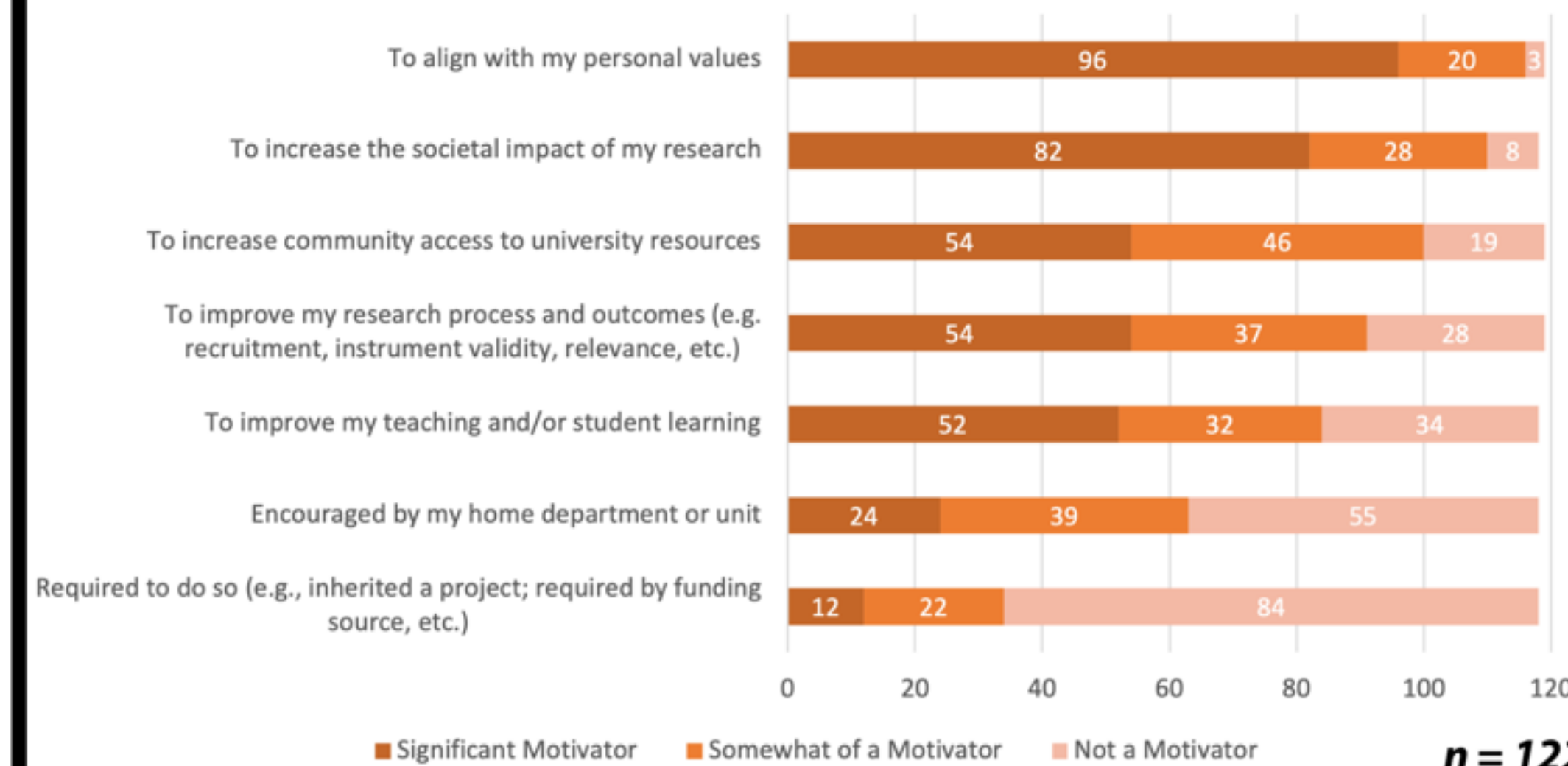
Facilitators

Motivation:
- Duke researchers discussed research partnerships with community organizations that were both intentional and flexible in design, attributing to barriers they may have faced in a more traditional academic setting.

To what degree do the following factors motivate your decision to take a community-engaged approach in your scholarship?

Factor	Significant Motivator	Somewhat of a Motivator	Not a Motivator
To align with my personal values	96	20	3
To increase the societal impact of my research	82	28	8
To increase community access to university resources	54	46	19
To improve my research process and outcomes (e.g. recruitment, instrument validity, relevance, etc.)	54	37	28
To improve my teaching and/or student learning	52	32	34
Encouraged by my home department or unit	24	39	55
Required to do so (e.g., inherited a project; required by funding source, etc.)	12	22	84

n = 122

Community Partner Findings

Barriers

Difficulty Navigating Duke:
- Difficulty identifying researcher partners who fit well.
- Community partners may not have the same access to resources and information as Duke researchers do.
- Have to rely on personal connections or curricular requirement to facilitate partnership development.
- Asymmetrical power dynamics making community partners feel that Duke researchers have more control over the research process and may not be as receptive to their ideas and interests.

Time Conflict, Especially with Students:
- Conflicts in schedules and other commitments struggling to maintain consistent engagement.
- Some community partners expect more involvement from students that are not always feasible given their responsibilities to school.

> "As an organization, Duke tends to reach out when they see a way that we can be helpful and sometimes, when we try to go the other way and say we have these things we are interested in researching, that hand isn't always there."

Facilitators

Champions:
- Champions are individuals who facilitate the execution of CER projects.
- Navigate the complexities of institutional dynamics, such as university bureaucracy.
- Push the projects forward, helping to garner buy-in and mediate conflicts across the partnership.

