

Equitable University-Community Research Partnerships

Students: Libby Doyle, Ryder Buttry, Joey Rauch, Cai Liu, Zoe Spicer, Zoe Loh

Faculty: Jessica Sperling, Noelle Wyman-Roth **Consultants:** Kathy Sykes, Leslie Parkins, Liz Shapiro-Garza, Mina Silberberg

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.



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."

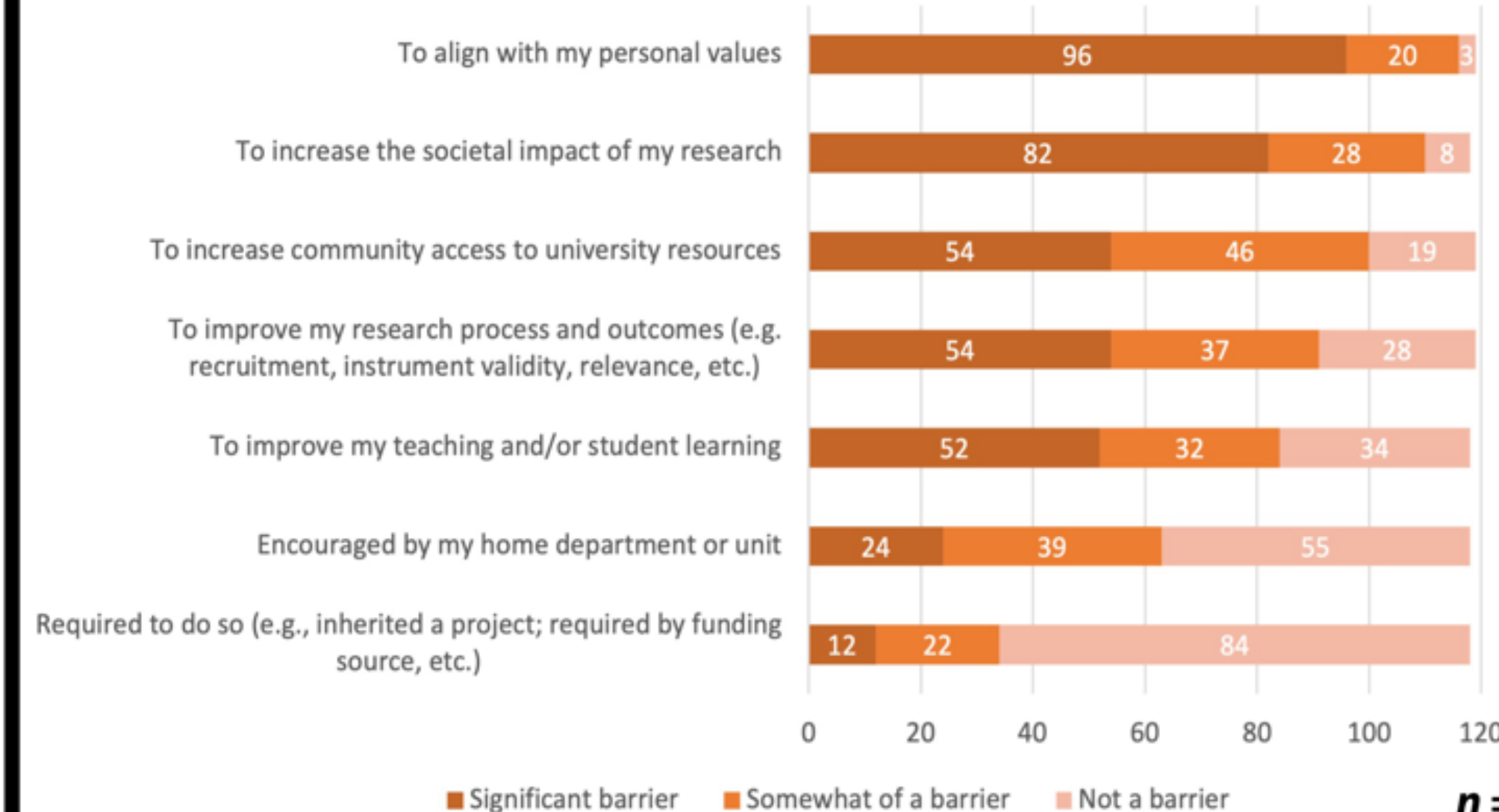
Facilitators



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?



