Understanding Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) Partnerships from Institutional and Community Perspectives

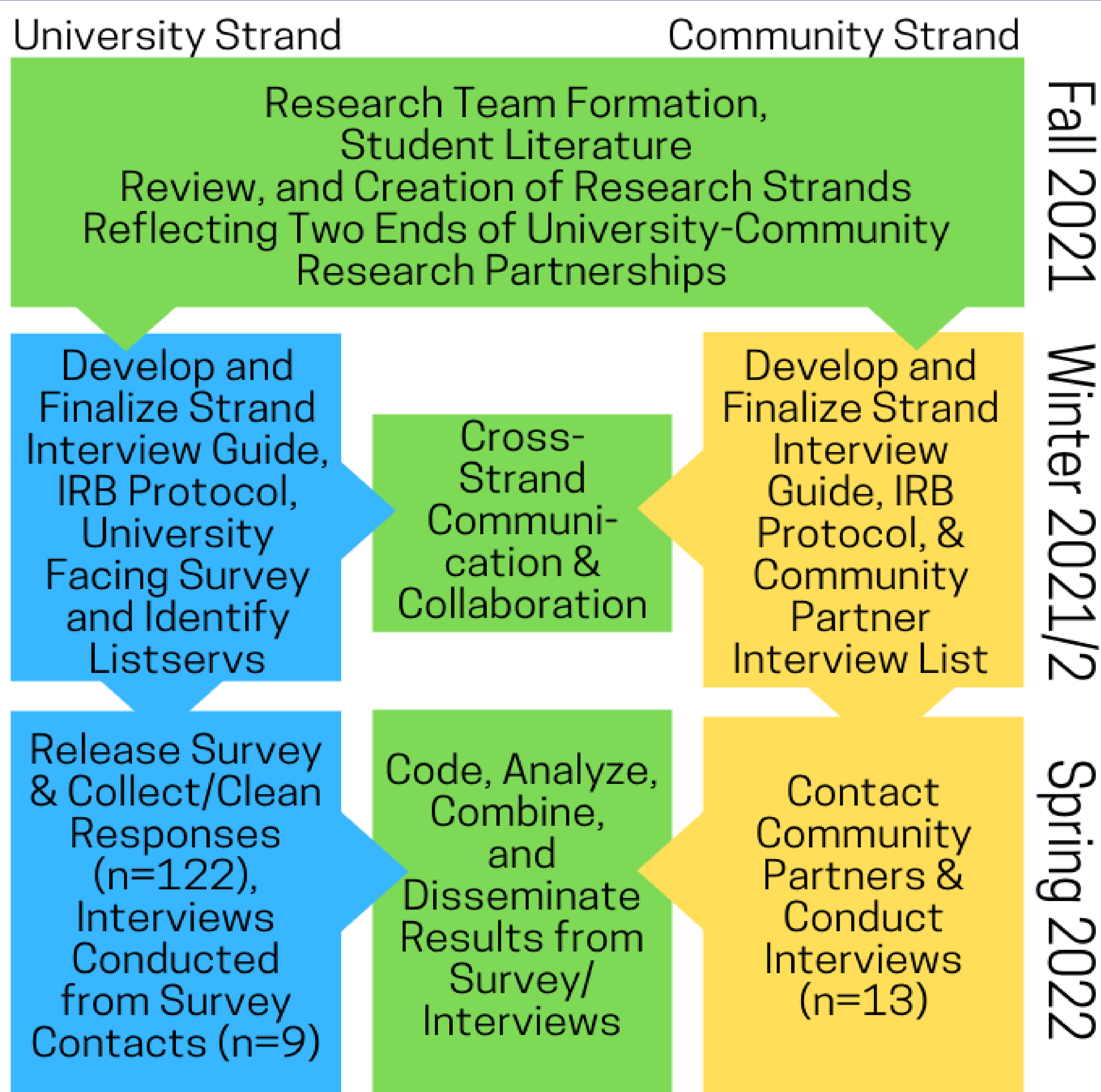Eric Juarez[1] Hadeel Hamoud[2] Elaijah Lapay[2] Andrew McGannon[1] Gabriela Nagle Alverio[1]

