

COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND FUNDER RELATIONSHIPS: A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study focused on the relationship between a community college and philanthropic foundation that have a decades-long relationship in the community in which they both reside. While community colleges and funders in general regularly work together to create change in the communities they serve, when they share a hometown, the frequency with which they work together can be greatly increased. Sharing a hometown was found to contribute to a myriad of complications in this relationship, as well as providing some unique opportunities to increase their shared community impact. Better understanding this organizational relationship can inform grant work between these organizations and others like them; help ensure that investments are done wisely; and ensure that the goals these organizations share for community change effectively achieved.

The goal of this study was to support community colleges and funders in maximizing the return on their joint community grant investments by illuminating practices contribute to success. This study included a broad analysis of documents and communications central to this relationship and in-depth interviews with staff of both organizations whose professional positions included responsibility for the grant work between the organizations. Four major themes emerged that were important to the larger organizational relationship over time: (1) the importance of individual relationships between staff at the organizations; (2) the unique nature of the community college as a fund grantee; (3) the impact of unseen and unstated organizational factors; and (4) the level of intent placed on defining the relationship's parameters in terms of communication, transparency, trust, and mutual accountabilities.

Key Words: grants, philanthropy, funding sources

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Phebe, who was always my biggest supporter and official proof-reader; my father, William, who always made me feel special and capable; my husband, Chip, who helped me carry on when I wasn't sure I could; and my mother-in-law, Gloria, who was always in my corner cheering me on. The hard things in life are made easier by those who stand with you, and without the love and support of these four people, this huge undertaking would have been so much more difficult to accomplish.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Charitable foundations and higher education, including community colleges, regularly come together around programs and services that will benefit colleges, their students, and the communities they serve. Millions of dollars and hours of time are invested in implementing grants through community colleges, but what can be done to help ensure these investments actually achieve the long-term goals identified? What is the role of the college, what is the role of the funder, and does each organization truly know how to maximize the relationship to best achieve success? Words like “partnership” and “collaboration” are often used in describing these relationships, but are the definitions of these terms the same for each organization involved? If so, are these always accurate descriptions of the relationship?

Purpose and Significance of this Study

This research project is important because it contributes to existing literature on higher education and charitable foundation partnerships. It is especially important in relation to community colleges, as emphasis is placed on collaborations there. The benefits and challenges these arrangements can offer in working towards established goals needs to be further explored to help inform the practices of both community colleges and funders. With vast human and financial resources invested through these relationships, it is important those resources help achieve the goals sought. In stepping back to consider how the work of higher education and funders are impacted by collaboration, successes should be highlighted, and lessons captured that

will advance learning for similar efforts. Where missteps have occurred, it is important to understand why and what could be changed next time to avoid them.

Research Questions

1. How do community college and funder perspectives on their working relationships and partnerships differ and align?
2. How do these perspectives impact their work together?
3. How can community colleges and funders leverage partnership best practices to the benefit of their mutual goals?

Focus, Structure, and Methodology

This research project is a qualitative case study of the relationship between a private charitable foundation and a community college. Concepts related to partnership and collaboration were explored in identifying the aspects of this relationship that both contributed to and detracted from success. Understanding the social and organizational construct of this relationship will inform the practice of other similar collaborations and provide insight into the factors that impact success in pursuing the goals funders and community colleges work together to achieve.

The researcher conducted interviews with individuals from both organizations, all of whom are currently or were recently engaged in work stemming from this organizational relationship. Participants were asked questions intended to provide insight into partnership practices that impact their joint work. To supplement interview data, provide depth to the research, and understand the context within which grant-funded activities have been and continue to be implemented, document analysis was also conducted. Examples of documents reviewed include grant proposals and revisions; annual reports; business plans; strategic plans

and evaluation reports of grant-funded work; organizational mission and vision documents; and a historical timeline of grant investments between this Funder and College.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Collaborations exist in many forms and under many names. They can be commonly referred to as partnerships, strategic alliances, consortia, and coalitions (Eddy, 2010), but for the purposes of this study, they are defined as “purposive strategic relationships between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and acknowledge a high level of mutual interdependence. They join efforts to achieve goals that each firm, acting alone, could not attain easily” (Mohr & Spekman, 1994, p. 135).

Partnerships are an evolving process, and through careful planning can be built upon solid ground that will later benefit the work. Regardless of the sector(s) in which they operate, successful partnerships have common characteristics. Emerging from an extensive Wilder Research Centre analysis of research on partnerships (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001) and other recent research cited in chapter two, there are critical factors identified as having great influence on how partnerships are formed, function, and sustain success. These factors are grouped into the following categories:

- Environment – relationship history, legitimate leadership, and climate
- Membership – appropriate members, commitment and motivation, compromise, leadership characteristics; trust, respect, and understanding
- Process and Structure – roles, decision making and accountability; change, pace, and patience
- Communication – open and frequent, formal and informal
- Purpose – values, vision, and goals
- Resources – financial and other resources, champions

Community Colleges – History of Partnership and Collaboration

Community colleges have a long history of partnering with other organizations. The junior college movement began as an extension of the K-12 system, with many using existing high school buildings to deliver services (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Over the years, community colleges have continued to partner with employers through contract training and other labor market initiatives; with high schools in offering early and middle college opportunities; and with four-year colleges through articulation and transfer agreements. This trend of partnership is not anticipated to change anytime soon, as the 21st Century brought with it increasing pressure on colleges to engage in collaborations (deCastro & Karp, 2009).

The Foundation and Grantee Relationship

In developing a good funder and grantee relationship, the role of the Program Officer holds special significance. This role within a funding organization has the greatest degree of interaction with grantees, and their actions can significantly impact the degree of trust, mutual respect, transparency, and communication within the relationship. As will be shown in Chapter Two, the importance of these factors cannot be overstated in creating strong partnerships.

Program Officers that exhibit the ability to nurture good grantee relationships have been shown to have more success in this effort when working within an organizational culture that supports their desire to place priority here (Buteau, Glickman, & Leiwant, 2017). Additionally, funders whose cultures value and practice ongoing organizational learning and improvement also contribute to good funder-grantee partnerships (Bolduc, 2016), as does one that is caring and collaborative (Sanders, Galindo, Vega-Marquis, & Millay, 2017).

In seeking to support large-scale change in communities, funders engage in strategic grantmaking. Success on this front requires developing strategies in partnership with grantees

and having internal structures to support the resulting work (Patrizi & Thompson, 2010). It also requires acknowledging and addressing the power imbalance that exists between grantees and funders due to the traditionally unequal financial resources contributed to the work. A study by Independent Sector (2016) found that this power dynamic was the one consistent impediment to funders and grantees realizing success in their work together.

According to Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO, 2017) four effective practices for grantmakers that best support grantee success include providing multiyear grants, general operating support, capacity-building support, and learning and evaluation activities. Based on GEO's 2017 field survey, multiyear grants and general operating support have remained relatively unchanged over the past decade, but 85% of survey respondents provided capacity-building support in 2017 as compared to only 65% in 2008. Evaluation support among funders also increased from 70% in 2011 to 77% in 2017.

GEO states that funders are increasingly developing their own goals and strategies for funding initiatives, which aligns with findings that indicate there is increasing focus on program evaluation to show progress or point to a new path when things go off course. Supporting grantees to achieve the goals envisioned through their investments is critical to sustained success, so the increased capacity-building support funders provide to organizations is vital. In addition to funding however, foundations can also provide resources such as experience, access to networks and experts, and a different perspective on the work at hand. As understanding roles and good communication are found to be important in successful partnerships, perhaps without these, grantees will not be ready to take advantage of all the resources a foundation has to offer.

Providing multiyear and general operating support grants necessitate a shift in decision-making power away from funders and towards their grantees. As GEO data shows, support

through these kinds of grants is not increasing, so they postulate that foundation staff and leaders may be hesitant to relinquish too much power through this more flexible funding, as they have a deep stake in the work's success. As trust is paramount in any partnership, could this hesitation to relinquish control create unintended barriers and impact success?

Community Colleges and Funders — Partner Versus Grantee

As community colleges work with funders to create or enhance programs and services, funder support can range from merely donating funds for an event, to multifaceted arrangements in which they work together to create complicated change. Perhaps making a distinction between when a relationship is that of a “grantee” versus a “partner” is important. To provide additional context with an example of how community colleges and funders are working together to address complicated community challenges, the work of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded Completion by Design (CBD) (Grossman, et.al, 2015) can be highlighted.

CBD was a five-year initiative engaging nine community colleges across three states in creating systemic change to increase completion and graduation rates of community college students. Although CBD involved multiple community colleges, its work was clearly more complex in nature, and focused on long-term change. In considering the relationship between funders and community colleges in an example such as this, it seems having a good understanding of the difference between being a grantee versus a partner could inform practices that impact success. Perhaps the nature of the work and level of complexity impacts whether a funder and community college define their relationship as a partnership.

As funders become more strategic and advanced in supporting change work, they are investing their resources in place-based programming. According to the Aspen Institute (2014), place-based efforts are generally focused on long-term and sustainable impact in addressing

problems such as intergenerational poverty, racial discrimination, and disparities in education, income, criminal justice, health, housing, and other complex social issues. In doing this, funders pour resources and support into a specific community over a lengthy time period, with the intention of creating change within that community's systems.

Community colleges engage in varied work to meet the broad array of needs existing in their communities, much of which is intertwined with the very community systems that funders hope to impact in that location. In delivering work of this nature, community colleges often receive recurring grant support from local funders. This reality may create aspects unique to this kind of funder and grantee relationship, as compared to those of dissimilar grantees or funders located in different communities.

A Case Study: The Partners

The community college of focus in this study is a fully accredited nonprofit institution of higher education based in the Midwest. It serves approximately 10,000 credit and non-credit students each year on five regional campuses in urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Funder is a large private foundation located in the same community as the College. Their grant-making efforts do place special emphasis on supporting their shared community; however, grants are not restricted to this geographical location.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are boundaries the researcher places on the study to define its scope. For this study, the researcher chose a bounded case study of the work between a specific Funder and College, to better understand how the realities of this relationship impacted the work's success and/or created challenges. The intent of the researcher was to contribute to the knowledge base of community college and philanthropic funder partnerships in working together to achieve

identified goals. Quantitative data beyond the output level was not included, as it would not contribute in providing the rich and thick descriptive data necessary to better understand the nuanced and sometimes subjective nature of partnerships in community work.

Limitations are influences on the study that are beyond the researcher's control. A limitation of this study is the possibility for researcher bias and reactivity to participant responses due to her involvement and professional relationship with all partners in this study. The researcher has been an employee of both the Funder and College of focus and has previously worked on grant-funded work between them. Her relationships with study participants could also influence the study in soliciting more honest and complete responses to questions, or by contributing to responses being guarded or incomplete. Efforts to validate responses via a variety of methods have been performed.

Organization of the Study

The study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of partnerships and collaborations, with an emphasis on those between community colleges and philanthropic funders where possible. Focus is placed on factors and characteristics that contribute to success or failure in pursuing the goals sought through grant investments. Chapter 3 describes in detail the research methodology of the study and the rationale for its selection in this instance. Information around participant selection, data collection, analysis, and validity are also included. Chapter 4 presents the findings from participant interviews and document review as related to the research questions, and provides an analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings. Chapter 5 offers a reflection of the study, drawing conclusions and including suggested directions for further research.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this dissertation, the following terms are used extensively; thus, the following definitions are provided to clarify their use and meaning.

- Anchor Institution – Boundary spanning organizations that help to lead change, convene and connect others, and focus on the community (rather than programs alone).
- Capacity-Building – The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources that organizations and individuals need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world.
- Funder / Foundation / Grantmaker / Grantor / Philanthropic or Charitable Foundation – These terms are used interchangeably and are defined as organizations that are a legal category of nonprofit organization that will typically either donate funds and support to other organizations or provide the source of funding for its own charitable purposes.
- Grantee – An organization that receives funds that are not required to be repaid to pursue agreed upon work with established goals.
- Program / Initiative – A set of coherent activities with a final goal and one or more programmatic objectives, and which has specific resources (human, financial, material) available to achieve the objectives and contribute to attainment of the goal.
- Memorandum of Understanding – An agreement between two or more parties outlined in a formal document. It is not legally binding but signals the willingness of the parties to move forward with a contract.
- Partnership / Collaboration – An arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests.
- Place-Based Funder – A charitable foundation that strategically focuses its investments and resources in a geographic location over time to create a long-term and sustainable impact.
- Program Officer – A funder employee that works with applicants and grantees to oversee program development, grant seeking and proposal development processes, budgets, and reporting.
- Social Change – Any significant alteration over time in behavior patterns and cultural values and norms. By “significant” alteration, sociologists mean changes yielding profound social consequences.
- Social Systems – The patterned series of interrelationships existing between individuals, groups, and institutions, forming a coherent whole social structure that is greater than the sum of its parts.

- Stakeholders – Organizations, institutions, and individuals that influence and/or benefit from the outcomes within a system or of a specific project.
- Strategic Grantmaking – A proactive approach to grantmaking, more focused on goals and a defined set of strategies for how a funder wants to accomplish those goals.
- Systemic Change – Change that pervades all parts of a system, taking into account the interrelationships and interdependencies among those parts. It is distinguished from piecemeal change, in that this looks at change to just one or several parts of a system.

Chapter Summary

Community colleges and philanthropic foundations regularly partner with various organizations in their work. Funders want to ensure their resources are well invested, and community colleges want to make sure they are meeting their constituents' needs, so clarity around what each organization can do to contribute to or detract from success when working together is important.

In this case study, grant-funded work between a community college and philanthropic foundation are considered. Emphasis is placed on how adherence to, or variance from, best practices in partnership in funder / grantee work have impacted the relationship and their work together. Insights gathered from the Funder and College staff involved in this organizational relationship, have been considered in drawing conclusions about the realities that contributed to or detracted from success in this relationship. Any unique benefits or challenges presented in the relationship due to having a community college as a grantee (versus another kind of nonprofit grantee) have also been explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Three primary focus areas served as the main sections for the organization of this chapter. In the first, Partnerships and Collaborations, key factors affecting the success of these kinds of relationships in general are provided. These include Defining Partnership, Building a Successful Partnership, Barriers to Success, Partnership Benefits, and Critical Success Factors. Key themes of factors are arranged as subheadings.

In the second focus area, Community Colleges as Collaborators and Partners, the relevant history and details that impact how community colleges engage in collaborations and partnerships are presented. This section is organized around the following factors: History and Drivers, Governance and Financial Structures, and Lessons Learned and Leadership.

The third focus area, Foundations and the Grantee Relationship, discusses factors that influence how funding organizations partner and collaborate with their grantees. The section is organized around the following factors: Charities and Foundations, Foundation Governance and Financial Structures, Role and Importance of Foundation Program Officers, The Impact of a Foundation's Organizational Culture, Developing Shared Goals and Measuring Success, Strategic Funding and Partnerships, Power Dynamics, Perceptual Alignment and Misalignment with Grantees, and Best Practices in Grantmaking. Key themes of factors are arranged as subheadings.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Defining Partnership

For the purposes of this study, “partnership” and “collaboration” will be used interchangeably and are defined in alignment with Mohr & Spekman’s 1994 definition, which is “purposive strategic relationships between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and acknowledge a high level of mutual interdependence. They join efforts to achieve goals that each firm, acting alone, could not attain easily” (p. 135). According to Eddy (2010), in addition to collaborations and partnerships, these types of relationships are also often referred to as strategic alliances, joint ventures, consortia, collaborative arrangements, and coalitions.

Building a Successful Partnership

Hardy, Hudson, and Waddington (2000) developed a partnership assessment tool designed to provide organizations a cost-effective way to assess the effectiveness of their partnership. Through their research and field work, they identified the following six Partnership Principles that they considered essential for partnership success:

- recognize and accept the need for the partnership
- develop a clear and real purpose
- ensure commitment and ownership
- make developing and maintaining trust paramount
- create clear working arrangements
- measure, monitor, and practice continual learning

Austin’s 2000 research into how traditional philanthropic relationships can become effective strategic alliances, resulted in his seven Cs of strategic collaboration. Through his

study, numerous collaborations were investigated to better understand why and how they work, and lessons learned through them highlighted. His model aligns with the literature on what makes an effective partnership, and includes:

- C1 – connection
- C2 – clarity of purpose
- C3 – congruency
- C4 – creation of added value for both parties
- C5 – communication at all levels of all partners
- C6 – continually learning and adapting to new and fruitful processes
- C7 – commitment from all levels, for all partners

Partnership Barriers to Success

Hardy et al. (2000) found that when barriers to success exist in a partnership, this can result in increased focus on the mechanisms of the partnership and less on the actual outcomes. Hudson's 2002 research indicated differences in culture and organizational structures can impact decision making processes and contribute to unclear roles and accountability, which can make working together more difficult. From the perspective of organizational staff involved in new partnerships, a survey by Peck, Gulliver, & Towell (2002) identified work overload and increased bureaucracy as barriers to success, as many employees felt the rewards of the partnership were not worth the effort.

In the literature, barriers to success created by inadequate resources, variance in workload, and structural organizational differences were found to be compounded by power imbalances, as this had a destabilizing effect on partnerships by resulting in an imbalanced workload, conflict, and differing priorities. In instances such as this, this same literature indicated resulting conflicts led to perceived loss of autonomy, unclear roles, and bred distrust

(Banks, 2002; Cameron & Quinn 2006; Rose, 1997). According to Cameron and Quinn (2006), when insufficient resources contributed to partnership barriers, this resulted in inadequate funding for administrative and/or direct service costs, and increased lack of appreciation for the work overall.

Partnership Benefits

Gray (1989) found partnerships allow goals to be achieved that may not be possible otherwise. She indicated that working together, especially on complex and ever evolving challenges, can result in a number of benefits. These include more creative approaches and solutions, increased reach, increased capacity of the partners, more influence on the problem, making better use of resources, and better relationships between partners themselves and the community. Her research also found that an improved relationship between the partners themselves can be seen as a benefit, as this can lead to ever increasing trust. In the literature, a lack of trust between partners was found to decrease the likelihood of partnership success (Banks, 2002; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Rose, 1997).

Critical Success Factors of Collaboration and Partnership

An extensive Wilder Research Centre analysis of research on collaborations identified critical factors for organizations successfully working together (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). These factors align with Austin's 7Cs (2000) and the Hardy Assessment Tool (Hardy et al., 2000), and represent one of the first major synthesis of critical factors in successful partnerships from a literature review of 133 studies from the fields of health, social science, education, and public affairs. The factors emerging from this this research were identified as Environment, Membership, Process and Structure, Communication, Purpose, and Resources. A

summary of each of these six factors is presented below, and related supporting historical and current literature presented.

Environment

According to various researchers, having a history of partnering together is beneficial in that it affords the time required to develop the factors identified as important in a successful partnership, and achieve joint successes (Butterfoss, Lachance, & Orians, 2006; Gray, 1989; Hardy et al., 2000; Hill et al., 2008; Hoffmann et al., 2012; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

Additional research indicated that having leading organizations that are capable and well governed is also important if stakeholders are to view a partnership as legitimate and support its success (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1996; Butterfoss & Keglar, 2002; Butterfoss et al., 2006; Hoffmann, et al., 2012; Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001; Wolff, 2001; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006).

According to Butterfoss et al. (2006) and Hoffmann, et al. (2012), the social and political climate in which a partnership operates can also greatly impact its functioning. They found that when there is support for the cause and the goals of the partnership, this can be helpful to its success. In less favorable environments, however, the same researchers found that strife and discord present in relation to the goals of the partnership can result in its struggle and possible failure.

Membership

Appropriate Members

Lencioni (2002) highlighted the importance of teamwork over things like finance, technology, and even strategy, but also indicated that teams are innately dysfunctional because they are made up of human beings who are imperfect (p. vii). In creating a hierarchical model of

the five dysfunctions of teams, he placed trust as the foundation upon which all teamwork is built and indicated lack of trust between members creates a chain of events that leads to stifled communication and ultimately team paralysis. In partnerships, the literature clearly supports the importance of having the right members at the table who share a common vision for the work at hand (Butterfoss & Kegl, 2002; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Zakos & Edwards, 2006).

Commitment and Motivation

Gray's 1989 study found problems that are both complex in themselves and that cross organizational boundaries are often drivers of partnership, because these challenges can only hope to be addressed together. She also identified factors that contribute to organizations labeling a problem as large and important enough to partner in addressing. These factors include rapid change, blurring of boundaries between sectors, and decreased funding from government sources.