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.

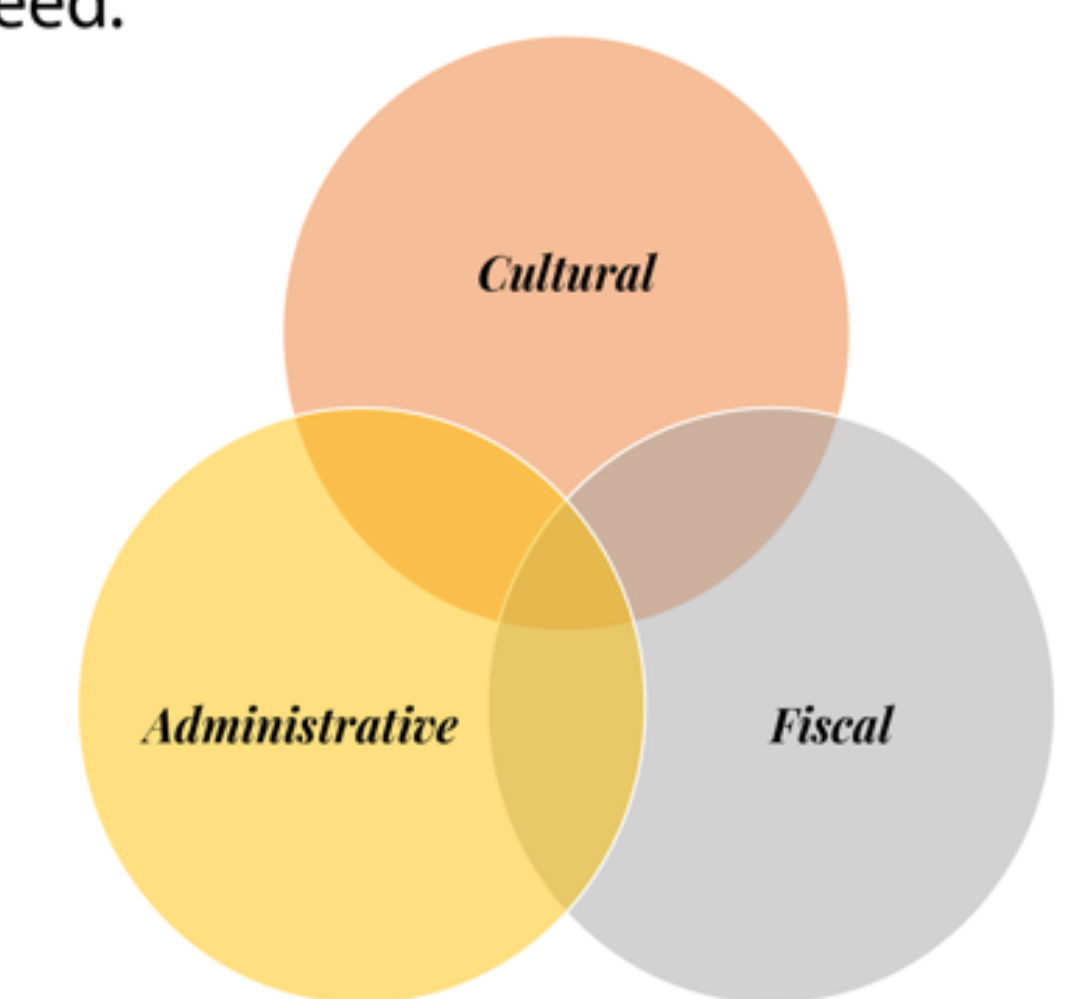
- Remunerating researchers for time spent building long-term relationships.
- Funding community partners, even allowing partners to host grants if their administrative capacity allows.
- More flexible grant options, especially allowing more nascent projects.
- Coordinating university-provided grant options 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.



Building a CER Infrastructure