[1]Graduate Student, [2]Undergraduate Student

In collaboration with Duke Civic Engagement, Duke Service-Learning, & Duke Social Science Research Institute

Introduction and Objectives

- Academic and community partnerships are critical to effective community-engaged research, but these partnerships can be difficult to cultivate and sustain.
- We define "Community-Engaged Research" as research activities involving university researchers (faculty, staff, or students) and community collaborators on issues of shared concern.
- We conducted research to understand more about community-engaged research practices, structures, and lessons from current partnerships between Durham community organizations and Duke researchers to determine the best practices that should be encouraged
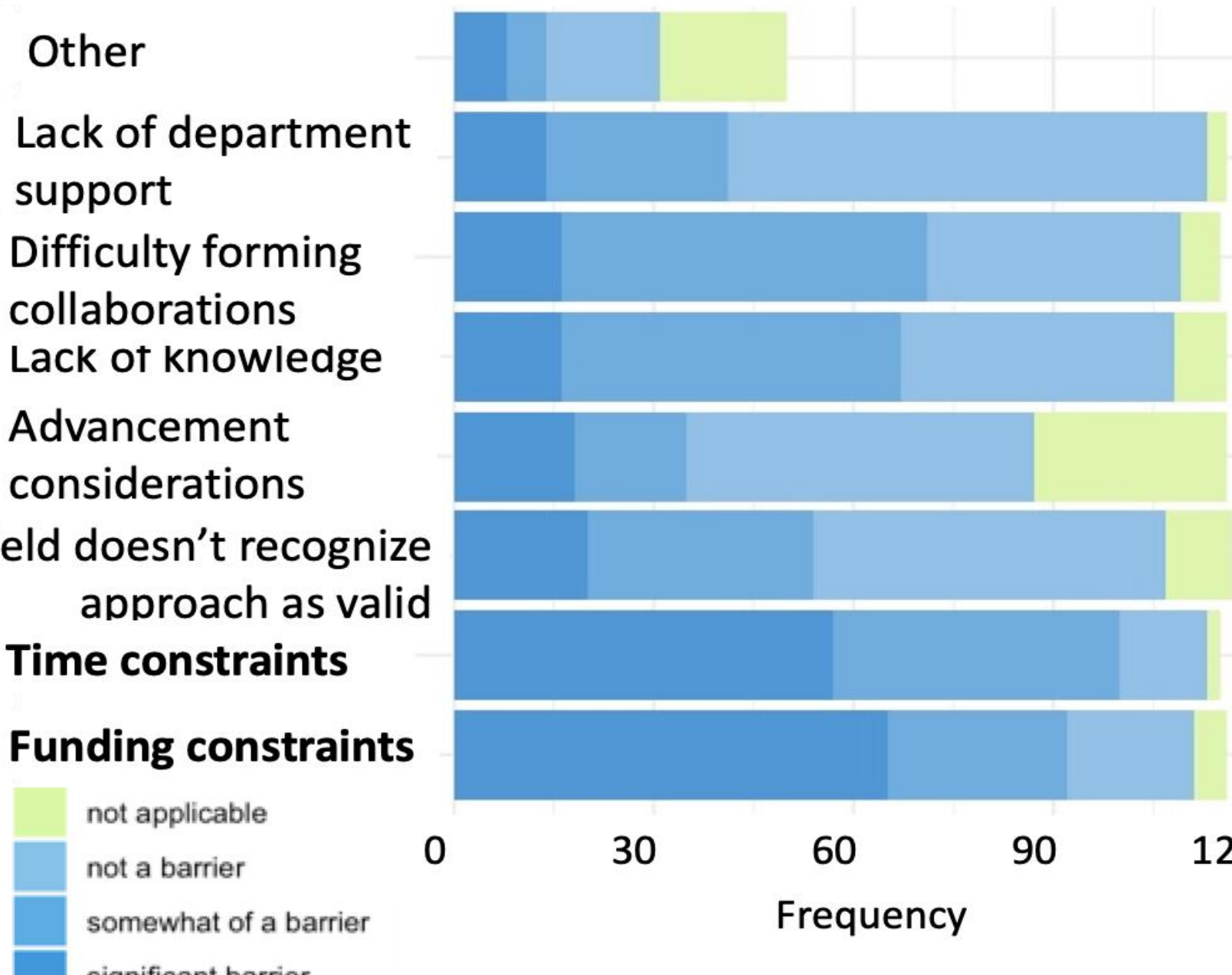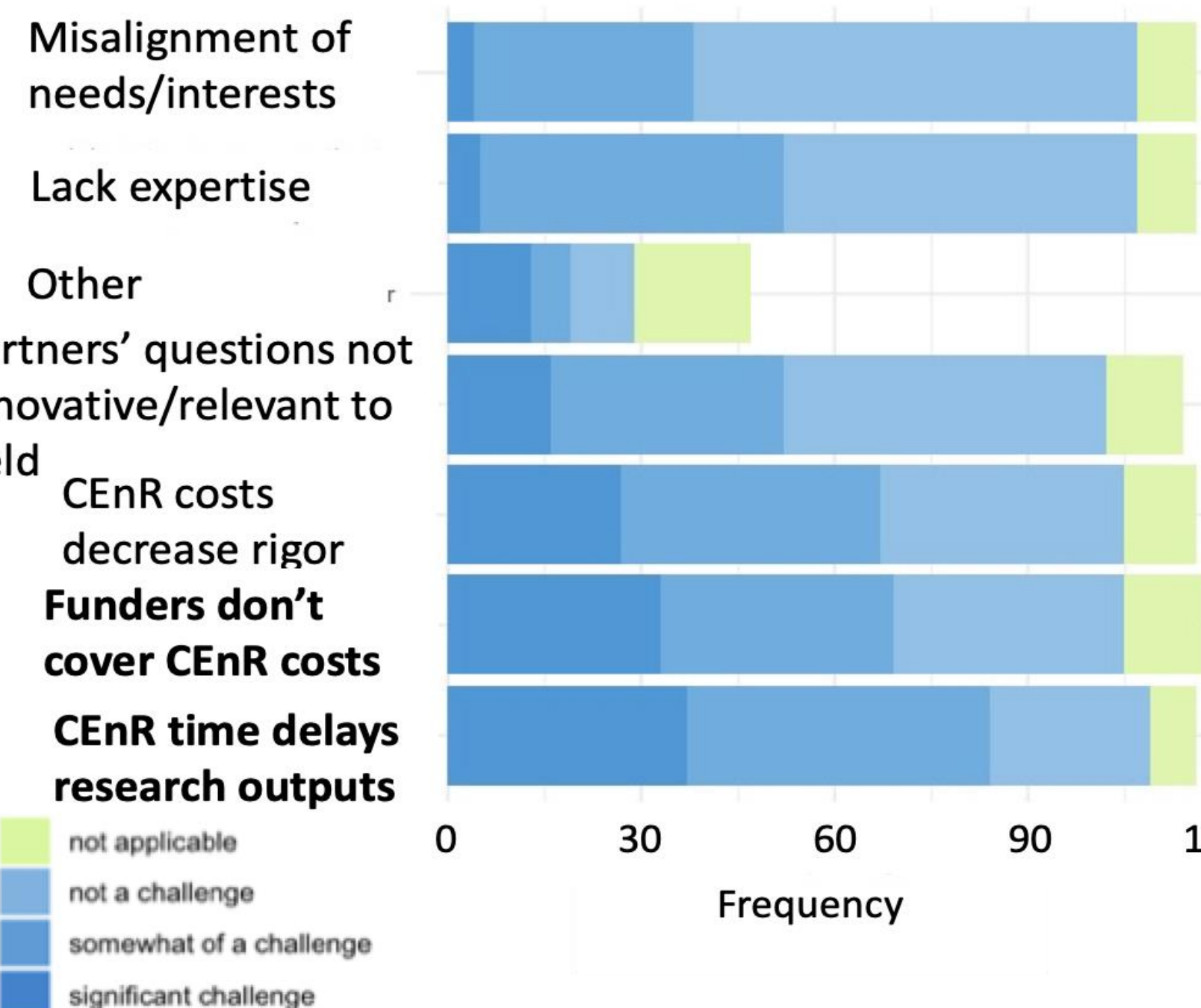
Methods and Timeline