Banks (2002) found senior leadership's appropriate support of the work can keep commitment levels of all partners high, as can developing and prioritizing personal connections and investing in leadership development for staff involved. In the literature, it was found that to maintain commitment to the work, all partners must feel engaged (Butterfoss & Kegl, 2002; Hardy et al., 2000; Jacobson & Choi, 2008; Peck, Gulliver, & Towell, 2002; Shaw, 2003). These same studies also found that all partners contributing to the work and managing change together can enhance commitment, as can sharing successes.

Several researchers have examined how motivations for entering a partnership greatly predict success in how it develops, functions, and is sustained. Organizations that clearly see how the partnership will not only serve the greater good, but also satisfy their own self-interests, is supported in the literature as having a motivating effect (Butterfoss & Kegl, 2002; Rogers, et

al., 1993; Wilson, Dutton, Foreman, Kearney, & Watson, 2009). Starting from a jointly recognized need or previous joint achievement can help partners achieve a shared vision, which is also cited as key to motivation in a successful partnership (Amey, Eddy, & Ozaki, 2007; Eddy, 2010).

Trust, Respect, and Understanding

Bryk & Schneider (2002, as cited in Ozaki, Amey, & Watson, 2007) found that in any relationship, trust results from mutual respect, competence, and integrity, and when present in a partnership, these qualities help increase the chance that the identified goals will be achieved. It was also found that trust is what makes successful partnerships possible, as it results in cooperation, which in turn builds even more trust (Gage, 2004).

Covey (2006) asserts trust is built through possessing both competence and character, which requires one to be a good and sincere person who exemplifies integrity and ethics. He argues that character reflects motive and intent, while competence is related to skills, abilities, and past performance in various situations. He states that it is the balancing of these two words that results in trust and highlights that leadership theory includes what a leader is (character) and what a leader does (competence), ethics theory focuses on doing the right thing (character) and getting the right thing done (competence), and decision-making approaches tend to focus on balancing heart (character) and head (competence).

In 2006, Covey found that in practicing smart trust, one must combine critical analysis with the desire to trust. In doing this the three variables that should be considered are (a) opportunity (the situation and what you are trusting someone with), (b) risk level involved, and (c) credibility (the competence and character of the individuals involved). In extending trust

however, the literature points out that while doing so empowers others, trusting blindly is not recommended (Covey, 2006; Covey & Link, 2012).

Kezar and Lester's 2009 study found that overall, time and energy are essential in building trust. The consensus of the literature is that good partners 1) pay time and attention to building and maintaining trust, and 2) work to be sure all partners are contributing real value to the work through inputs such as financial resources, content expertise, local legitimacy, and networks (Butterfoss et al., 2006; Covey, 2006; Covey 2009; Hardy et al., 2000; Hoffmann et al., 2012; Jacobson & Choi, 2008; Perrault, McClelland, Austin, & Sieppert, 2011; Rodriguez, 2012; Shaw 2003; Zakos & Edwards, 2006). This same literature also found that although partners can work together without a great deal of trust between them, trust is critical if the partnership is to be truly successful.

Compromise

Several researchers found that a) change in partnerships must be managed through compromise, b) partners must be comfortable with the change process as it unfolds, and c) partners can be a source of support to one another in navigating change (Balloch & Taylor, 2001; Banks, 2002; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), 2014). Ozaki et al. (2007) also pointed out that as partners must often work across differing cultural, organizational, and community boundaries, the ability to seek understanding and compromise is important to their joint success. Overall, being adaptable and compromising to embrace change is amply highlighted in the literature as an important factor in successful partnerships (Hoffmann et al., 2012; Jacobson & Choi, 2008; McCarthy & Possingham, 2007).

Additional research indicates that ongoing partnerships will necessitate the time to work through things together and sometimes even to renegotiate the terms of the arrangement,

and that this will often require great patience (Hill et al., 2008; Hoffmann et al., 2012; Wynn et al., 2006; Zakos & Edwards, 2006). Studies by Bartczak (2015) and Shaw (2003) both found that in making sure flexibility is maintained as the partnership and work evolve, clearly defined roles are important in this process.

Leadership Characteristics

The literature indicates embracing the continual learning that partnership effectiveness requires is seen as a key asset for partnership leaders (Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001; Walters & Holling, 1990), as is the ability to work across professional, organizational, and other boundaries (Banks, 2002; GEO, 2014; Hardy et al., 2000). Building on much of this research, Buettner, Morrison and Wasicek (2002) found that partnership leaders must also be able to leverage their networks, accept less institutional autonomy in support of collective decision-making, and set aside personal agendas in pursuit of the partnership's goals. In further advancing research into the characteristics of successful partnership leaders, Eddy (2010) found that while leaders need to be able to leverage their networks and partnerships to advance their organizational missions, they must also hold the interests of all partners as equal priority through partner advocacy. He added that leaders must also be trusting, trustworthy, and visionary in inspiring others (p. 27-28). Kouzes and Posner (2012) maintained that another important characteristic of partnership leaders is credibility, so that as the carrier of the message, they are believed.

Process and Structure

Roles, Decision Making, and Accountability

Several researchers have examined decision making and responsibility in partnerships and found collective ownership important to ensure progress made is maintained, and that all parties take ownership over the work (Banks, 2002; GEO, 2014; Gray, 1989; Hardy et al., 2000;

Hill et al., 2008; Holton, 2013; Institute for Public Policy, 2001; Perrault et al., 2011; Zakos & Edwards, 2006). Additional studies found that clearly defined roles and responsibilities among partners helped maintain focus on process and outcomes, versus becoming distracted by and placing too much attention on structure and inputs (Butterfoss et al., 1996; Butterfoss & Kegl, 2002; Hoffmann, et al., 2012; Holton, 2013; Jacobson & Choi, 2008). A report from Corporate Voices for Working Families (2012) also found clearly defined roles and responsibilities for partners as important to success.

Change, Pace, and Patience

According to Deering and Murphy (2003), partnership work involves change, and members must be comfortable with ambiguity and discord so that the best approach to joint work can be found. Additional research also found that comfort with change is important, because it can encompass changes in key people, roles, goals, and even the issue of focus, and that sustainable partnerships are flexible in making adjustments as new information and circumstances are revealed (Amey, 2007). Amey (2010) posits that as partnerships develop in a non-linear fashion, this can mean starts, stops, and changes of course are common as members develop shared understanding and processes, and that working in this way requires a level of comfort with ambiguity and any accompanying discord.

Communication

Research has indicated good communication entails high quality information, effective information sharing, and high levels of participation (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Badaracco, 1991; Trefry, 2006). Mohr and Speckman (1994) go so far as to state that the absence of good quality communication by all members of a partnership can place the success of the partnership in doubt. In partnerships, the ability to deal with conflict was found to be an essential part of

good communication, as if partnership members cannot get past conflictual moments with their relationship intact, their ability to work together going forward is diminished (Ding, 1997; Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Monczka et al., 1998; Park and Ungson, 1997; Tilman, 1990).

The literature reveals that communication cannot just include the formal members of a partnership but must also reach the stakeholder groups their joint work impacts. Several researchers examined the role of other stakeholders in partnerships, and found that leaving them out of communication around the work and not seeking their input can result in the partnership's work being seen as illegitimate and not taken seriously (Audit Commission, 2002; Bauman & Smyth, 2007; Butterfoss et al., 1996; Gray, 1989; Institute for Public Policy, 2001; Keglar et al., 1998; Larson, Measham, & Williams, 2010; Perrault et al., 2011; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

In terms of communicating effectively, Deering and Murphy (2003) observed conversations that failed to dive beneath the surface of issues can serve to undermine trust between partners, but Bracken (2007) also found that in partnership communication, the tone for planning and problem solving must be trusting and non-threatening to be effective. Deering and Murphy (2003), along with Eddy (2010), also found open and effective communication between partners is aided by establishing a common working language among them, and Bracken (2007) indicated a benefit of developing this common language, is that trust among members is built.

The literature indicates that clear and consistent communication is an especially critical factor for high functioning partnerships (Hoffmann et al., 2012; Jacobson & Choi, 2008; Rogers et al., 1993; Shaw, 2003). The research of Soares (2010) sheds further light on this finding, as he posits that in establishing open and effective communication in a partnership, the commitment of all partners is strengthened.

According to Eddy (2010) and Ozaki et al. (2007), good communication is aided by possessing strong social capital that has been established through a broad network of positive relationships. They indicate that leveraging the power of these interpersonal networks is typically possible based on the mutual trust that has been established over time, and that the strength of these relationship and the position of individuals within a social network impact the partnership's ability to leverage power. These studies further found that the influence of such extended networks can contribute to a partnership's communication and functioning by providing information, enhancing reputation and authority, and even providing tangible resources such as funding, facilities, and technology.

According to several researchers (Bickenbach and Liu, 2010; Drejer & Vinding, 2007; GEO, 2014; Narula & Santangelo, 2009), strong interpersonal relationships between partners in which open and honest, face-to-face communication is possible, communication is enhanced in the partnership. These studies also found that high levels of in-person interaction helped ensure that completeness, credibility, and accuracy of information is safeguarded.

Overall, according to a study by Corporate Voices for Working Families (2012), communication was found to be a binding agent that that serves to hold all the pieces of a partnership together.

Purpose

Values and Vision

Prevalent in the research on partnerships, is the observation that having a shared vision is a key element of success (Holton, 2013; Jacobson & Choi, 2008; Kegler, Steckler, Malek, & McLeroy, 1998; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Shaw, 2003). Additionally, other researchers learned that strong partnerships also depend on having a shared passion and favorable social

relationships, as much as they do more visible assets such as funding, time, facilities, and technology (Deering & Murphy, 2003; Eddy, 2010; Eisner, 2010; Gage, 2004). These same studies also found that when conflict arose out of shared passion, it was best managed when viewed as an opportunity for inspiration and change, and that shared vision and values can culminate in great collective power to achieve identified goals. Overall, the researchers' consensus was that the success of partnerships is highly dependent on this reality.

Goals

Studies by Butterfoss & Kegl (2002), Hoffmann et al. (2012), Holton (2013), and Roussos and Fawcett (2000), established that having clear, measurable, and attainable goals helps identify the data needed to show progress in a partnership. They also indicated that once a data collection process is established, it is important to make sure monitoring is in place that can identify whether things are off track or on course. Corporate Voices for Working Families (2012) found the need to continually monitor and measure data as relevant to the success of any successful partnership.

Resources and Champions

Resources

Studies examining the impact of resources on the success of partnerships, revealed that adequate financial and other resources allowed increased synergy among members, and their ability to better achieve identified goals (Butterfoss & Kegl, 2002; Kegl et al., 1998; Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Wolff, 2001). This body of research also indicated that when valuable assets are combined in a collaboration, achievements can transcend the limitations of what a single organization could accomplish alone.

Champions

According to Amey (2010) and Linden (2002), in successful partnerships, a champion emerges to drive the work. Further analysis of this role by these researchers revealed that this person can be a formal leader, such as a president or CEO, but that this can be challenging unless the work is all inclusive of the broad organizational scope of responsibilities in that person's purview. They found the role of this positional leader is still critical however, as they must ensure necessary resource allocations for the work and reinforce efforts. They further indicated that a champion can be someone in a different sort of position who commits to energizing the work and moving it forward, but that regardless of position, this person must transcend the boundaries of their own organization to connect with others important to the work.

In Amey's 2010 study, it was also observed that champions are seen as playing a large part in (a) creating the vision that makes the need for the partnership clear, (b) shepherding processes, (c) ensuring buy-in, (d) communicating goals and outcomes, and (e) generating and maintaining a high level of commitment to the work (p. 20). She also cautions however, that the work must not become too associated with one person and must be institutionalized for it to be sustainable.

Community Colleges as Collaborators and Partners

Mohr and Spekman (1994) stressed the similarities between partnerships and collaboration, defining them as "purposive strategic relationships between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and acknowledge a high level of mutual interdependence. They join efforts to achieve goals that each firm, acting alone, could not attain easily" (p. 135). Eddy (2010) studied the value of partnerships specifically in academia and stated that challenging issues in this sector could be solved by "parleying resources, knowledge,

and skills of individual partners to achieve joint goals and objectives” (p. vii). Her research emphasized that collaborations and partnerships in higher education take many forms and are known by many names including strategic alliances, joint ventures, consortia, collaborative agreements, and coalitions.

History and Drivers

In their 2014 examination of community colleges, Cohen, et. al described how these colleges partner with other organizations. They indicate that historically, the junior college movement began as an outgrowth of the K-12 system and used existing high schools as sites to deliver services. Today community colleges depend on relationships and partnerships with other educational institutions, businesses, government, community-based organizations, philanthropic funders, and community groups to achieve their missions, as each of these partners have access to different resources and supports that can help a community college achieve its identified goals. An increasingly diverse study body who represent a wide variety of needs, and industry demands to provide new degrees and credentials, have also driven the need for community colleges to partner.

Governance Structures, Financial Structures, and Transparency

Bowen et al. (1998) observed that somewhat unseen factors had influence on community college governance, which included the historical values and customs in each state. They stated, “Several historical factors - such as the constitutional strength of the governor, the constitutional status of institutions, voter initiatives, and political influences - affect system design and governance structures” (p. 37). They went on to indicate that in addition to the United States Federal government, each state has its own constitutional document as well, by which community colleges must abide.

Bowen et al. (1998) maintained that states “...differ in the way they link institutions (community colleges) to one another and to state government, and the way they use the key work processes” (p. 51). They also indicated that the degree to which community colleges are formally linked in a state varies widely, and that no principal logic seemed to have guided the evolution of how a state structured its community college system. Each structure came to pass as a result of geography, political culture, and history more than from an intentional effort to follow a specific set of design standards (p. 53). Their research asserted that each state government’s history influenced the kind of community college governance structure developed, and that factors such as the power of the governor, strength of the private higher education sector, constitutional status for public institutions, and voter initiatives, all impacted the way each structured community college governance.

Lovell and Trough (2002) examined the effect of collective bargaining on community college governance. They found that collective bargaining agreements that encompassed all community colleges in a state system had great influence over the larger governance system. However, even when a community college is not part of a state-system, and thus operates more independently, they indicated that union influence can still impact governance structure indirectly in ways such as influencing who is elected to a college’s board.

In their analysis of how government policies affect community college governance, Lovell & Trough (2002) learned that one aspect of policy which has an effect on governance is state funding. While colleges in some states collect revenue through local taxes, funding trends from the past few decades point to reduced local support and a shift towards a greater portion of general operating funds coming from state aid. Katsinas et al. (2016) found that as aspects of

funding change for community colleges over time, the responsibility of covering the cost of higher education is shifting towards the student through increased tuition and fees.

In Schuets' 2008 examination of the various community college governance structures, she indicated that although governance structures vary from state to state, all are characterized by a complex web of arrangements and relationships that have emerged over time. She described state-level coordination of such structures as "...the formal mechanism that states use to organize higher education. The responsibilities of coordinating boards include state-wide planning and policy leadership; defining the mission for each postsecondary institution in the state; academic program review and approval; resource allocation...and etc." (p. 92).

In the same analysis, Schuets described the impact of a state's prescribed governance structure on a community college, as well as governance implications stemming from factors specific to higher education. She indicated that for community colleges, state-by-state choice of how they are governed results in variations in things like level of state versus local control, elected versus state or locally appointed board members, degree of taxing authority, and voluntary versus mandated shared governance. She indicated that matters specific to higher education that influence how a community college's governance structure is designed, include things like board composition, collective bargaining, state and federal policies, and the political-historical context of higher education in each state. Schuets went on to discuss how board composition also impacts community college governance. Depending on the state, members can be appointed or elected. In states that are part of a larger community college system, there are more layers of governance, whereas as in states that allow community colleges to operate more independently, more control is retained at the local level.

According to the US Department of Education (Laws and Guidance, n.d.), the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), as amended by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA), includes many disclosure and reporting requirements for educational institutions such as community colleges. A disclosure requirement is information that a postsecondary education institution is required to distribute or make available to another party, such as employees or students. A reporting requirement is information submitted to the U.S. Department of Education or other agencies. Disclosure and reporting requirements sometimes overlap.

As publicly funded institutions under these Acts, community colleges must routinely and transparently make information publicly available in a number of areas. In summarizing the Act, it was found that these include policies, information, and statistics related to things such as: protected classes like women and those with disabilities; general student data; academics and accreditation; general institutional information around things like employee and facility policies; student resources; student financial information related to aid and tuition; campus health and safety; student outcomes; and athletics.

Lessons Learned and Leadership

Buettner et al. (2002) state that community college leaders who think from a systems perspective when identifying partnership as a way to improve services for their students will better achieve and sustain effectiveness. Flexibility and the ability to address obstacles often out of their control were cited as important characteristics for leaders in partnerships, but the researchers also stated that this can pose a challenge, as true partnerships come with reduced autonomy for those leading. They also observed that the patience to engage in shared decision making is critical to effective partnerships, and that adequate focus on preparation for partnership and efforts to understand one another's organizational cultures also contributed to success.

Finally, they indicated that ideas not aligned with culture will slow progress, give rise to miscommunication, and create barriers that decrease effectiveness.

Soares (2010) found that, in partnerships, community colleges must possess the ability to use data to drive change, as well as in addressing circumstances in which the larger goals of individual partners are not being met. In 2013, The American Association of Community Colleges also found that the ability to leverage networks and partnerships to advance organizational mission, vision, and goals was an essential characteristic of a successful community college leader. However, as Eddy previously found in 2010, to be an effective partnership leader in general, one must also be able to combine ability to leverage networks with partner advocacy.

A case study of a community college and nonprofit organization partnership in Virginia produced lessons to ensure collaboration is effective (Browning, Hatch, & Montes, 2015). Through their work, contributing factors were found to be developing a solid base of trust, mutual accountability, all partners both giving and receiving benefits, leveraging assets from all partners, patience and intention from management in building and maintaining effort, and continually reporting back on data that is of benefit for all involved (pp. 16-17).

In examining the future of community college leadership, the literature reveals that a shortage of community college leaders is on the horizon in the coming decade, and that the skills required of those that step into these roles will likely require the ability to partner with other organizations to better serve their students (Strom, Sanchez, & Downey-Schilling, 2011; American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Foundations and the Grantee Relationship

Charities and Foundations

According to the Council on Foundations (Foundation Basics, n.d.), charities are a large and diverse group of organizations, classified under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. This tax status has legal considerations that must be followed, such as the ability for donors to generally take deductions on their income taxes for charitable contributions; that grants and activities cannot support or oppose candidates for public office; and that grants and other payments must be made within specific guidelines, and for charitable purposes (para. 1).

The IRS (n.d.) states that, “Every organization that qualifies for tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Code is further classified as either a public charity or a private foundation. Under section 508, every organization is automatically classified as a private foundation unless it meets one of the exceptions listed in section 509(a). Private foundations typically have a single major source of funding (usually gifts from one family or corporation rather than funding from many sources) and most have as their primary activity the making of grants to other charitable organizations and to individuals, rather than the direct operation of charitable programs” (p. 4).

The term foundation has no precise meaning in the nonprofit sector, but the Council on Foundations (Foundation Basics, n.d.) defines them as “an entity that supports charitable activities by making grants to unrelated organizations or institutions or to individuals for scientific, educational, cultural, religious, or other charitable purposes” (para. 7). They also indicate that foundations are often mostly engaged in grantmaking activities, but that some may direct their own charitable activities or programs. They maintain that within the field of philanthropy, descriptive terms are used to differentiate between the various kinds of foundations, but that no matter how they are classified, foundations are all created to benefit

social, religious, educational, or other charitable needs. Foundations also generally have a board of directors, which guide giving decisions within specific guidelines based on the organization's field of interest and/or geographic area.

Governance Structures, Financial Structures, and Transparency

The Council on Foundations (Foundation Basics, n.d.) asserts that, among foundations, there exist some differences in governance and funding structures. Private independent foundations like the one of focus in this study are distinct from family or corporate foundations, in that they are funded by endowments from a single source, such as an individual or group. Family foundations were often originally funded by a single family who still maintain a role in its governance. Corporate foundations have been created and financially supported by a corporation but are a separate legal entity from the corporation. As such however, while giving and other policies must adhere to government regulations for charitable grantmaking, their other structures and focus are aligned with the founding corporation's values. Private operating foundations also exist, but they primarily operate their own charitable programs, and can make grants as well.