Pre-existing connections:
- Pre-existing connections refer to established relationships between community partners and researchers, often formed through experiences as students, staff, or research partners.
- Facilitate new research projects, making it more efficient to establish partnerships.
- Find relevant research partners and volunteers fast.
- Understand each other's working dynamics.

> "I have a PhD and I continue to engage in academic work but I'm at a community-based organization and so I'm able to bring a skill set and also have expectations of what the process is going to be. Knowing what to expect led to some of that success."

Recommendations

Cultural Infrastructure: Making CER ingrained into Duke's interpersonal relationships. Duke values knowledge in service of society, but this institution needs to build the connection across the university and across CER researchers. We recommend:
- Building intentional spaces for Communities of Practice to emerge
- Building awareness and trainings, both for university staff and students.
- For students, regularly offering courses on CER, especially recommended at the graduate level.

Fiscal Infrastructure: Recognizing the different funding mechanisms needed for CER. These researchers still produce high-quality insights, but they operate with different processes.
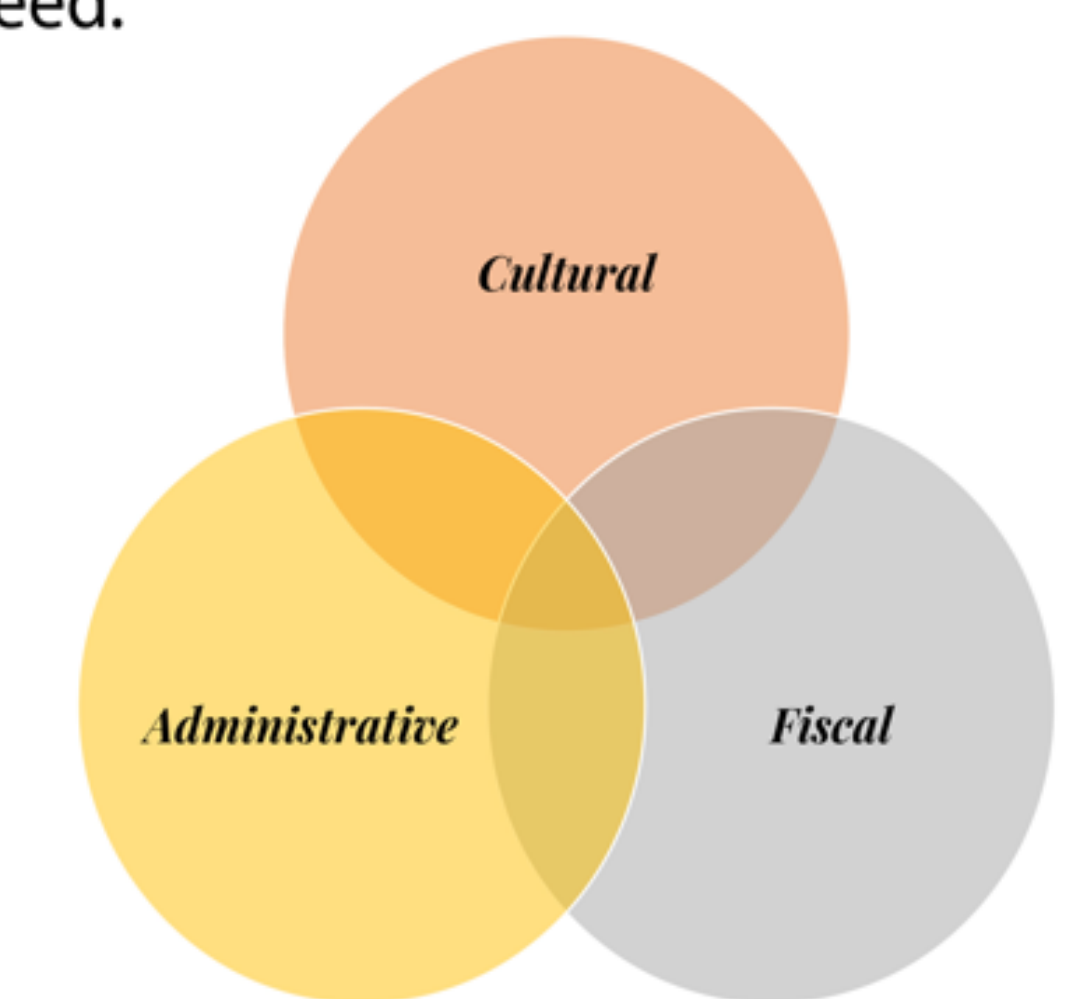- Remunerating researchers for time spent building long-term relationships.
- Funding community partners, even allowing partners to host grants if their administrative capacity allows.
- More flexible grant options, especially allowing more nascent projects.
- Coordinating university-provided grant options in online, widely available resource banks.

Administrative Infrastructure: CER works much more iteratively than traditional projects. Often,
- Understanding what "research" means, and having a consistent definition and policies across university entities.
- Evaluating when IRB, Data Use Agreements, and Research Trainings are necessary processes.
- Training IRB staff on CER processes.
- Tracking existing and emerging partnerships across the university

Continued Research: This work feels urgent, yet exploratory. We recommend that:
- Have an entity be provided funds to regularly evaluate the state of CER at Duke.
- Further understand community partner experience.
- Further understand the experience of those who want to do CER, but have failed to get the support they need.

Cultural · Administrative · Fiscal

Building a CER Infratructure

DUKE UNIVERSITY | BASS CONNECTIONS