University Strand / **Community Strand**

Research Team Formation, Student Literature Review, and Creation of Research Strands Reflecting Two Ends of University-Community Research Partnerships — *Fall 2021*

Develop and Finalize Strand Interview Guide, IRB Protocol, University Facing Survey and Identify Listservs

Cross-Strand Communication & Collaboration

Develop and Finalize Strand Interview Guide, IRB Protocol, & Community Partner Interview List — *Winter 2021/2*

Release Survey & Collect/Clean Responses (n=122), Interviews Conducted from Survey Contacts (n=9)

Code, Analyze, Combine, and Disseminate Results from Survey/ Interviews

Contact Community Partners & Conduct Interviews (n=13) — *Spring 2022*

Findings and Results

University Strand Survey Results (n=122)
Ordered by significance of barriers/challenges with most frequent significant barriers/challenges bolded

Barriers to taking a community-engaged approach

- Other
- Lack of department support
- Difficulty forming collaborations
- Lack of knowledge
- Advancement considerations
- Field doesn't recognize approach as valid
- **Time constraints**
- **Funding constraints**

Legend: not applicable / not a barrier / somewhat of a barrier / significant barrier

Challenges to practicing community-engaged research (CEnR)

- Misalignment of needs/interests
- Lack expertise
- Other
- Partners' questions not innovative/relevant to field
- CEnR costs decrease rigor
- **Funders don't cover CEnR costs**
- **CEnR time delays research outputs**

Legend: not applicable / not a challenge / somewhat of a challenge / significant challenge

Key Quotes from Stakeholder Interviews

University Strand

"The financial and organizational systems at Duke have been centered since the post-WWII period on facilitating large science and medical grants... In order to facilitate genuine co-creation opportunities on the Health or University sides of Duke, these systems must center the needs of low-status and low-wealth community partners."

"I honestly just don't pursue certain things, if I don't know that the funding is available."

"We're [Duke] probably 20 years behind a lot of our peers."

Community Strand

"I think that the whole process was a wonderful learning experience and it definitely brought a connection between the community and the academic world, because both can be very isolated."

"It's helped us enormously. We knew [our program] worked… but others had a hard time understanding what we were doing."

"Now, if someone can't figure out how to talk to the populations that we serve then they're never going to be successful in their project...it's a much bigger issue than can be addressed in a semester."

Expressed Challenges and Barriers of Duke CEnR Partnerships
Common: Time & Resources

University Strand

Time
- Time intensiveness and strain of projects felt by researchers, especially if need to train students
- Conflicts between academic and community timelines