Another kind of foundation is a public foundation; these are essentially public charities like hospitals, schools, churches, and other organizations that also make grants to eligible outside organizations. They typically receive their funds from multiple sources such as private foundations, individuals, government, and fees for services they provide. One example of a public charity / foundation is a community foundation, which exist to target grantmaking resources in a specific community.

The Council on Foundations explains that as tax-exempt organizations, the distinct difference between public and private foundations is a matter of federal tax law. As public

foundations receive more financial support from the public, they are subject to greater scrutiny to ensure adherence to standards of conduct. In comparison, private foundations may have more flexibility in how they choose to operate overall, but they still have to abide by governance and tax structures dictated by the country and state within which they reside.

The Council on Foundations additionally indicates that as tax-exempt organizations, all foundations must make annual tax returns and exemption applications filed with the IRS available to the public. IRS form 990 is used for nonprofits to report annual financial and related information. However, in the case of private foundations, this form is specifically categorized as a 990-PF. This form provides a snapshot of the financial health and expenditures of a private foundation at a specific point in time.

First, it provides information that helps government agencies (the IRS and state charity regulators) enforce the laws that govern nonprofits. For example, it helps government regulators learn whether groups have been spending their funds in a way that might cause them to lose their charitable and tax-exempt status. Second, the Form 990-PF provides a great deal of financial information about the filing organization's financial condition, about its financial strength or weakness and about such things as the sources of its income and its mandate or funding interests" (para. 5).

Nober (2010) explained the governance structure of a private foundation. She indicated that these organizations must operate from their Articles of Incorporation, which serves as their constitution, and that this formative document guides things like the organization's purpose and the size of its governing board. She also indicated that state laws governing nonprofit boards also require Bylaws, which is a document that governs the organization's day-to-day operations, election of officers and directors or trustees, and other governance issues.

Snow (2019) indicated that in some ways, limitations placed on private foundations were found to be less restrictive than those placed on other kinds of nonprofit organizations. With more public funding comes increased accountability and transparency requirements, and she found the effect of these requirements apparent when it impacted the pace at which decisions could be made related to the implementation of or changes to work. She stated “Because a private foundation is an independent, free-standing legal entity, it allows for a very high degree of control. It may be governed solely by its donor(s) or by a board consisting of family and/or other individuals chosen by the donor(s)” (para. 7).

Role and Influence of Foundation Program Officers

In a Grantee Perception Report conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (Buteau, Glickman, & Leiwant, 2017), eighty-six independent, community, and corporate foundations as well as public charities participated, representing a diverse array of funding priorities, staff size, and financial resources. Of the 25,906 grantees invited to participate, over 17,000 responded for a 66.6 % return rate. Three findings emerged as important to helping create a strong grantee-funder relationship:

1. Program officers played an important role in shaping the funder-grantee relationship.
2. The most powerful ways for program officers to strengthen relationships were to develop an understanding of grantee organizations and the context in which they work and to be transparent.
3. Program officers strengthened funder-grantee relationships by ensuring that selection processes were helpful and being open to grantees’ ideas about foundations’ strategies, which translated into grantees feeling more supported and less pressured to modify their proposal in order to receive funding (p. 13).

Trust and Mutual Respect

Mutual respect and maintaining trust were found throughout the literature to be key in establishing an effective funder-grantee relationship (Bartczak, 2015; Celep, Brenner, & Mosher-

Williams, 2016; Fehler-Cabral, James, Preskill, & Long, 2016; Sanders et al., 2017; Warner, 2015). In Buteau et al.'s 2017 survey, grantees maintained that the role of the program officer in their relationship with a foundation is so important, that it outweighs their experience in working with the larger foundation in general, but that the experience can vary between program officers at the same organization. Grantees reported that "Staff create a culture of trust and understanding through a solutions-driven approach, rather than one that creates fear in sharing the challenges that are faced in meeting deliverables" (p. 14). Yet grantees of other program officers at that same foundation asked the foundation to, "Please listen a bit more to us as people living in and serving the region. We know the region and its needs and requirements. We have the right ideas and team to assist the community, but we need the foundation's support" (p. 14).

In interviewing program officers identified by grantees as skilled in building good relationships, Buteau et al., (2017) highlighted things like the importance placed on trust and mutual accountability, understanding the grantee organization, vulnerability by both the program officer and grantee in sharing truths without posturing, and sharing written information with grantees to check for accuracy before reporting content up to foundation leadership. Overall, it was found that aspects of the grantee relationship most strongly shaped by the program officer included helpfulness of the selection process, helpfulness of the reporting/evaluation process, helpfulness of the foundation in assessing progress toward grantee goals, helpfulness of the foundation in addressing grantees' challenges, overall transparency, and total time grantees spend on foundations' processes (p. 14).

Understanding the Context in which Grantees Work

In summarizing a study by Read and Manno from 2011, program officers identified by grantees as demonstrating good practices in understanding grantees and the context in which

they work, highlighted things including listening a lot; avoiding judgment; communicating openly; being vulnerable and authentic; resisting the need to be seen as the expert; personally visiting grantees as often as possible; and being aware of the power dynamic that exists when representing a foundation and its expansive financial resources. From the same study, having a good relationship with grantees and understanding their local context was also found to matter in creating effective measurement tools that worked for both parties and accurately measured progress.

In surveying grantees, Buteau et al. (2017) found that the relationship between the program officer and grantee is strengthened, when program officers work to better understand the grantee organization and the contexts in which they work. Through this survey, grantees indicated that program officers should work to understand their organizations' grantee organizations' strategy and goals; awareness of grantee organizations' challenges; the fields in which grantees work; grantees' local communities, the grantees' social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors that affect their work; intended beneficiaries' needs; and the extent to which funding priorities reflect a deep understanding of grantees' intended beneficiaries' needs (p. 19).

Transparency

Consistency in behavior between the internal workings of a foundation and their external interactions with grantees was found to translate into transparency, and to contribute to building increased trust in the relationship (Celep, et al., 2016). In the Buteau et al. (2017) survey, grantees indicated that transparency between them and their program officer was about clarity, openness, and honesty. They maintained there were things program officers could do from the beginning of the relationship to enhance transparency within it. These included (1) being

available to the grantee, (2) making it clear that grantees could be transparent about challenges, (3) clarifying shared expectations, (4) both giving and expecting reciprocal transparency and accountability, and (5) recognizing the power imbalance present between the organizations and working to break that barrier down (pp. 23-26).

Communication

Research finds grantees prioritize the frequency and quality of interaction and communication in creating a good funder-grantee relationship, value clarity from a foundation around its goals and strategies, and want consistency of information over time (Bartczak, 2015; Buteau et al., 2017; Sanders et al., 2017). Interactions perceived by grantees as fair, comfortable, and responsive were found critical by Buteau et al. (2017), especially before they were comfortable approaching funders when problems arose. In the same survey, grantees indicated that prompt program officer and other staff responses to their requests for information, contributed to them having a more positive view of the relationship in general. Asking and listening before acting were also found to be important to grantees when communicating with a foundation, as this built a more positive relationship between them (Sanders et al., 2017).

The Impact of a Foundation's Organizational Culture

In reference to foundations, Celep et al. (2016) stated, "Culture is a critical strategy for large-scale change. It involves the articulation and consistent, long-term promotion of the values, norms, and daily behaviors that allow people, organizations, and communities to align their actions in a disciplined way that contributes to progress" (p. 116). In their research they found that foundations that wanted to achieve large-scale social change needed to possess characteristics such as a "focus on outcomes, transparency, authenticity, collaboration, racial equity and inclusion, and openness to risk" (p. 116).

A culture that supports learning was found important in funder-grantee partnerships, as research from the Center for Effective Philanthropy found that when foundation staff are knowledgeable about the communities in which they work, feel high levels of empowerment, and learn from past performance, grantees are more likely to perceive greater clarity and consistency, perceive the foundation to have more impact, and feel more positive about the quality of their relationships (Bolduc, 2016). As reported by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) in 2017, many foundation staff reported a belief that their organizational culture placed focus on ongoing organizational learning and improvement, but that there was still room for growth here.

Buteau et al. (2017) examined the effective of a foundation's organizational culture on how a program officer worked with grantees. Their survey included 150 program officers, some of whom who reported that they don't always feel supported when placing priority on relationship building. According to their research, more than half of program officers surveyed said spending time developing and maintaining relationships with grantees should take up the largest amount of their time, yet only 36% indicated that was the case.

Sanders et al. (2017) found that grantees appreciated when the culture within a foundation was caring and collaborative, and that foundation staff who maintained this kind of environment allowed for teamwork and collegial support that helped them move past problems and on to a solutions-focus in their work. Foundation staff also described their grantees as "partners" and stated that building a good relationship was central to achieving their mutually established goals. In a study by Fine, Raynor, Mowles, and Sood (2017) that examined foundations' assessments of their own capacity to support grantees, one respondent stated, "For all foundations, there's a risk of sitting in our ivory tower that breaks down two-way

communication and transparency. I find adaptive capacity and organizational culture are both critical for determining how grantee relationships are managed” (p. 90).

Developing Shared Goals and Measuring Success

According to Roussos and Fawcett (2000), emphasis on outcomes by funding partners has been shown to enhance partnership effectiveness in working together to achieve identified and measured goals. Greco, Grieve, and McCullough (2010) found that doing this successfully required a paradigm shift in how foundations and grantees worked together, so that deeper understanding of goals and mutual self-interest, and an environment of continuous learning, could be fostered. Read and Manno (2011) noted that for funders and grantees to achieve real change and be effective partners, they must together define what success means in the work, the results desired, and how progress will be tracked. They observed that measuring success in this way is benefitted by shifting from the traditional funder/grantee model to one focused on long-term relationships with trusted partners. In addition to developing shared goals and strategies, Mayhew (2012) found that the nature of the funder-grantee relationship influences how well evaluation is used in measuring the success of their work together.

Research indicates that how funders implement their grantee selection process impacts the ground upon which mutual understanding of shared goals, strategies, and values is built with grantees (Buteau et al., 2017). This same research indicates that a helpful and clear selection process sets the stage for productive and meaningful conversations between the two organizations and promotes shared respect. Grantees indicated that openness during the selection process also aided in building stronger relationships between the two organizations, and that program officers seen as skilled in this area displayed characteristics such as being a good listener, sharing openly, and seeking feedback on how to better support grantee work.

Strategic Funding and Partnerships

In 2007, the Center for Effective Philanthropy stated that if foundations are not able to change their internal operations, culture, competencies, and structures to align with the more strategic approach to solving community problems that they desire, they will not have adopted the deeper institutional changes needed to support the work (Bolduc, Buteau, Laughlin, Ragin, & Ross, 2007).

According to Patrizi and Thompson (2010), funder strategies are often “developed in isolation from the grantees that execute them, and misaligned foundation structures, processes, and cultures do not support strategic endeavors” (p. 52). In a survey of senior foundation staff, many acknowledged that they struggle with current approaches to strategic philanthropy, which could explain why one respondent described it as more of an “academic exercise than anything else” (p. 53). As cited in Warner (2015), the James Irvine Foundation defined strategic community initiatives as “strategic effort, working in partnership with local nonprofit organizations, to invest significant money and time to address a specific community issue” (p. 2). Warner also indicated that, in looking for more effective ways to pursue strategic community initiatives, a partnership approach by foundations gives rise to a “very different working relationship with grantees” (p. 65).

Place-based and Embedded Funders

According to Karlström, Brown, Chaskin, and Richman (2009), “Embedded funders are place-based foundations that (1) commit to working in a particular community or communities over an extended period of time; (2) pursue direct and ongoing relationships with a range of community actors; (3) make community relationships and partnerships a primary vehicle of their philanthropic operation; and (4) provide extensive supports and resources beyond conventional

grantmaking” (p. 51). Burns and Brown (2012), indicate that foundations following a place-based funding strategy focus grant investments in a specific community to support broader community change, and may or may not reside in the same hometown as their grantees.

In a 2012 Burns and Brown report, they captured knowledge and lessons learned from funders nation-wide who engaged in grant-making in a geographically defined community. Various options were found in how funders approach community relationships in advancing their place-based work.

Burns and Brown (2012) highlight the work of Brown and Fiester (2007), FSG (2011), and Harder + Company (2011) in summarizing lessons learned in effectively practicing place-based work. This body of research points to establishing partnerships in which roles are defined, collective expectations are set, accountabilities are in place, resources are appropriately utilized, conflict is positively managed, performance issues are addressed, and communication is well-managed, as critical to the work. Burns and Brown also state that “Missteps can slow progress and threaten to derail an effort entirely. Alternatively, skillful implementation can enhance or improve an imperfect design, make it easier to resolve differences, support expanding partnerships, and increase the momentum and confidence needed to sustain an effort over the longer term” (p. 34).

In designating a lead organization with which to work, Burns and Brown (2012) go on to indicate that funders expect this organization to bring its credibility and track record in advancing community needs and interests, and to develop the necessary community buy-in to make the work a success. The benefits for the funder in this kind of relationship are that they have a single point of contact for the work and can rely on the partner organization’s knowledge of community dynamics and leadership in implementing the work. However, they also indicate

that challenges can arise when the partner organization is not fully prepared to take on their role, as this can require “developing new staff capacities, modified practices and procedures, and new ways of working with residents and other neighborhood stakeholders” (pp. 14-15).

The Burns and Brown (2012) study also found that by clarifying the rules of how funders and partners engage together from the start, a robust and sustainable partnership can be built. According to the researchers, doing this “requires taking the time to understand the conditions under which each party operates — its institutional imperatives, capacities, pressures, and limitations. This mutual knowledge helps the parties reach agreement on roles and expectations, methods for resolving conflicts, and processes for communicating within and outside of the partnership” (p. 30).

From a convening of funders, evaluators, and community representatives engaged in place-based initiatives, insights were captured around effective learning practices and the role of evaluation in place-based work (Fehler-Cabral et al., 2016). The convening’s subsequent report stated that “place-based work by nature is a complex, long-term investment that can be unpredictable. This convening highlighted the critical role of funders in place-based work - not just from an investment standpoint, but also as a partner in the process” (p. 94).

Power Dynamics

Research finds that funder partnership approaches require thought and planning, and that even when grantees are involved in the planning process, it can be questionable as to whether they are real partners. (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). In a study of funder-grantee relationships, Fairfield and Wing (2008) found that lack of good collaboration impeded the ability of both parties to discuss important topics such as setbacks and future uncertainties.

Additionally, it was found that the perceived power imbalance between grantees and funders was tangible and had a great impact on performance.

According to Patrizi and Thompson (2010), learning and relationships can be impacted by “the power imbalance between foundations and their grantees, which inevitably distorts information flow and impedes feedback, particularly around what is not working. Overcoming this dynamic requires the time and trust to build a mutual understanding of and commitment to each other’s agenda” (p. 55). They also stated “the less trust we have in our partners, the more likely we are to micro-monitor them and require more data and reporting. Such irrelevant monitoring activities rarely succeed in building knowledge. Worse yet, they can lead to more mistrust and stalemated decisions about how to take important corrective action” (p. 55).

Even with intention and action related to overcoming the power imbalance, it has been found difficult to transcend the natural hierarchy existing when a funder provides financial support to a grantee (Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2011). Bartczak (2015) and Fehler-Cabral et al. (2016), asserted that funders and their grantees need to create space to purposely assess and discuss the power dynamics that exist in community work around things like race, class, equity, and also the power funders have in distributing resources to support grant work.

An Independent Sector study (2016) that included nonprofit and philanthropic organizations found one consistent impediment to them realizing success in their work together – strained relationships due to the power dynamic existing between them. Additional research (Sanders et al., 2017) found that when foundations provide funding support with fewer strings attached, grantees viewed that as sign of trust, and it helped to equalize the naturally occurring power imbalance that exists between the two organizations.

Perceptual Alignment and Misalignment with Grantees

Tierney and Fleishman (2012) indicate that for nonprofits and foundations to work together effectively, they must understand one another's perspectives. They also state that, "The ability to work effectively with your grantees is the fundamental operating requirement in the journey from aspirations to real impact. They, not you, are on the ground, doing most (if not all) of the heaviest lifting" (p. 151).

Through their research, they additionally found misalignment between grantee and funder perceptions when it came to the importance of foundation transparency as a support in assessing the performance of nonprofits. In response to the survey statement, "Foundations that are more transparent are more helpful to my organization's ability to work effectively," 91% of nonprofit CEOs surveyed agreed. In contrast, only 47% of foundation CEOs agreed with the statement "Foundations would be able to create more impact if they were more transparent with the nonprofits they fund." In the same study, the majority of nonprofit CEOs surveyed found their funders to be only "somewhat transparent" in their relationship, scoring them an average of 4.7 on a scale with 1 being "not at all transparent" and 7 being extremely transparent." Additional research by Brock, Buteau, and Gopal (2013), discovered that foundation transparency is necessary not just in areas such as finance and governance, as many grantees are more interested in foundations being "clear, open, and honest about the processes and decisions that are relevant to nonprofits' work" (p. 6).

Buteau, Chaffin, and Gopal (2014) examined the alignment of foundations and their grantees in four areas of foundation practices from both the grantee and foundation Chief Executive Officers (CEO) perspectives. Their study found alignment of perspective in the degree to which foundations were aware of nonprofit challenges and in their ability to use their resources to help grantees. An additional finding that emerged however, was that although

aligned on the topic of whether foundations were doing a good job of understanding nonprofit challenges, only slightly more than half of each group felt foundations were doing enough here. This meant almost half of both groups felt there was room for improvement in this area.

Based on information derived from the work of Buteau et al., (2017), one of the most powerful ways for foundation program officers to strengthen grantee relationships is to develop an understanding of grantee organizations and the context in which they work. This is important based on Buteau et al.'s (2014) previous finding, that nearly half of foundations and nonprofits surveyed felt improvement was needed in developing this understanding.

Best Practices in Grantmaking

Independent Sector (n.d.) defines itself as a “national membership organization that brings together a diverse set of nonprofits, foundations, and corporations to advance the common good” (para.1). A quote by its former President, Sara E. Melendez, stressed the importance of creating a shared understanding of what an authentic and effective partnership looks like between foundations and grantees, when she stated “What concerns me is that some people seem to think that a partnership is as simple as a business or foundation writing a check and the nonprofit using the funds to do the work” (Boris, 2000, p. 82).

Wei-Skillern and Silver (2013) point out that more research needs to be conducted into how leadership and culture contribute to partnership success, when a funder seeks to achieve transformational change. In GEO surveys of funders from 2009 and 2017, best practices in grantmaking were collected that were felt to contribute to better and more successful relationships with grantees.

In spite of how these practices were felt to positively impact funder / grantee relationships, the 2017 GEO report indicated that the prevalence of multiyear grants and general

operating support remained mostly unchanged over the past decade. Slight increases were seen in capacity-building support and learning and evaluation activities, and funders indicated that the degree to which they sought grantee feedback in order to strengthen their relationships with grantees was increased as well. There was little reported change in the sharing of power between grantees and funders.

Regardless of funder past practices in grantmaking, it remains to be seen whether the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will have a notable influence on what grantmaking looks like in the future, and what the influence may be on funder and grantee relationships. As reported in the *Chronical for Philanthropy* (Daniels, 2020):

A group of three dozen foundations have pledged to temporarily loosen grant-making restrictions to help the nonprofits they support remain financially viable and concentrate on the services they provide. For philanthropy, which has a reputation for a plodding decision-making process, the coalition came together quickly. The idea was floated a week ago by the Ford Foundation and a group of grant makers that practice “trust-based” philanthropy. As of Thursday, the group included large national grant makers like the Hewlett, JPB, and Packard foundations and regional grant makers, including the Albuquerque and Kalamazoo community foundations and the Seattle Foundation. (para. 1)

In order to support grantees who continue to serve those in need during this unprecedented world-wide health and economic crisis, The Council on Foundations (A Call to Action, n.d.) put forth a larger call to action to the philanthropic community. At the time of this research, approximately 800 philanthropic organizations had made a pledge to do the following:

- Loosen or eliminate the restrictions on current grants. This can include converting project-based grants to unrestricted support; accelerating payment schedules; and not holding grantees responsible if conferences, events, and other project deliverables must be postponed or canceled.
- Make new grants as unrestricted as possible, so nonprofit partners have maximum flexibility to respond to this crisis. We will also support organizations created and led by the communities most affected that we may not fund currently.
- Reduce what we ask of our nonprofit partners, postponing reporting requirements, site visits, and other demands on their time during this challenging period.