Resources
- Lack of funding to compensate participants, invest into building community relationships, and hire staff and graduate students
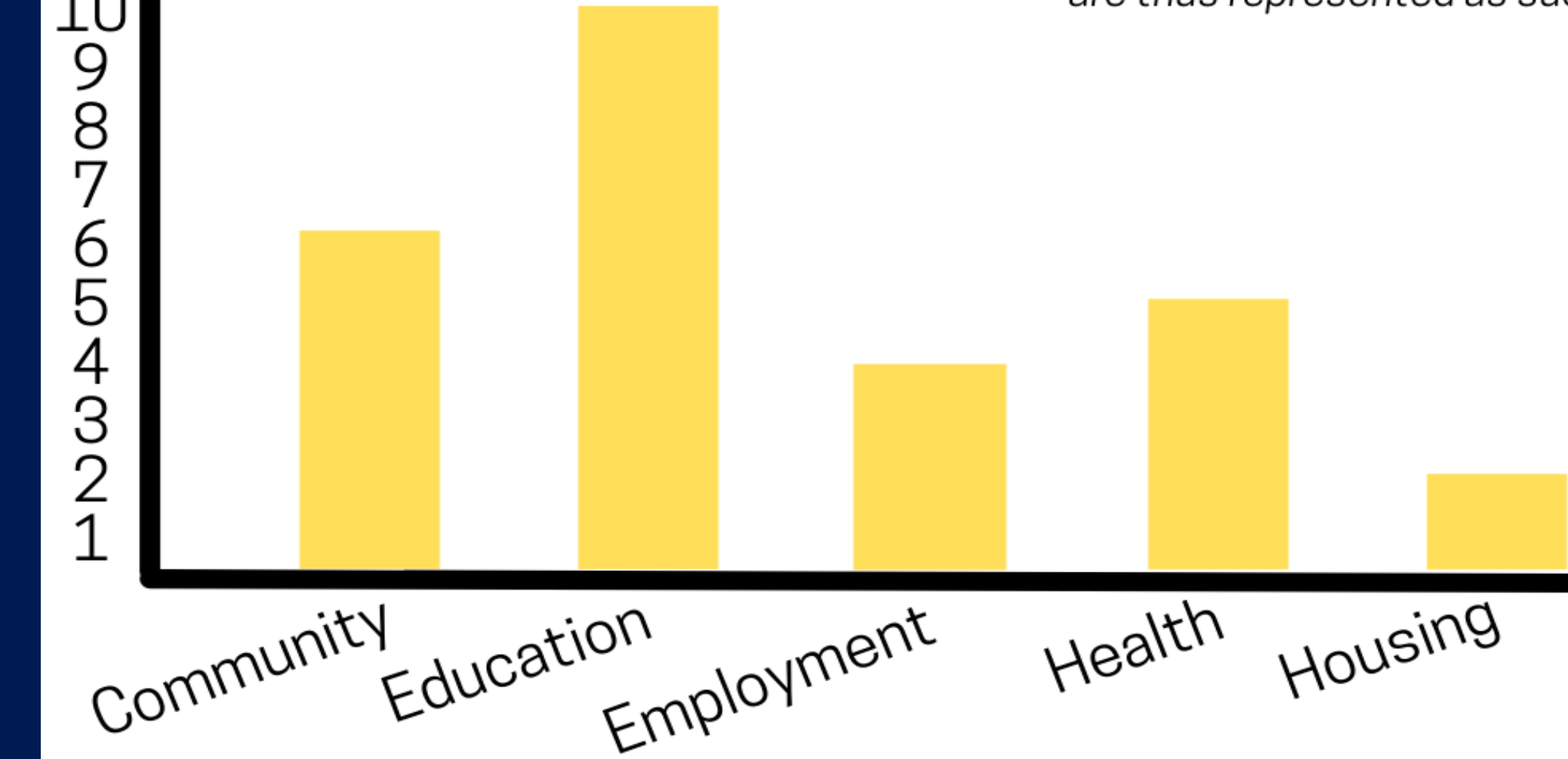
Administrative
- Institutional risk aversion
- Bureaucratic and lengthy approval procedures
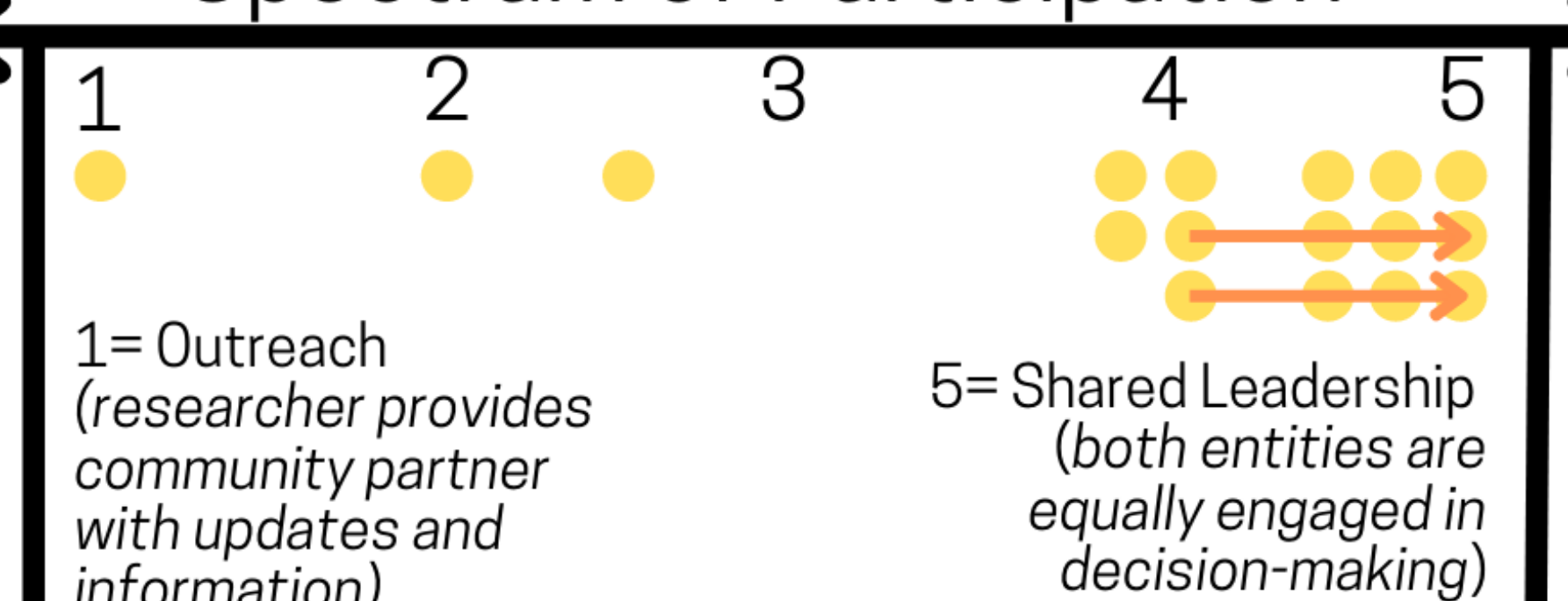- De-centralised approach in engaging community partners