- Contribute to community-based emergency response funds and other efforts to address the health and economic impact on those most affected by this pandemic.
- Communicate proactively and regularly about our decision-making and response to provide helpful information while not asking more of grantee partners.
- Commit to listening to our partners and especially to those communities least heard, lifting up their voices and experiences to inform public discourse and our own decision-making so we can act on their feedback. We recognize that the best solutions to the manifold crises caused by COVID-19 are not found within foundations.
- Support, as appropriate, grantee partners advocating for important public policy changes to fight the pandemic and deliver an equitable and just emergency response for all. This may include its economic impact on workers, such as expanded paid sick leave; increasing civic participation; access to affordable health care; and expanded income and rental assistance. It should also include lending our voices to calls to action led by grantee partners, at their direction and request.
- Learn from these emergency practices and share what they teach us about effective partnership and philanthropic support, so we may consider adjusting our practices more fundamentally in the future, in more stable times, based on all we learn. (para. 4)

Chapter Summary

It is only through creating a partnership with intention, and by paying attention to the critical factors of success, that it will more likely achieve its goals. Good partnerships need champions and a shared vision to start things off on the right foot. A good history of working together is an asset, but the absence of this must not sabotage the work before it starts.

Partners must enter and participate in the relationship on equal footing when it comes to decision making and accountability. Honest communication is critical if the work is to stay on track, and trust developed and maintained on all fronts. Flexibility and patience are especially important as the work evolves, as are ongoing measurement and learning.

Support from leaders is important to ensuring buy-in and adequate resources, as is clarity around what each partner will give to and receive from the relationship. And finally, the practical value of the partnership must be made apparent to not only the partners, but also other stakeholders if they are to embrace and sustain the change the partnership seeks to achieve.

Aspects of foundation and grantee interactions, cultures, and practices that contribute to developing a good relationship between the two organizations show alignment with best practices in partnership research. This is especially true in the areas of trust, respect, transparency, and communication. An especially challenging area of negotiation in the funder and grantee relationship, whether spoken or unspoken, is that of the power imbalance that exists between the two organizations due to their usually disproportionate contribution of financial resources. Clearly individual leadership and larger organizational level traits also play an important role in a partnership's success or failure, but in the case of funders and grantees, program officers play an especially significant role.

The literature is abundant in capturing general principles that impact partnerships, and it also provides a good picture of what impacts foundation and grantee relationships. However, linking principles from both of these areas directly to examples of community college and funder relationships and partnerships is missing. Data that can measure and evaluate such partnerships will add to the literature on this topic, and this case study will assist in this effort by gathering and analyzing such data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative research method used in this study and rationale for its selection: “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). A qualitative research approach was determined as appropriate as the researcher’s goal was to learn from the human of experiences of individuals involved in the partnership that is the focus of this study.

The research design’s principal strategy was to use in-depth interviews with institutional representatives associated with this partnership, to better understand their perceptions and experiences related to community college and funder relationships and partnerships in general. The intent was to discover their varying perspectives on these relationships, and how such variance impacts their work together. Benefits and challenges for each institution in their role was also sought to be understood. The researcher believed that a deeper understanding of their perspectives would serve to inform the practices of both funders and community colleges in better working together to achieve established goals. In addition to the in-depth interviews, a comprehensive document review and analysis was conducted to augment the interview data and provide further substance to findings.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do community college and funder perspectives on their working relationships and partnerships differ and align?
2. How do these perspectives impact their work together?
3. How can community colleges and funders leverage partnership best practices to the benefit of their mutual goals?

Research Design

The intent of this study was to learn from the representatives of institutions associated with this case study in order to improve practices in partnering to achieve established goals. In light of this, it is well aligned with the goals of a qualitative research design. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), “Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants. This approach implies an emphasis on exploration, discovery, and description” (p. 27).

There are various strategies of qualitative research, which include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and critical inquiry (Merriam, 2009, pp. 24-34). For this study, however, a case study approach was considered the most appropriate as it allows for “an intensive description and analysis of a bounded social phenomenon (or multiple bounded phenomena), be this a social unit of a system such as a program, institution, or a process” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31). According to Yin (2009) it also lets the researcher study a phenomenon in its real-life context when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not completely clear.

This partnership examination was well suited to a single case study strategy because it represents a bounded system, which is described as an entity or unit around which there are boundaries (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). In this case, the unit of study is limited to the organizations, individuals, and relationships that exist to execute the joint work between the organizations in this study. As the work of this partnership has existed over decades and through a multitude of

grants, data collection was limited to interviews with the four key individuals who currently play a central role in this partnership, or who have done so within the ten years prior to this study.

Relevant documents were also collected and included to supplement the data.

Merriam (2009) described special features of a case study in characterizing them as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, all of which lend well to the study of this partnership. Particularistic means the study focuses on a particular situation, program, event or phenomenon, while descriptive means that the final product of the study will provide a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon. Heuristic is defined as the case study illuminating the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon of study (pp. 43-44). Case studies are also more concrete and contextual for the reader, as interpretation is developed based on their own experience or understanding. The reference population is also determined by the reader, thus in generalizing the findings they have some population in mind.

In case studies participants are asked to describe their actual experiences of events associated with the study of focus. This lends to descriptions being more graphic, detailed, and representative of their unique experience. This gathering of unique experiences can expand the existing base of knowledge and allow the researcher to consider new theories and areas for future research (Merriam, 2009, p. 51).

Data Collection

In this study, in-depth interviews served as a rich source of research data. Of equal importance, however, was the thorough document analysis that revealed important information not captured during interviews.

Interviews

In this study, interviews were conducted with four individuals currently employed by the institutions of focus in this study. All had varying degrees of experience in their roles and in their current fields, but all had direct experience with the relationship of this particular Community College and Funder. Their unique perspectives and broad range of experiences allowed them to provide both historical and current perspectives on this working relationship.

In this study, two participants (one from each organization) had been engaged in the partnership for approximately five years, a third for almost 10 years, and the fourth almost 15 years. The individuals interviewed through this study from the College occupied positions such as current and former program staff employed through a grant from this funder, or those with general grant oversight on a higher level on behalf of the institution. The funder participants interviewed included current or former local Foundation program officers.

As the researcher had previously been associated with this partnership, she verbally extended informal invitations to participate in this study and followed up with formal confirmation letters via email. The four interviews conducted over a one-month period included:

1. Current College Administrator I
2. Current College Administrator II
3. Current Funder I
4. Current Funder II

Interviews were conducted at the participant's organization in a private office or meeting room, or via phone. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent at the beginning of the meeting that included the purpose of the research, intended use of responses, potential benefits and risks of participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the right of withdrawal.

Interviews were semi-structured and used a prepared set of questions. The researcher used probing techniques as necessary to clarify answers or reveal deeper meaning. Rubin and Rubin (2012) indicate probing allows the researcher to keep participants talking about a topic, expand upon answers that are unclear, or offer more detail which could benefit the study (p. 6). Seidman (2013) offers a different perspective on this questioning tactic, however, and indicates it can be helpful to think of it as “exploring” with the participant versus “probing” into what they have said (p. 86).

The researcher prepared an initial set of questions for both interview groups that were almost identical. The funders were asked two additional questions to better understand (1) how partnership characteristics may vary between types of grantees, and (2) the role of seeking grantee feedback in their work. During the interview process, rich conversation was welcomed by the researcher, which resulted when participant responses veered away from the specific question being asked. This provided additional insight around issues of relevance to this study. This type of interaction enhanced understanding around participant experiences, concerns, and points of view beyond those provided through the prepared questions and offered a deeper and more meaningful interview outcome. This offered great value to the study.

Although 60 minutes was scheduled for each interview, one took slightly less than an hour, and one took 90 minutes. There were 18 questions presented to all participants, and 20 to the Funder representatives. However, five of the questions were intended to collect background information such as (1) length of time each participant had served in their current role, (2) time worked in their sector, (3) level of experience with community college and funder relationships, (4) years spent engaged in this specific partnership, and (5) the roles of other staff at their institution who influence this relationship in some way. The primary focus of the remaining

questions was related to their individual perspectives on (1) the characteristics of effective and ineffective partnerships in general, (2) how these characteristics impact the work between community colleges and funders, and (3) how this has specifically played out in the relationship between these two organizations. Special attention was placed on lessons learned about partnership barriers in this relationship and opportunities to build on strengths to enhance the partnership.

Each interview was audiotaped using a digital recording device, and a transcriptionist hired to ensure verbatim transcription of the interviews. Transcription was provided to the researcher in Microsoft Word documents, and a written process to manage the interview data and confidentiality agreement were secured with the transcriptionist. The researcher uploaded the transcribed data into QDA Miner Lite, a computer assisted qualitative analysis software, which can be used for the analysis of textual data such as interview and news transcripts, open-ended responses, etc. as well as for the analysis of still images. For the purposes of this study, the software was only used to more easily organize coded data as the researcher identified important themes. It was also helpful in understanding the frequency with which themes occurred.

Documents

A thorough review of documents collected as part of this study was conducted. An initial review informed research focus, and a second and more detailed and deliberate review happened as they were sorted and coded for this study. Documents revealed details important to understanding the partnership and consisted of formal grant agreements and related letters, grant proposals and revised copies, grant and budget guidelines, funded program budgets and business plans, evaluation and planning documents, annual reports and other historical publications, the Funder's grant award history, and a selection of internal emails between College staff involved

in this partnership or as communication with a Funder representative. As documents reviewed are not publicly accessible and would diminish the ability to retain anonymity of the individuals and organizations of focus in this study, they have not been included in the reference list.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher's previous and current professional relationship with the organizations involved impacts the anonymity of the partners for the purposes of this study. In order to encourage confidentiality of individual participants, personal names and titles as well as organizational names were concealed. All information was instead coded and referred to by the sector each participant represented and a corresponding Roman numeral, for example "Funder I."

Although minimal, some possible risk to the relationships of interview participants was assumed in providing genuine responses. An effort has been made to prevent association of documents or responses with individuals or institutions, but this may still be possible for readers familiar with the work of the partnership.

Data Analysis and Coding

Research questions had been determined before research started, which allowed for analysis to occur as data was collected. According to Merriam (2009), "Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed" (p. 171). The researcher also focused all data analysis on answering the research questions, keeping in mind the principles of a high-quality case study as outlined by Yin (2009):

1. Attend to all evidence, including rival hypothesis, and be exhaustive in efforts to fully answer research questions.
2. Address rival interpretations of data. If further data cannot support or dispel the rival interpretation, report it loosely as needing further inquiry.

3. Address the most significant aspect of the case study. Keep the analysis focused on the most important issues and do not become distracted by analyzing lesser concerns.
4. Use prior experience and expert knowledge of the topic. Possessing a deep knowledge of the case study can strengthen data analysis. (p. 160)

All interview and document data were considered as evidence unless and until they were proven un-substantiated, an anomaly, or contradicting patterns and themes. Upon discovery of this data, it was reported as such.

As the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, human beings interpret reality directly through their observations and interviews. In light of this, Merriam (2009) stated, “We are thus ‘closer’ to reality than if a data collection instrument had been interjected between us and the participants. Most agree that when rigor is viewed in this manner, internal validity is a definite strength of qualitative research” (p. 214). As the researcher has been employed by both institutions involved in this study and has been associated with the grant-funded initiatives of their work, this experience offered a deeper level of knowledge of the organizations and relationships in this study and allowed for a more critical analysis of the data. This lent credibility to the analytic process.

Coding data begins with making notations next to bits of data that seem potentially relevant to the study of focus. Assigning codes to pieces of data then categorizing the data based on emerging themes is how categories can be constructed (Merriam, 2009). Overall, coding data for analysis requires creating a system to organize and classify data based on significance as determined by the researcher, and the words and phrases in interview data must be thematically identified and organized in a way that makes sense to them.

As previously stated, in analyzing transcripts of the interviews from this study, the researcher utilized specialized software (QDA Miner Lite) to assist in the organization of this data. This allowed a more comprehensive analysis, as ease and flexibility in the coding process

was increased. As themes were identified, the software allowed the researcher to create new codes, or merge existing. It also helped in understanding the frequency with which a specific theme was discussed by participants and allowed quotes to be easily captured that demonstrated identified themes from the participant perspective.

Documents reviewed as part of this study were sorted chronologically and by type based on the source and established purpose of each. Initial observations were drawn from each using the comments function in Microsoft Word. For PDF or other types of documents, content within was highlighted and corresponding notes made in a Microsoft Word document. Making notes in Microsoft Word allowed the researcher to easily revisit document content multiple times for further analysis and to identify themes as they emerged. Once the initial document review was complete, tables were created to help thematically group the data and identify patterns. This allowed data to be considered in conjunction with the themes from coded interview data.

Although predetermined categories helped serve as a beginning point for classifying data from both interviews and documents, care was taken to avoid applying too much structure to the analytic framework. By maintaining a more evolving approach with the data, bias and prescribed outcomes were avoided and thus validity maintained (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this study, not forcing data into predetermined categories allowed for the emergence of new categories and the elimination of others.

The benefits of a flexible approach to analyzing the data in this study aligned with those expected based on a review of the literature on this approach. The researcher began by using the three research questions that were formulated as broad and comprehensive, but that were also based on predetermined categories. From these three categories of focus, interview questions were developed to help answer each research question.

Throughout the semi-structured interview process, the thoughts and responses of participants sometimes flowed freely and veered into unanticipated directions. Responses were, thus, not necessarily orderly or exclusive to any one category. Even though the research questions served as the basis in developing the interview questions and initial categories for analysis, the system to classify the data changed over time. This evolution occurred both during and after data collection and resulted in the grouped data themes and patterns discussed in Chapter 4.

The overall classification process for document analysis was similar to that of the interview data. A separate category was created to house outliers from interview and document analysis until the data could be dismissed due to inconsistency or identified as requiring further inquiry. The flexibility of this approach enabled all data to be coded and classified as part of analysis, and resulted in a more comprehensive, accurate, and credible study. Considering the wieldy number of transcribed interviews that were organized with the help of qualitative research software, and the researcher's familiarity with documents of the nature of those included, this supported a reliable process for organizing the data.

Validity

As cited by Merriam (2009), Maxwell (2005) stated validity is “a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context independent property of methods or conclusions” (p. 214).

Internal Validity or Credibility

In an internally valid study, research findings will be determined to match reality (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). In this way it helps make sense of the research. Strategies to ensure

internal validity in qualitative research are triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, and peer review (Merriam, 2009; Yin 2009), each of which is further defined below:

- Triangulation - the use of multiple methods, such as data sources, investigators, or theories.
- Member checks - the solicitation of participant feedback on findings that have emerged from the interview responses.
- Adequate engagement in data collection - trying to get as close as possible to participant understanding of experiences through an adequate scope of participants and amount of time spent with them.
- Peer review - engaging unbiased colleagues to examine the data and comment on whether the findings seem plausible.

Document analysis combined with in-depth interviews with people having different perspectives related to the focus of this study provided a triangulation strategy to confirm the validity of emerging themes. Combining interview responses with relevant document evidence offers credibility to this study's research findings.

Adequate engagement in data collection was realized through the researcher's close relationship to the work of this case study as well as all partners involved. Experience in the working relationship of these partners allowed the researcher to remain close to the work and in contact with the institutional representatives associated with this study.

External Validity or Transferability

In this study, the context provided through rich description better prepares the reader to compare the study to their own life and experiences, and thus enables them to transfer the findings in a personalized way. According to Merriam (2009), "External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (p. 223). As the original researcher cannot know locations to which the reader may seek to transfer findings,

sufficient descriptive data needs to be provided to make transferability possible (Merriam, 2009, pp. 224-225).

Maximum variation increases transferability by maximizing the range of participants based on things like age, ethnicity, gender, level of education, professional position, etc. Due to the limited scope of available participants for this study however, maximum variation was not possible as a strategy for external validity in this instance.

Researcher Bias

In qualitative research, the researcher is often referred to as the main instrument (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). As such, the findings of this study evolved from the researcher's understanding of the data collected. The researcher served as a filter for the information collected and assessed it through research and categorization based on themes emerging from participant feedback, the documents reviewed, and the literature review on partnerships and funder-grantee relationships. The researcher also relied on the experiences and interpretations of participants in providing data. For these two reasons, (1) the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and (2) the research being grounded in the interpretations and experiences of participants, qualitative research is especially vulnerable to researcher bias (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) discussed "epoche" and bracketing as ways to address researcher bias. Epoche is the process by which a researcher engages in introspection in order to become aware of and isolate his or her personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions related to the phenomenon of study. Prior beliefs about the phenomenon of study are then set aside temporarily, or bracketed, so as to not interfere with the ability to analyze data and arrive at valid

conclusions. Bracketing allows the researcher to purposely and temporarily suspend theories and suppositions in pursuit of a pure and authentic study.

To honor transparency, it is important to remind the reader of the researcher's history and current affiliations with all partners involved in this study and the resulting potential for bias. The researcher is a former employee of the Funder, and in that role, was responsible for working in partnerships with the College included in this study. The researcher is currently employed by the College in this study, and four of her 13 years at this institution were spent in a grant-funded position supported by the Funder. The researcher also spent two years as a member of the advisory board for a grant-funded initiative housed at the College and supported by this Funder. She has known the four interview participants in a professional context for between three and 15 years.

With planning and intent, the researcher practiced epoche and bracketing to ensure an untarnished and valued study. The researcher intentionally reflected on her history and experiences to identify any preconceived notions. This was done in order to prevent the risk of bias as she worked under the guidance of her committee chair to envision the study. She also remained mindful of her possible bias throughout the study and worked to clear her thoughts of existing assumptions and predispositions as she entered into each interview. To start each interview, she acknowledged her previous and current roles with each partner, reinforced her commitment to authenticity in the study, and explained that as a researcher she was committed to conducting a study free of bias and assumption. All four participants expressed their confidence that the research process would unfold as has been outlined, and that they intended to fully cooperate in the interest of adding to the base of knowledge in this area.

Chapter Summary

Gathering data directly from individuals central to this community college and funder relationship proved insightful and important in understanding the relationship between these two organizations. In considering their unique perspectives in light of the partnership best practices identified through the review of literature, additional insights were presented into this relationship. The analysis of documents important in this relationship offered the opportunity to not only compare their contents and structure to partnership best practices from the literature, but also to observations from participant comments. This comprehensive analysis generated excellent data for review, and revealed areas of alignment and misalignment, whether known or not, that informed the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationships of community colleges and charitable foundations and identify barriers and best practices in their partnership work together in order to increase effectiveness. The long-term relationship of a specific community college and funder were used as a case study in this research to understand the strengths and challenges that have emerged in this relationship over time.

Research Questions

The three research questions presented below were used to guide this study. They were intended to identify any similarities and differences in perspective and approach to partnership in this relationship. Once areas of alignment and misalignment were understood, the larger goal was to identify how supports could be put in place to enhance this relationship to the benefit of their joint work. The research questions are:

1. How do community college and funder perspectives on their working relationships and partnerships differ and align?
2. How do these perspectives impact their work together?
3. How can community colleges and funders leverage partnership best practices to the benefit of their mutual goals?

Research Themes

Four themes arose from the analysis of in-depth interviews with representatives from the community college and funder of focus in this study, and a review of documents relevant to this

working relationship. These are noted below, along with the factors that emerged as important in relation to each.

Theme One: Current individual relationships serve as a surrogate for the larger organizational relationship, even though this is not distinctly acknowledged.

Relevant Factors:

- A. The impact of individuals on the organizational relationship
- B. The influence of organizational factors on individuals
- C. An individual's longevity in the relationship
- D. The role of senior leaders

Theme Two: The Community College is, in many ways, unique among the Funder's grantees.

Relevant Factors:

- A. The power dynamic
- B. The scope of service recipients and impact of other organizational partners
- C. The impact of organizational size and community co-location
- D. The College's board is publicly elected

Theme Three: Internal, invisible, an often-unstated organizational factors impact the organizational relationship.

Relevant Factors:

- A. Culture, organizational structures, and governance
- B. The influence of other organizational partners

Theme Four: Communication, transparency, and trust are paramount to the strength of the larger organizational relationship, but insufficient intention is placed here, and on defining mutual accountabilities and related practices that might promote stronger relationships.

- A. Communication and transparency
- B. Miscommunication, goals, and trust

Research Evidence

Interviews. As a part of this study, four in-depth interviews were conducted with participants who are currently or had been recently involved in developing grants between these two organizations and implementing or overseeing their subsequent work. Data collected from participants proved essential to the research, as this provided personal perspectives on the organizational relationship from individuals who have been or still are central to it.

The level of detail offered through interviews in qualitative research is powerful, as it makes the reader feel as if they are living the experiences that are being described (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 107). The researcher in this study used the same predetermined interview questions with all participants to ensure consistency in data collection. Probing techniques were used to elicit deeper responses and enhance dialog in gathering additional data and to ensure the researcher was understanding the information shared.

Document Analysis. The researcher's review of relevant documents served to verify interview data, but also to reveal evidence that did not emerge in interviews or was only marginally referenced. Analysis of key documents helped shape the story and contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between these two organizations. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), a document review aids in revealing "cultural nuances" (p. 195), which was of critical importance in answering the research questions of this study.

Relevant examples from documents reviewed are provided throughout this chapter as germane to the discussion of a particular theme. Listed in Table 1 are documents reviewed as part of this study.

Table 1: *Documents Reviewed for Study*

OFFICIAL GRANT DOCUMENTS	GRANT FUNDED PROGRAM DOCUMENTS	OTHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Narrative Report Guidelines • Financial Reporting Guidelines and Forms • Commitment/Agreement • Agreement Notification Letters • Grant Revision Letters • Grant Closing Letters • Grant Budget Guidelines • Supplemental Funding Agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Board Agendas • Advisory Board Membership Lists • Program Evaluation Reports • Grant Extension Requests • Funded Program Budgets • Logic Models • Staffing Charts • Business Plans • Official Grant Applications Submitted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails between staff at both organizations related to grant work. • Emails between staff at both organizations related to non-grant work that was of joint interest. • Internal Organizational Emails • Funder Grant Award History 1959 - 2018 • Funder Grant Award History to Community Colleges 1959 - 2008 • Organizational Annual Reports • Funder 25th Anniversary Publication

The remainder of this chapter is presented in two sections. In the first, a discussion of themes that emerged through interview responses and document analysis are presented. The second section draws from the themes presented to answer the study’s three research questions as stated in Chapter 1.

Discussion of Results and Analysis Related to Themes

Theme 1: Current individual relationships serve as a surrogate for the larger organizational relationship, even though this is not distinctly acknowledged.

In this study, all participants indicated that the relationship between program staff from each organization assigned to a particular grant had a noticeable impact on the perceived working relationship between these two organizations. Through the qualitative data coding

process, it was found that comments related to this finding were shared 123 times, which represented 16% of all coded interview data. Documents reviewed offered additional insights. Evidence from interviews and document analysis are presented in the discussion of this finding that follows, and are focused around the following relevant factors: (1A) impact of individuals on the organizational relationship, (1B) influence of organizational factors on individuals, (1C) an individual's longevity in the relationship, and (1D) the role of senior leaders.

Theme 1A: Impact of Individuals on the Organizational Relationship.

Background. Based on their individual work histories provided by interview participants, and observations made by the researcher over the past 15 years, staff assigned to oversee or provide strategic direction for the work of grants between these organizations has changed over time. Even though the working relationship between these two organizations has been decades-long and included over 60 individual grants totaling over \$17 million dollars, in the past 15 years alone, multiple staffing changes have impacted who was directly involved in this partnership.

As will be shown through this research, even though the relationship studied was at the organizational level, individuals had a great impact on how these two specific organizations partnered. At the College, four different individuals have had responsibility related to leading these grants. At the Dean level and above there has been the introduction of new players or changes in roles six times. Three of these times the result was a new College President. At the Funder, five Program Officers have been assigned to the grants of this relationship during that same period. In positions above them, there have been introductions of new players, or changes in roles, at least five times. One of these instances was a change at the presidential level.

In some instances, the players involved at both organizations were moved into their new role from within their organizations, but at other times they were either new to their organization,

the community, or both. They also came with varying degrees of experience within their sector and in working with the other sector as well.

Results. Due to the size of both of these organizations, there were opportunities for staff at both organizations to make career moves without leaving their organization. This resulted in the individual players involved in this relationship sometimes changing during or between grants. Within the College, grants were awarded and housed in various departments and divisions, which further increased the number of individuals involved in the larger organizational relationship over time. Similarly, Funder staffing reassignments resulted in new players entering and leaving the working relationship. With each staffing change at both organizations, there was the opportunity for new approaches to things like communication, conflict, and transparency to enter into the larger organizational relationship, whether acknowledged or not. Participant comments demonstrated the impact of different individuals on the organizational relationship.

Community College Staff One:

We (those involved directly in the grant) have conversations around our work and the relationship itself. We communicate quite a bit. I feel like I can have that honest conversation with them, and we can ask what this larger organizational relationship looks like and what it should look like going forward. I've not always had that with other folks, but I wish I had. Without that, the organizational partnership was sort of dictated by who was involved at the moment, but it should be bigger than that.

It's (communication) more informal. I've never seen that before with them (individual funder staff). I think there's more openness now about the expectations, which I'm thankful for because, I'm not sure we had that as much in the past where you could feel open enough to say where it's working, where it's not working, and talk about it.

When there are organizational factors that impact level of trust, I really think it's the people within the relationship that give rise to those factors.

What I think has happened along the way, in my experience, has been that we've had more open and frequent, formal and informal communication than I think perhaps has happened in the past. Much of that has been leadership and who's been in a particular position.

I think that we have the commitment and motivation, trust, respect and understanding (at the organizational level). I think it's there, but it's certainly had its challenges in the past. That sometimes had to do with the leadership and also other players.

Community College Staff Two:

We tried to have almost monthly meetings. They didn't always work out, but there was a certain level of sustained communication over time. One time there was a shift in who was involved in a grant, and then the communication felt less transparent than it had previously.

Funder Staff One:

I think they assigned the right kind of project staff to that grant. I get email updates all the time, even more than what's required by the grant, but I feel like at no time am I ever not in the loop on something. I don't always need that level of engagement, but I appreciate their willingness to consistently reach out and share just in case there ever is a situation where I need to know something for various reasons.

For communication to work, it really requires a regular set of interactions that aren't necessarily scripted. I could set up regular calls with a grantee and we could talk to each other, like I've got another grantee now where we have quarterly meetings set up and everything is very transactional. I've tried a couple of different ways trying to get them to open up and just talk in general, but that's their goal — the transactional part. And that's fine, you know, we don't give grants for me to be friends. But I think to build trust, it does require a level of engagement.

Once somebody made a judgment call not to talk to the Foundation about an issue, and it spiraled out of control and became complicated. I now understand their rationale for that, but we can't help or support grantees if we don't actually understand the landscape of what they are dealing with.

Funder Staff Two:

We both made ourselves vulnerable by recognizing we don't have all the answers, owning up to mistakes that had been made, and showing a willingness that the intent and support was there, because the larger partnership is going to be necessary to actually achieve the impact that we want. I think that level of vulnerability was shown on both ends in that instance.

In a particular instance, I felt like we had achieved a level of trust where open and honest feedback was given. Some of the most difficult and helpful feedback that I received came from an employee of the Community College. They were very willing to give direct feedback about things that the Foundation was doing that were or were not helpful, not just for the College, but for the community. I think that was able to happen because we had personally built trust over time together.

Those of us working on a grant have to agree together that we're going to try to do it together, and be open about what's working and what isn't, and that that's just how we're going to work.

Sometimes I know there's a concern about sharing things that may not be working, for fear that funding won't continue. I think that has been true in this case between these two organizations, but I also think that in a particular instance in one grant, I felt like we had achieved the level of trust as individuals where open and honest feedback was given.

I think it's setting the up-front expectation that this isn't a relationship where we're purely just holding you accountable for achieving what you said you would do in the grant, but that we're problem solving together and that we recognize that we're going to be in regular enough communication so if something doesn't go the way we thought, we can make a mid-course correction. The work can continue, and we can learn together, adapt together and make the work better as opposed to it being a pass or fail type of thing. That takes us as individuals agreeing to work together like that.

I do think that in instances where individuals have been able to build strong, trusting relationships with each other between the institutions that helps, and has helped in the past.

What's interesting about such large institutions like a college, depending on the shared goal at hand, you work within different departments and with different people. Each of those projects entails a separate set of relationships with people at both organizations, and people drive relationships, so I think there's been lots of different experiences and lessons learned from those situations.

Whereas individual relationships were found to vary in length and be shorter-term in the larger scheme of things, the organizational level relationship has existed for over 60 years (D1). Having changing players over time in this relationship not only impacted the relationship in the moment, but also larger organizational reputations in terms of how each showed up as a partner. Participant comments offered insights into how this played out.

Community College Staff One:

We've had a long relationship with the Foundation, so in many ways that learning around transparency, how to be transparent and make sure we've got strong communication, has, you know, had to happen over and over with new people. I think that has slowed things at times, as we had to relearn how to communicate. Maybe we've lost some time because of that, and also because we sometimes had to figure out how to get past any missteps that had been made in the past by others. It's been a challenge, but that's also added to the uniqueness — that reality that these two people who are steering things right now can really have an impact on this long relationship even after they are gone.

When there are organizational factors that impact level of trust, I really think it's the people within the relationship that give rise to those factors.

I think that we have the commitment and motivation, trust, respect and understanding (at the organizational level). I think it's there, but it's certainly had its challenges in the past. That sometimes had to do with the leadership and also other players.

Community College Staff Two:

We tried to have almost monthly meetings. They didn't always work out, but there was a certain level of sustained communication over time. One time there was a shift in who was involved in a grant, and then the communication felt less transparent than it had previously. Even though it was just with that one person, looking back, that made it really difficult to be able to build a sense of trust with the whole organization. Things like that can linger even after the person moves on.

Funder Staff One:

This goes back to our conversation about communication. I'd much rather someone sit down and say, "Look, this is how I'm feeling, and this may not be intentional, but this is how I'm feeling," and then we move forward from there. That approach isn't taken by everyone though. I think the communication, transparency, and building the relationship between program staff and leadership at both organizations contributes to reducing a power dynamic barrier that, in some cases, is real, but it also, in other cases is perceived, and that impacts how we work together overall. It's more complicated than just a couple people, but I'm not sure we always recognize that and think about their impact on the larger work over time.

Funder Staff Two:

I do think that in instances where individuals have been able to build strong, trusting relationships with each other between the institutions that helps, and has helped in the past. I think the challenge with that is that it works to an extent, but when that individual-to-individual relationship replaces the institution-to-institution relationship, then it's not quite enough to lead to those successes you were hoping for, especially in a long-term relationship like this. These two levels of relationships are not the same thing. I'm not sure everyone thinks about that.

What's interesting about such large institutions like a college, depending on the shared goal at hand, you work within different departments and with different people. Each of those projects entails a separate set of relationships with people at both organizations, and people drive relationships, so I think there's been lots of different experiences and lessons learned from those situations. I wonder if that's always captured though, for new people entering into the equation. I think the trick is to figure out how to capture all that and pass is along for future work together.

If an idea or a project or an agreement lies with just one or two people, people leave and things change, so I think trying to actually build relationships between the institutions and

not just individuals is important. Its people and institutions, but we need to think about how to institutionalize those positive relationships and ways of working to help manage it better when people do leave or change – otherwise it just ends up being a relationship between two particular people in the moment. It’s not just about the relationship between those two people though; it’s larger than that. I’m not sure we always think about that, but those people can have such an impact. You know, grantees can come and go over time, and so can the people that work there, but the relationship between our organizations is not likely to go away. Maybe that makes it a little more unique then.

Document analysis. A review of documents offered additional insights into the impact of individuals on this organizational relationship. Information sharing between the organizations was found to be impacted when new staff at either organization were assigned to a grant. An example of the time required to uncover pertinent information and for new staff to get up to speed in such instances was reflected in a 2014 email conversation (D2) between the Funder and College. In it, records related to a current grant were needed but unable to be located. One funder email stated that a staff person was looking through organizational records to find documentation of the proposed model for a current grant-funded program. They wanted to share this information “with everyone” as a reminder of where the work had started, and as “information for those of us not engaged in this process several years ago”. This email demonstrates how more newly assigned staff had to work together in locating information they both needed, but about which neither had been provided.

In a related example from that same period, an email conversation (D3) between the same newly assigned College grant staff and a different Funder representative demonstrated their efforts to learn to work together through a grant, neither of whom had been involved with it since its inception. This email conversation began in October and continued through February of the following year. Through it, the two staff were attempting to clarify and wrap up an issue related to supplemental funding and a grant extension that stemmed from an initial Grant Extension Letter (D4) issued the May prior.

Over the course of those approximately three months, content from emails demonstrate that frequently changing staff have an impact on the organizations' working relationship in the moment. In this instance, they were learning to navigate a new interpersonal relationship without having pre-established and agreed upon norms to rely on for how the organizations worked together, passed along information and lessons learned, etc. In the emails, there is eventually a realization shared that some of the funds in question had been previously awarded and spent, unbeknown to either of these staff. Comments shared to arrive at that realization include:

College: I will forward this to our finance department staff that manage this grant, as they will likely be able to decipher it.

College: I wish I had caught this sooner.

Funder: Not sure if this makes sense or causes confusion. Let me know.

College: I am still working on resolving this. I apologize for the delay.

Funder: Sorry for the confusion.

Funder: Do you know if a formal letter had been sent? I am not able to locate one in the program's files. I have a series of emails related to this but am wondering if an actual letter was sent authorizing this.

College: I submitted a request a few months ago. As it turns out we didn't need that extension.

College: The previous staff had forwarded me a message about the final report that I believe had a different due date. I am assuming this supersedes that date and this is all the documentation and information you will need from me related to the grant – is that correct?

Official grant documents reviewed as part of this study offered detail around things like grant goals, grantee reporting processes, and methods of service delivery. However, less information was included that clarified mutual practices and norms for communication and decision-making at the interpersonal and organizational level, which the literature states is critical to developing and sustaining a good working relationship. When this language was included, it directed responsibility towards the College as the grantee.

In a 2011 Grant Commitment Letter (D5), it stated that the grantee had to agree to “immediately notify the Foundation” of changes related to things like “persons holding senior executive positions,” “organizational structure, financial condition, management, professional staffing, and operations,” and circumstances that could impact “the Grantee’s financial stability” (p. 4). This demonstrates that while accountabilities were published, and the expectation was in place, they were not published as part of the Funder’s responsibilities outside of the distribution of funds. Absent direction around mutual accountabilities at the organizational level, related practices were left to the individuals assigned to a grant to work through on a day-to-day basis.

The review of a 2017 Grant Agreement (D6) between these organizations found language indicating an awareness that interpersonal interactions could impact the larger organizational relationship. This document stated that the agreement superseded all prior “contemporaneous negotiations, correspondence, understandings, and agreements between parties relating to the subject matter hereof” (p. 6). This acknowledged that while individuals assigned to a grant from both organizations would interact and this would impact the work, the results of these interactions were not to replace the formal written grant agreement that was in place. Official funding documents like this are used to put accountabilities in place at the organizational level, but in this relationship, they did not include direction for how to implement this on a day-to-day basis interpersonally.

Overall Analysis. Growth and setbacks are common in long-term relationships. In this study, how individuals navigated day-to-day interpersonal relationships with other staff assigned to the same grant was found to impact the joint work of and larger relationship between these two organizations. While this worked in the moment with varying degrees of success, it was

person and situation dependent, and the impacts of their efforts lingered in the larger relationship, even after they were gone.

In reviewing documents pertinent to this relationship, it was as much a case of what was absent within those documents versus what was found that demonstrated how individuals had the opportunity to impact this relationship. While sometimes factors were included in official funding documents that could have supported strengthening the organizational relationship, accountability was one way and directed at the College as the grantee. Without the benefit of having clearly spelled out mutual norms and practices of interaction at the organizational and interpersonal levels, program staff were reliant upon their individual skills, approaches, and ability to build trust in navigating the day-to-day relationship. In addition, clear and consistent processes for capturing information for posterity was not found when reviewing email conversations between the organizations. With changing players in this relationship over time, this inconsistency takes on a heightened significance.

Theme 1B: Influence of Organizational Factors on Individuals

Background. Models of community college governance vary by state: “The structures are typically a mix of coordinating and governing boards at the state, system and institutional levels; and other agencies and organizations may play important roles in the postsecondary landscape” (Education Commission, May 2019). The state in which the College of focus in this study resides, however, does not have a state-level board or agency. This means the College is governed by a locally elected public board, which is charged with leading the institution in a manner compliant with larger state and federal governance requirements of the sector. The funding model under which this institution operates captures revenue through a mixture of state

appropriations, federal grants and student aid, local property taxes and grants, individual donations, and student tuition.

The Funder in this study is an independent, private foundation that appoints its board members. As foundations like this are free-standing legal entities, this allows for a higher degree of control over how this board functions (Snow, 2019). The original source of organizational funds was an investment by the organization's founder. As a private foundation, additional donations have been possible over time by individuals and organizations, and investment income has been central to the Funder's financial model.

Results. Participants in this study provided their first-hand experiences in navigating the relationship between these organizations. Their comments indicated that organizational factors over which staff had no control sometimes impacted how each navigated their way through a particular grant. Participants acknowledged that aspects of organizational culture and practices drove approaches to things like communication, decision-making, and transparency. The impact of these invisible factors on the larger relationship contributed to theme three of this study and is discussed later in this chapter. Here in theme one however, the impact of such factors on individual behaviors is presented. Participants offered the following insights.

Community College Staff One:

It gets back to an internal organizational culture. Do you feel like your voice will be heard and you can speak it in the room? When you don't have that, I think that's a legitimate issue that can get in the way and cause mistrust, and internal transparency can impact the relationship with the partner too. We have to ask how open we are about being open and honest, and then make sure everybody is on the same page so we can be a good partner.

Community College Staff Two:

I think there is an internal culture that leads to the organization, regardless of who the person is, continuing to show up in a certain way.

Funder Staff Two:

Sometimes you can't share something before it's been through your internal process of decision making, but at the point you're able to share it you should.

Sometimes there are internal factors that dictate how much you can share, but you don't want someone drawing the wrong conclusions by not sharing what you actually can, or at least keeping the lines of communication open.

In addition to operating within their own culture and processes, staff had to interpret the actions of staff from the other organization without the benefit of knowing the culture within which they were operating and how that was impacting their behaviors. These included less formal aspects of organizational culture, but also more formal structures related to funding or board governance.

Community College Staff One:

Sometimes I think there were expectations that weren't being fulfilled, which caused leadership to change course, and funders can do that. I'm not sure everyone understood that culture is how they work – it's funding in general. I think they wanted to see things move much faster, much quicker, and that wasn't a philosophy shared by some, because they felt they needed longer to do the work. I think they just didn't understand the funding environment and culture that well.

I believe foundation leaders wanted to see things move much faster and see change happen now, and that wasn't a philosophy shared by some at the college. They thought that the work needed years to make the changes wanted, so I think that was a challenge.

I think it transcends down and comes right from the top. They wanted to make a big impact, and I don't think that was happening at a pace expected by their board and/or others in the field. I think there is just a trickle-down effect.

Community College Staff Two:

I think there is an internal culture that leads to the organization, regardless of who the person is, continuing to show up in a certain way. When you are not a part of that culture though, you don't always get that, and that can lead to misunderstandings about a lot of things.

Funder Staff One:

I find in larger institutions in particular that it is extremely important to understand their internal process, their goals, decision making, accountability, because that can be a challenge. I may be talking to a senior leader about where we are in the project, and they have ideas about moving something forward, but they have to internally check with five people first. I find that sometimes it can be really difficult to wrap your head around having a relationship with one or two people at any institution, and then realizing that they have to go back and check with like five people on something. It can take a minute to understand all their internal workings, but you need to so the wrong assumptions aren't made.

I had a long conversation once with someone about the Pell Grant, and another about the impact of some state and federal legislation on how community colleges operate and their ability to access funds. Leadership is always important at any institution, and I can think of moments where I wished the College had done this or that or whatever, and I'm sure they would say the same thing about us. Most of what I hear and feel when it comes to situations like this though, has been around the broader policy implications of the decisions they are making, and that makes their job very difficult in many ways. I did not always understand that at first.