Community Strand

Time
- Time constraints result in an inability to collaborate fully on research planning
- Scheduling conflicts with Duke vs. public vs. government/FY calendars

Resources
- Lack of staff bandwidth to support researcher needs
- Staff turnover leads to loss of organizational memory; mutual burnout concerns

Communication
- Lack of clear agreement of shared research goals
- Difficulty at times developing plans with & obtaining data/results from partners

Community Partners Interviewed by Duke DCA's Focus Areas & Strategic Priorities
Note: Some Organizations Address more than one Focus Area/Strategic Priority, and are thus represented as such

Categories: Community, Education, Employment, Health, Housing

Spectrum of Participation*

1 = Outreach (researcher provides community partner with updates and information)

5 = Shared Leadership (both entities are equally engaged in decision-making)

Outreach (1/5), Consult (2/5), or Involved (3/5) partners tended to use more negative descriptions of experience

Collaborative (4/5) and shared leadership (5/5) typically associated with positive and affirming language

*Source: International Association for Public Participation. (2007). Core Values, Ethics, Spectrum – The 3 Pillars of Public Participation. https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars. Note that some community interviews described more than one partnership, and are thus each partnership is represented.

Recommendations and Future Directions

University Strand

- Increased & ongoing funding for non-traditional costs of community-engaged research like support for relationship building
- Support research throughout the year
- Explicit recognition of community-engaged research on faculty and staff work profiles
- Streamlining cross-institutional communication and knowledge on current community-engaged partnerships
- Sustain agreements on clear communication

Community Strand

Framework for Duke Researchers
- Think: Does both Duke and community partners currently have resources, assistance, and time to develop an impactful community partnership?
- Ask: What does each end hope to gain from this research in data/deliverables? Has this been done before? Why (not)?
- Do: Maintain clear communication lines & maintain respect through all research stages

Research ongoing; project will continue in 2022-2023 to create best practice resources and toolsets for academic researchers, institutions, & community organizations.