Funder Staff Two:

I know that institutions have their own internal processes that they follow to make decisions, even when I don't know that those are. Sometimes you can't share something before it's been through your internal process of decision making, but at the point you're able to share it you should. You should also do the best you can to keep the other partner updated as you're going through that process, because I think sometimes silence is viewed as not transparent. I think sometimes silence happens when people feel like they don't have the end result to communicate, but you can still communicate where you are in your process of decision making so at least people know that something's happening. Sometimes there are internal factors that dictate how much you can share, but you don't want someone drawing the wrong conclusions by not sharing what you actually can, or at least keeping the lines of communication open.

Document analysis. Sometimes even though the College was not the fiduciary of a grant awarded by the Funder, they still served as an organizational partner to them by playing a central role in providing services through other grants. In one such instance of a larger collaborative community project, staff transition and other organizational level changes within the College and other partners were highlighted in a 2015 Program Evaluation Report (D7).

At the College and another organization new Presidents/CEOs had been selected, another organization was being operated by a new fiduciary, and another had lost program staff with responsibility for leading the grant work. The report also indicated that while the relationships between all the organizations remained collegial, it was unlikely they would continue to work together on that particular program after the grant ended. As evidenced in this example, changing players and organizational factors over which individuals had little to no control impacted the landscape within which they had to operate. In this case, both organizations of focus in this study and their staff were a part of that landscape.

As large institutions with many layers of hierarchy, it was found that sometimes organizational structures impacted staff ability to communicate decisions to the partner, because more information had to be gathered from senior leaders. In a 2014 email (D8), it was noted that new College program staff needed access to information the Funder had requested. When this need was communicated up the internal hierarchy, their request was put on hold until a very busy senior leader could get involved. This resulted in the new staff being placed in the position to solely rely on their interpersonal skills and personal approach in navigating this limbo space with the Funder while they waited for the information.

In this study, it was found that sometimes senior leaders at the College played roles in not only the larger organizational relationship dynamics overall, but also the more detailed aspects of grant funded programs. In 2014, one very senior leader indicated in an email (D9) to the Funder that they had hoped to have a white paper proposal for an upcoming meeting that reflected the vision for the next iteration of a grant funded program. They went on to indicate that after meeting with various community stakeholders, it had become apparent their vision was still a bit unclear and needed further refinement. Such aspects of organizational culture that resulted in this

level of involvement by a senior leader were not controlled by the College staff assigned to lead the program. However, this circumstance not only impacted the pace of progress, but also the staff's ability to navigate the relationship between the two organizations and related work for which they were accountable.

A review of the Funder's Final Narrative Report Guidelines (D10) found that information was specifically requested in this document around "Environment, Challenges, and Opportunities" (p. 3). In this section of the report, the grantee was directed to describe factors or circumstances (positive and/or negative) within the environment affecting progress toward achieving goals either generally, or as they related to specific activities. The question was broad, and as such provided a place to note internal or external organizational factors impacting staff ability to do the work.

Overall Analysis. Based on their lower position of power within the organization, using the Funder's Narrative Report Guidelines (D10) just discussed to explicitly address any internal organizational factors presenting barriers in the work would have logically presented a challenge for the staff person writing the report. However, this does not diminish the fact that an opportunity to at least tactfully broach factors of organizational culture impacting the work, but that of which the Funder may have been unaware, was possible. However, no similar formal opportunities were found for Funder representatives to share such information with the College.

When organizational culture negatively impacted a staff person's ability to navigate the larger relationship, this logically put them in a challenging position. Senior leaders tend to drive organizational culture, so as staff held less positional power in their organization that meant they had little opportunity to shape the culture within which they had to operate. This circumstance

had an impact on real and perceived levels of transparency, pace, and accountability in the relationship.

Formal structures related to organizational governance and funding had impacts on how individuals could navigate within the larger organizational relationship. Lovell and Trough (2002) described governance as “decision-making authority for an organization, which is typically controlled by boards. Governing boards usually appoint the chief executive of the institution or system, establish policies, and approve actions related to faculty and personnel, ensure fiscal integrity, and perform other management functions” (p. 91).

No matter the details of the specific governance structure of a community college or charitable foundation, both are considered a form of nonprofit organization under Internal Revenue Service (IRS) definitions (IRS Exempt Organization Types, n.d.). Both are thus subject to the various federal regulations and laws that govern aspects of their operations. Additionally, each state has different requirements as to how nonprofits are governed that reside within their borders (Harbor Compliance, 2018). All applicable federal and state laws that impact the governance and financial structures and requirements of community colleges and funders must be taken into consideration by both in their daily operations.

BoardSource is a membership organization for nonprofits, with a mission to “inspire and support nonprofit boards and executives to lead justly and with purpose” (About BoardSource, n.d.). Their research into industry best practices for nonprofit governance reveals that, regardless of specific governance structure, the responsibilities of a nonprofit board of directors include that they do the following: determine mission and purpose; select the chief executive; support and evaluate the chief executive; ensure effective planning; monitor and strengthen programs and services; ensure adequate financial resources; protect assets and provide proper financial

oversight; build a competent board; ensure legal and ethical integrity; and enhance the organization's public standing (Board Responsibilities and Structures, n.d., para. 1).

Regardless of the governance structure within which a community college operates, as publicly funded institutions, the degree of control they can exert over some things is occasionally limited. While things like programing decisions, staffing, and general aspects of daily operations are within the control of these institutions, governance and funding structures can impact their ability to move forward in other ways. The timing of funding mechanisms at the local, state, and federal level, and relevant governance structures for community colleges within its state of residence, both occasionally impacted the pace at and latitude within which this College could maneuver.

Funders are also bound by governance and funding structures within which they must operate. In some ways however, limitations placed on them were found to be less restrictive, especially when it came to the pace at which decisions could be made related to the implementation of or changes to their work. That was found to be the case in this relationship for this private foundation. As stated by Snow (2019), “Because a private foundation is an independent, free-standing legal entity, it allows for a very high degree of control. It may be governed solely by its donor(s) or by a board consisting of family and/or other individuals chosen by the donor(s)” (para. 7).

Theme 1C: Individual Longevity in the Relationship

Background. While two interview participants in this study had roots in the local community, the others were transplants within the last several years. One of these two well-rooted participants also had an especially long history in this partnership. His/her experience here exceeded all other participants by at least 14 years. In terms of longevity in their sector, this

same participant's tenure exceeded all others by at least 10 years, and his/her experience in working in any kind of community college / funder partnership exceeded all others by at least nine years.

Results. In comparing comments made by the participant with the longest tenure in their sector and this partnership with those of the individual with the least, insights into this theme were presented. They show that a knowledge of their shared community history provided helpful context for their mutual work. Likewise, time spent within their sector, working with the other sector, and engaging in this particular organizational relationship also impacted how they maneuvered within it.

Longest Tenured Individual:

Now, there have been times that I've been challenged with delays in getting things like notes, reports, feedback, or answers, but I have been involved in this work (in this partnership) for a long time, so I know how to navigate when I need to engage leaders or others from both organizations in meetings and in other ways so that I'm not working in isolation. That helps me get things done more quickly, I think.

So, I'm from here. I know this community and its history, and both of our organizations are a big part of that history, so having that larger historical context and understanding our roles within it really helps.

Shortest Tenured Individual

So, I've learned more about community colleges and what they have to offer, from "I'm in high school and I want to be dual enrolled" to "I'm unemployed and I need to find a job." The more I learn about community colleges the more I realize that the average person probably does not have a sense of what a community college can do, offer, or how they might be supporting community goals differently than you think. I mean I like to think that I'm pretty savvy in general knowledge-wise, but I literally have continued to learn over the last few years about community colleges, things I just never knew could be under their umbrellas.

Coming into an organization means having to learn how to operate within it. The same is true in a community too. These organizations have worked together for a long time in this community, so their histories are intertwined in some ways. When you start to understand all that better, it helps.

Overall Analysis. It was found that with increased longevity of an individual player in this relationship came their ability to better maneuver within organizational structures. In instances when individuals had longer tenure in their organizations and the relationship, they were better equipped to make moves more quickly that benefitted the work. With frequently changing players in this relationship, however, logical progress in deepening the organizational relationship was sometimes temporarily set back. The degree to which this was of impact depended on who the next player was, and their approach, knowledge, and experience operating within the parameters of their organizational structures and those of the relationship.

When a player was not only new to the grant or relationship, but also to the community, they were at an increased disadvantage in getting “up to speed,” as they also did not come with the historical community context that was found to impact this long-term relationship. Likewise, when an individual’s background had not afforded them the opportunity to gain knowledge specific to how the other organization’s sector operated, this resulted in them needing time to gain this knowledge for use in their joint work.

Theme 1D: Role of Senior Leaders

Background. In the 60 years spanning this organizational relationship, the Funder has had five different Presidents, and the College has had eight individuals in the role of President or its equivalent. Early in this relationship, three individuals who filled this role at the College had a different title but acted in the capacity equivalent to that of a college president. During this period, other senior leaders at both organizations have changed somewhat regularly, as individuals came to and left each institution, were promoted, or moved into different roles based on organizational restructuring of departments, divisions, and strategy.

Results. As drivers of culture, senior leaders specifically drove the culture within which staff assigned to these grants operated. Following are participant insights shared that highlight the impact of this leadership on staff ability to navigate the larger relationship between these organizations.

Community College Staff One:

It's fine to disagree (internally), but if you're disagreeing and you're not moving, you're not making a change. You make decisions but you just become stagnant or frozen, and that can become clear to the other party. That can cause questions and concerns and we've experienced that - where there's questions and concerns about our abilities to be able to fulfill the grant, implement them, or to say what you want to do with the grant, but then not be able to fulfill it. There's nothing wrong with that provided that you're very open and honest about what wasn't working or what does work, where the challenges are, why something can't be fulfilled, but I think culture around communication, trust, how we make decisions, how we interact and relate, all makes a big difference in being a good partner and certainly in the eyes of a funder. A lot of that is driven by leadership.

What I think has happened along the way, in my experience, has been that we've had more open and frequent, formal and informal communication than I think perhaps has happened in the past. Much of that has been leadership and who's been in a particular position.

I believe foundation leaders wanted to see things move much faster and see change happen now, and that wasn't a philosophy shared by some at the college. They thought that the work needed years to make the changes wanted, so I think that was a challenge.

I think there is mission and vision fit in many ways, so I think that's been a real win. Leadership plays a role in that. At least right now, the college wants to work with the funder, but there may be leaders in the future that just say, "Forget it, you know, I don't want to be beholden to a grant funder, I don't want to have to worry about that."

Funder Staff One:

As a Foundation, we do a grantee perception study every other year. It's put together by a third party outside organization and they send these surveys out to every project director that we have that I think has a current grant. Our leadership uses that as a temperature check for how we're doing with grantees and where we need to improve. That's something that's shared foundation wide. That's important because it helps us do our work better, but it also helps leaders make strategic adjustments where needed. It's pretty cool actually.

Funder Staff Two:

I think the relationship changes over time depending on leadership. When organizations change leaders, you are kind of reevaluating the relationship. I think as each of our institutions have gone through those types of changes, we've just had to work again at reestablishing that trust and that relationship and getting clear on anything that's changed or hasn't changed.

I think that the College has been willing to give the time of their senior-level leadership to engage in conversations with the Foundation, and to engage in efforts the Foundation supports in the community and thinks are important. That goes a long way, because community colleges are busy places with busy staff and busy leaders. To show that level of commitment to the community goes long way when you're building a relationship.

I think that internal alignment is important. Making sure that the College leaders and whoever is on the ground doing the work are in alignment is important. This helps make it clear to the Foundation about how they're working together and holding each other accountable. They also have to be able to communicate that back to the Foundation so if there's a concern, we know how to go about navigating resolution to that. Who to work with. Who to talk to. I think with any institution, you absolutely start with the president and senior leadership, but a lot of people doing the actual work are not those people. Senior leaders are setting the direction, guiding, and holding people accountable, and the same is true here. We have our people on the ground in the community too, and if that alignment isn't in place, it really creates a challenging environment for everyone.

Document Analysis. As noted previously in the discussion of this finding referencing emails between staff of both organizations (D8, D9), senior leaders had an impact on the pace at which decisions could be made and communicated to the other partner. It was also noted that their focus was not always exclusively placed on the partnership at a higher level, and that they sometimes played a role in the direction of grant work. Engagement at this level was found to impact lower-level staff who had responsibility for the work of a grant.

Overall Analysis. As noted previously, the culture within which staff had to operate impacted their approach to and navigation within the larger partnership. The ability of senior leaders to drive this culture and create internal alignment among their staff so that decision-making, communication, transparency, and accountability helped enhance the partnership and built trust was noted as important. Their influence was also a factor in creating an environment

where individuals could feel free to exercise the knowledge and skills they possessed to the benefit of joint work.

Depending on how senior leaders engaged in and intentionally drove the organizational relationship, their actions had the potential to introduce a new layer of complication for staff. This was sometimes felt at the College when it impacted staff ability to communicate around the work with the Funder, but also when it effected their ability to navigate the space of the relationship. This impact was especially heightened when they were newly assigned to a grant.

As will be presented later in this chapter, Theme 4 from this study is that *Communication, transparency, and trust are paramount to the strength of the larger organizational relationship, but insufficient intention is placed here, and on defining mutual accountabilities and related practices that might promote stronger relationships.* When this is considered in relation to the data presented above from a document review and participant interviews, this supports Theme 1: *Current individual relationships serve as a surrogate for the larger organizational relationship, even though this is not distinctly acknowledged.*

Theme 2: The Community College is unique, in many ways, among the Funder's grantees.

In this study, all participants discussed factors that made the College unique among the Funder's grantee pool. Through the qualitative data coding process, it was found that comments related to this finding were shared 110 times, which represented 14% of all coded interview data. Documents reviewed offered additional insights. Evidence from interviews and document analysis are presented in the discussion of this finding that follows and are focused around the following relevant factors: (2A) the power dynamic, (2B) scope of service recipients and impact of other organizational partners, and (2C) the impact of organizational size and community co-location.

Theme 2A: Power Dynamics

Background. In their shared community, both of these organizations occupy positions of power based on the systems they represent, and to which they allow access. Two other four-year colleges have a small presence in this community, but this is the only community college in this town. The College not only offers open access to education for residents but has also played a role in partnering across the community to address disparities that can create barriers to accessing and succeeding in post-secondary education. The Funder is one of several in this community, but is the largest in terms of staffing, resources, and service area. It maintains a strategic focus on this community however, as it resides within it.

As previously explained, these two organizations have different governance and funding structures. As a public institution, the College has a publicly elected board and relies a great deal on public money and earned revenue. It resides in a state with no oversight agency for its sector, but its structures come with a great deal of taxpayer and public scrutiny. It is also subject to all state and federal requirements for its sector. As a private organization, the Foundation is able to appoint board members, and most of its funding comes from investments and donations. The Foundation experiences less public scrutiny, but it is still accountable to the IRS and for meeting state level requirements. Its governance policies and practices also show up in how it structures, approves, and implements grants.

No matter their governance or funding structures, there always exists pressure from various sources for both organizations to sustain the work they support and implement. While larger local, state, and national pressures may exist that hold these organizations accountable in different ways, the boards of both organizations sit in the highest positions of organizational level power in this relationship, and organizational leaders are directly accountable to their individual boards.

Results. Through this study, it was determined that as both organizations served as anchor institutions in the same community, each has wielded political power locally. They have both historically been invited into high-level conversations at which decisions were made that impacted the larger community. Both were also found to be financially independent, and able to advance their mission work without reliance on the other for financial resources in this pursuit. Having large employee bases meant that each could draw upon these in taking on work with higher levels of complication, that required diversity of thought, background, and skill set. It also meant that in terms of sheer numbers, they possessed the amount of people needed to take on increased work together.

The power balance in this relationship was found to be impacted by each organization's ability to stand on its own and pursue its mission work independently of the other. However, it was also impacted by the interdependence that exists between them when it comes to increasing their reach and impact in their shared community. The interplay between their independence and reliance on the other impacts the power dynamic between them, and this context contributes to making the College relatively unique among the Foundations grantees.

In the literature, the power imbalance between funders and grantees was found to greatly impact their work together. In this relationship however, participants noted differences in this power dynamic that placed the two organizations on a somewhat more level playing field.

Community College Staff One:

You know, I'm not so certain power has come into play. The reason that I'm saying that is, we could just do this work without them. That's come to light a lot on this journey with them. If we really wanted to do our own work, we could do it without them. Did we need to partner?

A risk in just walking away, is that in the future we may not be a recipient of funds. If the players changed and you got some time and space that could change, but I'm not sure that we've seen power dynamics as much like this with who is currently involved.

I think that you do have some power dynamics, but not as much on the money side. I've seen it more demonstrated through the places leaders from both organizations hold in the community, and committees they sit on in community-wide work.

Sometimes grants have been a very vendor/vendee relationship with them. Power dynamics weren't there. I mean it was literally like "Okay, you give us the money. We're going to fulfill these goals. Yes, we're going to let you know how we do with this, how many people go through the trainings, etc." That's a very interesting aspect of the relationship with this funder. Depending on circumstances, sometimes it can be, quite honestly, very transactional, and very easy. But when you're looking at making change in a way that takes it from transactional to transformational, then I think that's when we see the power dynamics come more into play.

Our College Presidents have sat on committees with the Foundation Presidents, and I'm not certain that one has had more power than the other. I've not seen that. I think it's because both organizations carry their own political weight, and one doesn't feel threatened by the other or overpowered. I do think there are some dynamics at the College though, at times, to perhaps try as much as possible to bend over backwards to fulfill the needs of the Funder. I don't think it's to the point that we would give up our own principles and values for it. We've never been to that point, and I don't think we would because, it's been a choice of ours to seek Foundation dollars unless they make a request of us to be vendor for them.

Community College Staff Two:

I've always advocated for this organization to be really honest and let the Funder know how we're experiencing them, because I don't think that they can make changes until they get feedback from grantees. That's always been a hard thing for other grantees to do because of the power imbalance. I guess that is less of a factor for us though.

When you look at the relationship through a power lens, they still have more power. They are bigger in a lot of ways, like with resources. They have a history of really occupying a powerful place, but so do we in many ways.

Funder Staff One:

Many organizations need philanthropic funding to survive, so a lot of times those grantees are the ones who are really hesitant to provide critical feedback to their funder because they don't want to upset the balance. In the case of community colleges, many of them don't necessarily need our money. They have other ways that they are funded and operate based on their structures.

I think in this particular relationship, because of the broader community work that's going on, the Foundation's and College's leadership share similar values and a similar desire to really support improving the community for the residents we are both here to serve. I think having a common goal helps to reduce some of the power dynamic, but it's still there, just maybe more subtle than other relationships with some other grantees.

Funder Staff Two:

Generally, I do think one of the equalizers of the power dynamic between community colleges and funders is that a community college isn't, in most cases, going to go out of business if a grant ends. That automatically creates a little bit more of an even playing field than like in other grantor/grantee relationships where an organization, if their funding goes away, may truly have to close down. I think that helps with the power dynamic.

Document analysis. Within a 2016 Business Plan (D11) developed for one grant funded project of this partnership, a history of local work that led to the awarding of the grant was described. Through a separate review of the Funder's grant history since 1999 (D12), the timeline through which the Funder had been placing increased intention on building local capacity to engage in this particular focus of work was presented. Together, these documents show the Funder's work in this focus area had started before the grant between them and the College was developed. After nearly 15 years of working with other organizations to lay the groundwork, the Funder awarded the College a grant exceeding \$2 million (D13) to lead these efforts. This work was aligned with the College's goals to engage underserved populations, but overall, it was the Funder who approached the College to help it deliver this aspect of its mission work in this instance.

A similar example of the Funder relying on the College to help them pursue their mission work was found in reviewing the Program Evaluation Report (D7) previously referenced in theme one of this study. In that larger collaborative community project, the College was a key partner in work the Funder was central to starting in the community, and for which they helped recruit the College to support. These examples show an interdependence between these organizations in terms of achieving their missions.

In reviewing a Grant Agreement Letter from 2017 (D14), language was found that described accountabilities with power implications in the relationship. Through this document, it

was stated that the College had to obtain advance written approval for any budgetary deviations, and that failure to do so could impact funding disbursements. The letter also stated that if the Funder decided to waive any terms and conditions of the agreement in one instance, that action did not constitute a waiver of its rights in other areas of the agreement. Similarly, a 2017 Grant Agreement (D15) also indicated that the College had to report staffing changes to the Foundation when they were related to a grant, but no such reciprocal requirement was included.

As has been previously shown, the relationship with an assigned program officer has a critical impact on the success of the larger relationship between funders and grantees. In this case, when restructuring or personnel changes at the Foundation resulted in a change in assigned program officer for the College, no specific timeline for notification of such changes was provided.

Overall Analysis. As highlighted in Chapter 2, a review of the literature from the field of philanthropy abundantly found that the power imbalance between funders and their grantees was consistently a barrier in developing a more effective working relationship (Nayfack & Wohlstetter, 2011; Patrizi and Thompson, 2010; Bartczak, 2015; Fehler-Cabral et al., 2016; Independent Sector, 2016; Sanders et al., 2017). While the power balance in this study was still found to be a factor in this relationship, participant insights indicated it was less pronounced than is typical in most funder / grantee relationships.

Where the power imbalance was apparent, it was found to be most often associated with imbalanced financial resources. Document analysis revealed that in spite of the more equal footing participants felt between the two organizations, the Funder still had more control of the relationship's financial resources. While the language presented in the previously referenced Grant Agreement Letter (D14) is representative of the standard contractual language found in

most funding documents in general, it still placed restrictions on the College as a recipient of funds, and preserved freedoms for the Funder. This is a demonstration that, in spite of their relative equality within the relationship, in the end the power balance is still tipped toward the Funder.

The power imbalance created by control of financial resources was mitigated by the reality that both organizations are large and financially independent. This meant the College had not needed the Funder's resources to keep its doors open or pursue its mission work. When miscommunication occurred however, that impacted decision-making around the direction of joint work, the dynamic created by imbalanced financial resources still resulted in the Funder's ability to make decisions that had impacts across the College.

Another equalizer in this relationship was found to be the interdependence of the organizations in delivering aspects of their mission work. Because of the College's large staffing and financial capacity, in some instances the Funder had approached them to help introduce work in the community and achieve its mission related goals. In general, Funders cannot function without grantee partners to receive their resources and act on the intent of a grant. Without effective nonprofit partners, Funders cannot know exactly where their money is going and how effectively it is being utilized. In this relationship, while the Funder needed the College in this way, the College also often needed the Funder. In order to implement new work and best fulfill its mission, the College often approached the Funder for access to their financial resources, expertise, and professional networks.

Overall, the level of interdependence between these organizations in implementing their community work, and their financial independence as individual organizations, has helped

equalize the power balance in the relationship more than may be typical in most other funder-grantee relationships.

Theme 2B: Scope of Service Recipients and Impact of Other Organizational Partners

Background. The segments of the community served through the College's mission are broad. They have always made services available to all members of the community, and anyone can become a student that they have committed to helping succeed in achieving their educational goals. While the number of people they reach is likely much smaller than those supported by the Funder, the types of people they serve is broader in scope than any one grant. While the Funder serves people across a great geography and impacts countless lives, the kinds of specific service recipients they typically support is more targeted than the College's. In delivering their missions and supporting their service recipients, both organizations in this study have developed large networks of individuals and organizations in their shared community.

Results. In delivering services through grants in this relationship, College interview participants indicated that some of their other organizational partners have sometimes expressed concerns to them about the work. This was most often noted as focusing on things like (a) why an organization was not being served through a grant, (b) fears that they were being served differently than anticipated, or (c) that they were not sure their evolving needs could be fully met through a grant going forward.

To address such concerns, the College staff interviewed indicated they felt pressure to devote the time and attention necessary to ensure those partnerships remained intact. This pressure coincided with existing responsibilities to ensure the success of the grant, and all of this together put a strain on the capacity to achieve the grant's multitude of goals. Following are

insights from College staff about the impact of other organizational partners on their work in this relationship.

Community College Staff One:

We have a lot of different players at our other partner organizations, but in the community too. And, you know, trying to align with where everyone wants to go and to how they want to see change happen has sometimes caused tension. The College serves a lot more people and has a bigger service area than the Funder is focused on through a grant, and so that's kind of created some tension for the College in its broader work at times. It can be hard to get others to fully understand how big and complicated all that is for us.

We can't shift the whole ship just to comply with a grant, but we do need to ask what we need to do to make sure we are delivering what we promised. There has been tension when the Funder wanted to focus grant resources on specific segments of the community and organizations who serve those segments. That can be challenging for us if it looks like we are shifting to serve some people in the community more than others.

Community College Staff Two:

We have to have clarity internally about what the work of a grant means for us, what we can and cannot do, and how that aligns with fulfilling our funding requirements. We also have to consider how that all plays out within our campus environment and community partners in terms of resources and capacity needed. It's interesting. It can put us in a really challenging situation when we have to decide how we allocate our resources to fulfill grant requirements, without sacrificing other services or diluting them for other people and organizations that we serve. When that happens, it causes tension that we have to work through with them.

Document analysis. In reviewing the Funder's Grant Application Guidelines (D16), language was found within that acknowledged other organizational partners could impact a grantee's work. Specific information was requested as to the role other organizations played in sustaining the work of a grant. Additionally, information about community engagement efforts with other key leaders, organizations, and networks essential to the success of a grant was requested. The document went on to request details about the length of the relationships highlighted, how others contributed to the work, and any specific roles played within it.

An example of expectations being placed on the College by multiple partners to engage in specific community work is evidenced through the Program Evaluation Report (D7) previously highlighted. In that instance, even though the College was not the official grantee, it had a unique role to play in the work and was thus called upon to do so. In this instance, even though the College had less control over the direction of the grant, there was still the expectation they would partner with the other organizations and Funder by engaging in the work.

In a 2017 Annual Narrative Grant Report (D17), information was requested about how any other organizations involved in the collaborative work of a grant were impacting its success. This offered the opportunity to discuss not only partners who were official collaborators in the grant, but also any realities stemming from relationships with other partners too. As the College was not the official grantee in the collaborative project just referenced, they were not afforded the opportunity to offer such feedback through this report. In instances in which they were the official grantee however, they would have the opportunity to do so.

In a 2015 email (D18) from one College employee related to a grant that was in development, eleven individuals were copied on the communication. Of those, only one was from the Funder involved in this partnership. Others included other area funders and staff at the College, but also two individuals from other local organizations not responsible for the development or delivery of the eventual grant in any way. This demonstrates that other players had the opportunity to influence grant work between these organizations in some way, whether formally a part of it or not.

Overall Analysis. Because of their position of power and broad reach in the community, the College has developed a vast network of individual and organizational partnerships. Sometimes members of this network have been formally involved in grant work between this

College and Funder, but sometimes they have not. As has been shown, even when not formally a part of the work, these partners still exercised influence on how grant work the College led was executed.

In having such a broad base of service recipients and partners, this circumstance has meant grants were sometimes awarded that required the College place its attention more on some segments of the community than others. In turn, this encouraged pressure on them from their other organizational partners who felt they were somehow impacted by a grant, whether they were directly involved with it or not. Language in grant documents indicates an acknowledgement of this reality by the Funder, but not necessarily a true understanding of the degree to which pressure can be applied in such instances.

The degree of influence by outside partners on the grant work the College leads, contributes to making this a unique aspect of their reality as a grantee of this funder. While other grantees may feel similar pressure at times as well, the College's leadership position and scope of reach in its community increases this pressure in terms of intensity and frequency. In spite of this and the related realities highlighted, the commitment of these two organizations working together was made clear through this study. Their relationship and work are strengthened by the service recipients they have in common, and the broad partnerships they enjoy.

Theme 2C: The Impact of Organizational Size and Community Co-location

Background. Both the College and Funder in this study are large organizations who employ a large number of people in the same community. They have a 60-year history of working together to make community improvements, and even longer individual histories in this regard. In the past 15 years, multiple grants have been awarded between them that focused on distinct sectors of the local community. Due to their emphasis on systems level work, however,

these grants all had the capacity to reach beyond their defined focus and impact other systems with which they were interrelated.

Results. The participants in this study offered insights related to how organizational size and community co-location have made the College unique within the Funder's pool of grantees. Aspects of mission alignment, shared vision for the community and its residents, a shared community history, and opportunities for interpersonal connections across the organizations were highlighted as important and unique factors in this relationship.

Community College Staff One:

Certainly, the long history of working together is key in this relationship. The college is a large institution, and it impacts so many people's lives. There's been a connection between the two from day one, when the college started. That's important.

I think the work that we do in our community and expertise that we have plays a role. I would have to say there's a little bit of fortunate circumstances too. We are the only game in town, but that doesn't mean we take that for granted as the only educational institution in town. They [the Funder] could go elsewhere and find somebody else to deliver the work for them if they needed to, but I believe they have developed the confidence in us as an institution to do it.

Funder Staff One:

I think in this particular relationship, because of the broader community work that's going on, the Foundation's and College's leadership share similar values and a similar desire to really support improving the community for the residents we are both here to serve.

Funder Staff Two:

What's interesting about such large institutions like a college, depending on the shared goal at hand, you work within different departments and with different people. Each of those projects entails a separate set of relationships with people at both organizations, and people drive relationships, so I think there's been lots of different experiences and lessons learned from those situations.

Communication happens on a couple of levels. When there happens to be a grant, the program officer is responsible for communicating with the program lead over at the college. Being in the same community, I know our leader communicates with the leader of the College too, because they serve on local committees together. I shouldn't just say our leader because it's others too. There is really a lot of communication happening at

different levels because we are all in the same community. That can be complicated, but also a good thing.

Document analysis. In reviewing the funder’s publicly viewable history of grantmaking to community colleges between 1959 and 2008 (D1), a total of 229 grants were awarded totaling over \$51.5 million dollars. Of those, 58 grants exceeding a total of \$17 million dollars were awarded to the College of focus in this study within that nearly 50-year period. This means that 25% of all community college grants and 34% of related funding was awarded to this particular college during this period. Since 2008, additional grants totaling nearly \$6 million dollars have also been awarded to this College in support of two projects.

When compared to other community college grantees, the college who received the second greatest number of grants received nine totaling just under \$2 million dollars over a 15-year period. While records were found of other community colleges receiving grants exceeding \$4 million dollars, the College of focus in this study was still the recipient of the single largest grant to a community college during this period. A further break down of grants awarded from 1959 to 2008 between this Funder and College is as follows.

Table 2: *Funder – College Grant Awards, 1959-2008*

GRANT RANGE	GRANTS AWARDED PER RANGE
\$0 - \$4,999	22
\$5,000 - \$24,999	11
\$25,000 - \$49,999	2
\$50,000 - \$99,999	6
\$100,000 - \$249,999	4
\$250,000 - \$499,999	2
\$500,000 - \$999,999	6
\$1,000,000 - \$4,000,000	4
Over \$4 million	1

Other points of interest related to this funding history are highlighted below and offer additional perspective on the uniqueness of this relationship.

- Some grants to four-year colleges and universities were larger.
- One large publicly funded research university that was founded over 100 years before this College received more than 2.5 times as many grants.
- A similar and sometimes greater number of grants were awarded to other local funders, typically to re-grant those funds in support of larger work or to operate a capacity building program aligned with the Funder's grantmaking focus areas.
- A large local K-12 district was awarded more and larger grants to focus on implementing district-specific improvements.
- City government was awarded more and larger grants to enhance specific city services, make infrastructure improvements, and sometimes to build community capacity to address neighborhood challenges.
- No record was found of a local organization or institution having received more grant awards than the College of focus in this study, with the exception of those noted above.
- While a comparison to all grantees of this Funder was not possible because they awarded over 22,000 grants through 2008, it seems unlikely few organizations and institutions beyond those highlighted above would have received approximately 60 awards from this Funder over time, based on the large geography within which they distribute grants.

Further analysis reveals grants awarded between this Funder and College from 1959–2008 spanned five main focus areas: (1) education, (2) leadership, (3) community enrichment, (4) nonprofit sector capacity building, and (5) workforce supports. However, the vast majority of grants were in support of educational efforts, as this totaled \$14.5 million over 44 grants, and represented 76% of all grants and 84% of all funds. Across the four remaining areas, 14 grants were awarded totally \$2.7 million. When three additional grants awarded between 2008 and 2017 are considered (D5, D13, D15), growing or new areas of Funder interest emerge. During this period, \$5.75 million was granted in two areas: (1) workforce supports, and (2) diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Whether considering only the Funder's publicly viewable grant history through 2008, or including additional grants awarded through 2017, the overwhelming majority of all grants awarded to this College were for one of three activities: programming support, workshop and

event sponsorship, or facility construction. These areas together totaled over \$22 million, which represented 79% of all grants and 97% of all funds awarded from 1959 to 2017. The details of these three areas reveal that over \$13 million was invested in facility construction, \$9 million in support of direct programming, and another \$65,000 to sponsor workshops and events.

Remaining activities that the Funder supported through the College spanned an additional eight areas, and included things like scholarship support, convening groups, and research, but the only activity receiving funding over \$100,000 was for curriculum support, at nearly \$630,000.

Overall Analysis. The details provided from the documents reviewed include some grantees of this Funder who share some similar features with the College in this study, based on sector or geographic location. In spite of these features, the relationship between this Funder and this College was still found to be especially unique when grant frequency, size, and diversity of focus areas were considered. It is apparent that the relationship between these two organizations is uniquely long-standing and active, especially as compared to other community colleges and most other local organizations that have also been the recipient of grants from this Funder.

Their community co-location was found unique as compared to many of the Foundation's grantees, as was the large size of the College compared to other local grant recipients. Together, these factors result in a large network of interpersonal relationships that has allowed ample opportunities for staff across these organizations to interact formally and informally, whether engaged in a current grant or not. This was viewed as both an opportunity to deepen the organizational relationship in general, but also a challenge when these interactions contributed to creating sometimes inaccurate or confusing narratives about who each of these organizations are within the community.

Their organizational sizes and history of work separately and together to make local community improvements has created a level of confidence in each for the other and contributed to them seeing one other as a natural partner. At the organizational level, there was found to be a common sense of purpose and commitment to strengthening their shared community, which is something that has contributed to their long-term relationship.

As found in the literature around Funders who focus resources in specific locations (Brown & Fiester, 2007; Burns & Brown, 2012; FSG, 2011; Harder + Company, 2011), place-based or embedded funding has the potential to have great impact in a specific community, but it also requires a higher degree of partnership. Overall, this body of work points to lessons learned for Funders and grantees in effectively practicing place-based work. Best practices include establishing partnerships in which roles are defined, collective expectations are set, accountabilities are in place, resources are appropriately utilized, conflict is positively managed, performance issues are addressed, and communication is well-managed, as critical to the work. In designating a lead organization with which to work, they go on to indicate that funders expect such an organization to bring its credibility and track record in advancing community needs and interests, and to develop the necessary community buy-in to make the work a success. The benefits for the funder in this kind of relationship are that they have a single point of contact for the work and can rely on the partner organization's knowledge of community dynamics and leadership in implementing the work.

The unique aspects of the relationship between this Funder and College, contributes to the chances the necessary level of partnership described by place-based researchers can be achieved in this instance. The Funder and College in this study reside in the same community, which can allow for easier communication and trust building. Additionally, their joint work is

focused on making improvements in their shared location, in which the College has the necessary credibility and connections to support the work's success.

A complicating factor found that has made this long-term relationship somewhat unique as compared to many other local grantees of this Funder, is that much of their joint work has been focused at the community systems level. This reality is due to their co-location in, and commitment to, the same community, positions of power they both occupy within it, the political pressure that comes with large personal and organizational networks, and some mission overlap. While the College possesses the human and financial capacity to take on challenging community work, systems work is by nature complicated. In this relationship, with a multitude of and changing players over time, and lessons learned related to communication not consistently passed along to new players, this has offered additional challenges at times in impacting the systems on which their work was focused. However, in spite of that, the unique aspects of this relationship could be of support in achieving the best practices found to increase success in place-based work between funders and grantees.

Theme 2D: The College's Board is Publicly Elected

Background. As previously discussed in this chapter, organizational factors and structures over which individuals had no control impacted how they navigated the relationship between the two organizations in this study. In that discussion, the governance structures of each of the organizations were presented, and differences noted. In this section, a brief summary and analysis of how the governance structure of this College makes it unique as a grantee of this funder is provided.

Document Analysis. According to the Funders Grant Application Guidelines (D16), all grantees must be a legal entity that is a nonprofit organization, public or governmental entity, or

a for-profit corporation doing charitable work. If they meet this criterion, the applicant organization must also be a legal 501(c)(3) organization, such as a church, school, hospital, governmental unit, or publicly supported organization.

A search of the Funder's publicly available grantee database (D12) was conducted for grantees whose funded work was in support of the community shared by the Funder and College in this study. Based on this criterion, since 2010, approximately 16% of all grants awarded in support of this community were to grantees with publicly elected boards. As many of these organizations received multiple grants during this period, all of these grants were awarded across approximately 10 grantees who included the Community College in this study, as well as four-year universities, individual K-12 districts, the county's Intermediate School District, and departments within the city and county governments. When the four-year universities that do not have a physical presence in this particular community were removed as a search criterion, the number of grantees with strictly locally publicly elected boards was reduced to only 13% of grants focused on this community during this period. All other grantees identified through this search had appointed boards, but some with close ties to government work did reserve board seats for publicly elected officials. However, in spite of their public election to their seat, these individuals were still appointed to the boards of these grantees.

Overall Analysis. The College is governed by a locally elected public board, and its members are charged with leading the College in a manner compliant with the larger state and federal governance requirements of its sector.

Colleges often refer to their board members as "trustees," but according to Eisenstein (2019), the role of the board of trustees in higher education has been evolving. She states, "Much of the responsibility for governance in that arena is transitioning from upper administration to the

board because the board is ultimately responsible for decisions governing higher education” (para. 1). She goes on to clarify that when “director” is used to describe a member of a governing board, it is typically in connection with a public or private nonprofit organization. She states that the difference between a board member and a trustee comes down to legal requirements. She indicates, “These regulations differ substantially from the laws that govern nonprofits. Under charitable trust acts, the word trustee has a specific legal meaning. Trustees are held to a higher fiduciary standard than other board directors. This is an important distinction because trustees may be held personally liable for simple acts of negligence even if they made decisions in good faith” (para. 5).

As has been discussed, a search of this Funder’s grantee database revealed that most of their grantees serving the community they share with this College are governed by appointed boards. While all governing boards must adhere to laws and policies related to their governance responsibilities, a higher fiduciary standard is applied to the College’s trustees as publicly elected officials. This aspect of the College’s governance contributes to making it unique in comparison to most other local grantees of this Funder.

Theme 3: Internal, invisible, and often unstated organizational factors impact the organizational relationship.

In this study, all participants highlighted how often unseen factors impacted the relationship between these two organizations. Through the qualitative data coding process, it was found that comments related to this insight were shared 111 times, which represented 14% of all coded interview data. Documents reviewed offered additional insights. Evidence from interviews and document analysis are presented in the discussion of this finding that follows and are focused around the following relevant factors: (3A) culture, organizational structures, and governance, (3B) the influence of other organizational partners.

Theme 3A: Culture, organizational structures, and governance

Background. As discussed in Finding 1, invisible or unknown organizational factors exist in this relationship, and impact the individuals that navigate within it. An overview of aspects of organizational culture was presented, as was an overview of the governance and funding structures within which each of these organizations operate. Beyond the impact of these invisible structures on the players, they are discussed here in relation to their impact on the configuration of the larger organizational relationship itself.

Results. It was found that some of the pace and agility with which the College was able to move was impacted by formal structures that were beyond its control as a publicly funded institution. They were also impacted, however, by factors within its control, such as some policies and culture. As a private organization, although the Funder had different constraints that impacted its pace and agility, it sometimes desired quicker movement than the College could offer. Comments shared by participants offered insights into how internal, invisible, and uncommunicated organizational factors have impacted this relationship.

Community College Staff One:

It gets back to an internal organizational culture. Do you feel like your voice will be heard and you can speak it in the room? When you don't have that, I think that's a legitimate issue that can get in the way and cause mistrust, and internal transparency can impact the relationship with the partner too. We have to ask how open we are about being open and honest, and then make sure everybody is on the same page so we can be a good partner.

In terms of culture, internally, trust within the organization plays a role, and even internal communication plays a role in order to be able to be a really strong partner.

You know, when you have a College, to make things change takes a tremendous amount of time and there are a lot of loopholes and a lot of layers to get through it, but when you have a Funder who wants to move faster and we're not able to necessarily move as fast based on our culture, then that can cause tension. I think that's Higher Ed in general though - are we as nimble as we could be? Probably not.

Community College Staff Two:

When a Funder makes internal changes, we don't always know that. Sometimes they restructure to align with a new strategic direction or something, but we don't always know that is happening at first. From the outside we might feel something is different though. Maybe we feel a change in how quickly we can reach someone, or maybe a new person becomes one of our grant contacts. When they are in the process of moving people or departments around, that can be a little confusing until the final picture becomes clear.

Funder Staff One:

I have found kind of a bigger thing with communication sometimes is internal process and structure. Once I knew my main point of contact wanted to talk to me about something but was not able to due to internal processes. Things came to light as it played out and it required several conversations with several people there, but a lot of that could have been simply avoided by letting the person communicate with me. And I completely understand now why the call was made not to share, but it made stuff really difficult then.

I find in larger institutions in particular that it is extremely important to understand their internal process, their goals, decision making, accountability, because that can be a challenge. I may be talking to a senior leader about where we are in the project, and they have ideas about moving something forward, but they have to internally check with five people first. I find that sometimes it can be really difficult to wrap your head around having a relationship with one or two people at any institution, and then realizing that they have to go back and check with like five people on something. It can take a minute to understand all their internal workings, but you need to so the wrong assumptions aren't made.

The Foundation leaves a lot of that flexibility, decision making up to program officers. Since many are interacting on a daily basis with grantees, there are several things they can see when a grantee is like, "I want to change this, this and this. How do I do that without having to go back and go up a full hierarchy?" That's probably one of the things that I think we (the Funder) probably do the best.

I see that the department implementing a grant sometimes can't see what they need to do because something needs to be approved by a different arm or an academic board. For those that might be more on the academic side who aren't necessarily engaged on the ground like that and may be more focused on the research, academics, and theory, I think sometimes there feels like there's a bit of a disconnect. I don't know that for sure — it's just speculation based on a few conversations I've had that that happens as kind of an internal struggle, probably with many community colleges to be honest because, you know, how do you get everybody on the same page?

I had a long conversation once with someone about the Pell Grant, and another about the impact of some state and federal legislation on how community colleges operate and their ability to access funds. Leadership is always important at any institution, and I can think of moments where I wished the College had done this or that or whatever, and I'm sure

they would say the same thing about us. Most of what I hear and feel when it comes to situations like this though, has been around the broader policy implications of the decisions they are making, and that makes their job very difficult in many ways. I did not always understand that at first.

Funder Staff Two:

I think that sometimes what impacts transparency is not necessarily having everyone who is part of a situation in the room at the same time, but having the same conversation when messages get communicated up and down organizations, regardless of the institution. I think sometimes things get lost or are not as clear as they need to be. That impacts how each partner experiences transparency with the other, whether in reality or in perception, which are both important. I think that's always a challenge when you're in a larger institution when you oftentimes have multiple people making decisions about things.

I know that institutions have their own internal processes that they follow to make decisions, even when I don't know that those are. Sometimes you can't share something before it's been through your internal process of decision making, but at the point you're able to share it you should. You should also do the best you can to keep the other partner updated as you're going through that process, because I think sometimes silence is viewed as not transparent. I think sometimes silence happens when people feel like they don't have the end result to communicate, but you can still communicate where you are in your process of decision making so at least people know that something's happening. Sometimes there are internal factors that dictate how much you can share, but you don't want someone drawing the wrong conclusions by not sharing what you actually can, or at least keeping the lines of communication open.

I think that internal alignment is important. Making sure that the College leaders and whoever is on the ground doing the work are in alignment is important. This helps make it clear to the Foundation about how they're working together and holding each other accountable. They also have to be able to communicate that back to the Foundation so if there's a concern, we know how to go about navigating resolution to that. Who to work with. Who to talk to. I think with any institution, you absolutely start with the president and senior leadership, but a lot of people doing the actual work are not those people. Senior leaders are setting the direction, guiding, and holding people accountable, and the same is true here. We have our people on the ground in the community too, and if that alignment isn't in place, it really creates a challenging environment for everyone.

We [the Funder] want to help. We want to be as flexible as possible. When we don't have enough details though, we can't do that. Sometimes when a grantee isn't as open as would be helpful, it can lead to questions around their capacity to an extent. Even if that's not the issue, we have no way of knowing that until more information is provided. I think sometimes it can be related to things we are not a part of, like internal processes within that organization, but we have no way of knowing that at the time.

Document analysis. In reviewing a 2017 Grant Agreement (D15) between these two organizations, the types of changes the College had to communicate to the Funder was clearly spelled out. This included things like changes in senior leadership positions, but also changes in organizational structure such as financial condition, management, professional staffing, and operations. It was noted that these changes were considered important as they could threaten financial stability or position or affect ability to fulfill the grant as agreed upon. While these were listed as changes that the College was required to communicate to the Funder, no evidence was found that suggested such organizational level changes at the Funder had to be communicated to the College.

Overall Analysis. In a relationship that merely involves the awarding of funds to a grantee to complete identified work on behalf of a funder, this could be viewed as a contractual relationship with the grantee as a vendor. Under this type of arrangement, it is less important for them to be informed of changes at the funder such as those outlined in the above Grant Agreement. However, as this particular relationship has been shown to be unique in the ways discussed throughout this chapter, the types of information reciprocally shared related to organizational level change was found to be an important consideration.

As has been previously discussed in this chapter, as a publicly funded institution, aspects of the College's governance structures and decision-making processes were impacted by the state and federal laws to which they were accountable. As the Funder operates under a different governance model that allows them to appoint board members and exercise more flexibility in aspects of their work, when the Funder felt the College did not quickly share challenges as they emerged, this led to them sometimes questioning capacity and transparency. This impression of the Funder's was often influenced by the College's governance factors with which they were not

familiar, or sometimes even aware. Likewise, as the Funder refined its strategic approach to grant-making, it occasionally restructured departments, reporting structures, etc. In doing so, this impacted communication with the College specifically around things like pace of decision-making, time availability of staff, changing roles of staff, and degree of communication possible.

The apparently unintentional appearance of opaqueness created by both organizations in these various instances contributed to assumptions and miscommunication that impacted trust, but the factors contributing to these actions were not usually apparent to the other partner. Organizational structures for both were more easily navigated when communication was clear, transparent, and consistent. It was found that senior leaders at both organizations played an important role in ensuring internal alignment for communication, accountability, decision-making, and transparency.

Theme 3B: Influence of Other Organizational Partners

Results. Documentation was previously presented for Theme 2 that highlighted how external partners could have an impact on the College's grant-funded work, and that the degree to which this happened made them more unique as a grantee of this funder. Here, such invisible factors are presented in relation to their impact on the larger organizational relationship itself, and not just on the uniqueness of the College as a grantee.

As discussed previously in this chapter, the nature of these organizations' work, mission, size, and broad commitment to their shared community contributed to them both having large local organizational networks. Their joint work was sometimes influenced by these partners, whether the other organizations were formally involved in a grant or not. In the case of the College, the influence of outside partners sometimes translated into them experiencing pressure to address the concerns expressed by these partners, even when that negatively impacted their

ability to achieve the goals of a grant most effectively. A College representative offered an insightful perspective on the reality of how such factors sometimes placed their organization in challenging positions, whether the Funder was aware of this or not.

Community College Staff One:

We have a lot of different players at our other partner organizations, but in the community too. And, you know, trying to align with where everyone wants to go and to how they want to see change happen has sometimes caused tension. The College serves a lot more people and has a bigger service area than the Funder is focused on through a grant, and so that's kind of created some tension for the College in its broader work at times. It can be hard to get others to fully understand how big and complicated all that is for us.

We can't shift the whole ship just to comply with a grant, but we do need to ask what we need to do to make sure we are delivering what we promised. There has been tension when the Funder wanted to focus grant resources on specific segments of the community and organizations who serve those segments. That can be challenging for us if it looks like we are shifting to serve some people in the community more than others.

Document analysis. Analysis of documents revealed expectations were placed on both organizations that they come to the table for larger conversations and work in the community. Such expectations showed that the relationship between them was impacted by their broad connections with other local organizations.

A 2014 email thread (D19) showed that a College representative working on a current grant from this Funder was part of an informal collaboration of six organizations representing various community sectors. While no formal affiliation existed, the group coalesced around their common goals of making positive community change for underserved populations. The emails reviewed showed, that at one point, a Funder representative was invited to their meeting to provide clarity around how their bodies of work aligned with an emerging direction in the Funder's local interests. The emails are friendly and collegial, and in them the Funder indicated they were happy to provide an update on their emerging work, but that they also hoped to get

recommendations from these individuals on how the Funder could best support such work in the future. This documentation shows outside organizations pursuing complementary work have had the opportunity to influence grant-funded projects between this College and Funder. It also shows that these other organizations can influence other work of the Funder as well.

A 2014 Grant Application Narrative (D20) included language prompting the College to discuss how proposed work could be sustained with the support of existing partners. Later in the document, a request was made for the College to discuss other community engagement efforts in which it was involved, and the key leaders, organizations, and networks these included. This indicates an awareness on the part of the Funder that the College's work is impacted by broader community relationships.

Overall Analysis. As discussed in theme two, the nature of their work, mission, size, and broad commitment to the community resulted in the College sometimes feeling political pressure from other external partners, whether they were directly involved in a grant or not. For similar reasons, this was found true for the Funder as well. The pressure felt by both seemed to most often manifest in the expectation that they play a leadership role in community work and be at the table for conversations about high-level community impact.

While both organizations were found to experience this pressure, the reality of it was not always apparent to the other partner. Additionally, in the case of the College, this sometimes led to them taking on work that, while aligned with their mission, inadvertently placed them in awkward positions in which they felt it was not possible to completely please both the Funder and other organizational partners that they valued. It seems the depth of this impact and level of complication sometimes imposed on them was not always clear to the Funder.

Theme 4: Communication, transparency, and trust are paramount to the strength of the larger organizational relationship, but insufficient intention is placed here, and on defining mutual accountabilities and related practices that might promote stronger relationships.

In this study, all participants discussed the importance that communication, transparency, and trust had on the nature of the relationship between these organizations. Through the qualitative data coding process, it was found that comments related to this insight were shared 180 times, which represented 23% of all coded interview data. Documents reviewed offered additional insights. Evidence from interviews and document analysis are presented in the discussion of this finding that follows and are focused around these factors: (4A) communication and transparency, and (4B) miscommunication, goals, and trust.

Theme 4A: Communication and Transparency

Results. As discussed, communication in this organizational relationship was found to be quite dependent on the approach of and relationship between the individual players involved in current grant work. Consistency in approach was impacted when new players were introduced, and/or existing players left the relationship. As drivers of culture and norms, senior leaders had an impact on communication as well.

Alignment of internal communication impacted communication with the organizational partner, which influenced the building of trust between the individual players and the organizations. At the College, internal alignment and communication impacted ability to deliver on grant goals and commitments to the Funder, if different messages were sent to, or perceived by, the Funder. The same reality happened within the Funder as well, which resulted in perceived inconsistent communication with the College at times. When the miscommunication stemmed from lack of alignment within the College however, this sometimes led to the Funder questioning

the College's capacity. Following are participant insights around how communication and transparency have impacted this relationship.

Community College Staff One:

It's fine to disagree (internally), but if you're disagreeing and you're not moving, you're not making a change. You make decisions but you just become stagnant or frozen, and that can become clear to the other party. That can cause questions and concerns and we've experienced that - where there's questions and concerns about our abilities to be able to fulfill the grant, implement them, or to say what you want to do with the grant, but then not be able to fulfill it. There's nothing wrong with that provided that you're very open and honest about what wasn't working or what does work, where the challenges are, why something can't be fulfilled, but I think culture around communication, trust, how we make decisions, how we interact and relate, all makes a big difference in being a good partner and certainly in the eyes of a funder. A lot of that is driven by leadership.

It gets back to an internal organizational culture. Do you feel like your voice will be heard and you can speak it in the room? When you don't have that, I think that's a legitimate issue that can get in the way and cause mistrust, and internal transparency can impact the relationship with the partner too. We have to ask how open we are about being open and honest, and then make sure everybody is on the same page so we can be a good partner.

Trust is about being humble, knowing when you've made a mistake, owning up to it, and being very open and communicative about it. Once trust was marred a little, I think because the Funder felt there was lack of communication. There was communication, but they felt it was lacking in us being definitive around decisions we made. They said they were unaware of those decisions, but we thought we had communicated with them, so clearly there was miscommunication somewhere. That caused some damage to the relationship at the time, and we all had to get past that before we could focus on rebuilding.

In our partnership, I think they have been clear as much as possible, but there are times when it's not so clear to us. I think they have gotten more open and direct about how they may feel, but certainly there are some areas in which things can still be not so clear to us.

Ongoing communication is so important. I mean literally sit down and put it on a calendar. You know, check-ins are great, but literally force those communication touch points to happen.

I think we're now better. I think we've learned, at least I hope we have, you know, from some of those detours in the road so to speak when the situations arose, I think that now we've been able to say let's be as transparent as possible, communicate as much as possible. I think mistakes can be made. The challenges is that people's lives are involved in some of those mistakes and I think owning up to that and then being very open about

everything is, what you have to do. Otherwise, you won't be called back to the table around funding. I just think all this can damage the relationship.

Community College Staff Two:

Once a decision a decision was made that resulted in me feeling like there wasn't really complete truthfulness and honesty in terms of why a shift of direction was happening. It created a level of distrust, and I think that impacted our ability to communicate with each other after that.

We need to be sure to communicate our needs and concerns in this relationship. I think in the absence of that, we risk getting pushed in directions that we may not feel are the most beneficial for us. Unless we state clearly where we stand and what works for us/what doesn't work for us, then that leaves room for a lot of other things to happen.

I think cultivating more open communication with grantees is something a funder needs to take the lead on. They need to really do whatever it takes to send a really strong, clear signal to grantees that it's okay to be honest with us, to give us critical feedback, and that they will actually listen to it and respond to it. Not just listen, but respond to it, and then do something with that information to shift the way they operate in a relationship if necessary.

When a Funder makes internal changes, we don't always know that. Sometimes they restructure to align with a new strategic direction or something, but we don't always know that is happening at first. From the outside we might feel something is different though. Maybe we feel a change in how quickly we can reach someone, or maybe a new person becomes one of our grant contacts. When they are in the process of moving people or departments around, that can be a little confusing until the final picture becomes clear.

Funder Staff One:

This goes back to our conversation about communication. I'd much rather someone sit down and say, "Look, this is how I'm feeling, and this may not be intentional, but this is how I'm feeling," and then we move forward from there. That approach isn't taken by everyone though. I think the communication, transparency, and building the relationship between program staff and leadership at both organizations contributes to reducing a power dynamic barrier that, in some cases, is real, but it also, in other cases is perceived, and that impacts how we work together overall. It's more complicated than just a couple people, but I'm not sure we always recognize that and think about their impact on the larger work over time.

The communication aspect is probably the most important thing, and especially when things aren't going well.

With large institutions like both of ours, it can get complicated around communication and process and structure. It can go smoothly, but it's like nothing else matters if these don't work.

What's impacted trust between the two organizations in this study? I would say that everything goes back to communication. For example, when things once got complicated for a second, it was because of lack of communication. It's since been resolved, and is not a big deal, but in that particular situation, it didn't have to go as far as it did if people had just kind of communicated and said, "Look, here's the situation. This is the call we had to make, you know, it's gonna have some implications, but it's how we want to do this," and I think nobody would have had an issue.

Funder Staff Two:

I know that institutions have their own internal processes that they follow to make decisions, even when I don't know that those are. Sometimes you can't share something before it's been through your internal process of decision making, but at the point you're able to share it you should. You should also do the best you can to keep the other partner updated as you're going through that process, because I think sometimes silence is viewed as not transparent. I think sometimes silence happens when people feel like they don't have the end result to communicate, but you can still communicate where you are in your process of decision making so at least people know that something's happening. Sometimes there are internal factors that dictate how much you can share, but you don't want someone drawing the wrong conclusions by not sharing what you actually can, or at least keeping the lines of communication open.

I think communication is really critical. It's the basis of a good partnership. If you're not clearly communicating, then it's really hard to gain trust and be in alignment to hold each other accountable.

For effective communication, I think meeting more frequently helps in being clear with each other on what you want to achieve together. The opportunity to give feedback from either end when something isn't working well makes the relationship stronger if it's handled well and done well and people feel good about it and like they're in it together. I've seen it happen both ways though. I think there have been examples where maybe there wasn't alignment and clear communication, and I don't think either party felt good about the end result of that.

I think it's setting the up-front expectation that this isn't a relationship where we're purely just holding your accountable for achieving what you said you would do in the grant, but that we're problem solving together and that we recognize that we're going to be in regular enough communication so if something doesn't go the way we thought, we can make a mid-course correction. The work can continue, and we can learn together, adapt together and make the work better as it opposed to it being a pass or fail type of thing. That takes us as individuals agreeing to work together like that.

I think that we could really view our organizational partnership as an opportunity to plan and learn together. I think we should both always be asking ourselves, "Are we doing work that might impact the other and if that's the case, how should we involve them in the decision making for the work moving forward?" Because I don't think relationships

work very well when a decision is made on one end and then just communicated to the other.

We (the Funder) want to help. We want to be as flexible as possible. When we don't have enough details though, we can't do that. Sometimes when a grantee isn't as open as would be helpful, it can lead to questions around their capacity to an extent. Even if that's not the issue, we have no way of knowing that until more information is provided. I think sometimes it can be related to things we are not a part of, like internal processes within that organization, but we have no way of knowing that at the time.

Not having shared definitions of their work together also impacted the relationship. In the case of individual grants, a distinction was not made between the degree and nature of interaction required for work that was more transactional, versus work that was more complicated and systemic in nature. Representatives from both organizations acknowledged that the goals of a specific grant impacted the working relationship in the moment. Depending on whether the work was transactional in nature or more complicated, this impacted the level of partnership required at the time. One long-serving College representative offered the following perspective on how this lack of clarity impacted their work together.

Community College Staff One:

What does it mean to be a grantee? What it does it mean to be a grantor? What does it mean to be a partner? What does it mean to be in a vendor/vendee relationship? I'm not sure all organizations truly understand. And what does that mean for both organizations? It's not the same for every single funder and grantee out there in the world, but what does that mean particularly for the two institutions involved? I think that understanding is important. It needs to be defined.

Document analysis. The Funder's Final Narrative Grant Report Guidelines (D10) are provided when grants are awarded. Within this document, it is indicated that there is no Funder expectation that any project should unfold exactly as envisioned, and that the ability to make course corrections could help better achieve project outcomes. The importance of capitalizing on "lessons learned" is noted, and there is encouragement to share "successes and frustrations." The

language in this document indicates the open sharing of both successes supporting and unanticipated challenges negatively impacting progress are encouraged.

As previously highlighted in documents analyzed, other aspects of communication are also formally outlined in grant documents. In a 2017 Grant Agreement (D15), formal language discussed factors related to staffing or finances considered important for the College to communicate to the Funder. In a 2017 Grant Agreement Letter (D14), budgetary and other changes that required advanced written communication from the College were included. While these examples demonstrate accountability for the College to the Foundation, the documents were absent formal mutual accountabilities in the relationship.

Following established Grant Application Guidelines (D16), in 2014 the College responded to the Funder's directions by discussing their plan for larger communication with the community around project outcomes. As no request was made in this document to discuss communication with the Funder in general as a partner however, the College provided no such information.

Internal emails (D3, D8, D9) previously highlighted showed how communication within the College between new grant funded staff and various other employees impacted their ability to retrieve and provide information requested by the Funder. One email specifically (D8) showed an attempt to ensure that everyone internal to the College was being included in the information gathering process, with an acknowledgement that this was important as it could impact communication with the Funder.

Overall Analysis. As already presented throughout this chapter, individual approaches to the interpersonal relationships between those involved in grant work was found to impact the reality of the organizational relationship in the moment. This reality was often found to be of

greater influence on how the organizational relationship played out over time, than was language found in the formal grant documents highlighted above.

In grant guidelines, language was included stating the Funder had no expectation that any project should unfold exactly as intended, and that identifying and making course corrections could benefit the work. The importance of capturing “lessons learned” was also observed, as was the open sharing of both progress and setbacks. Even though such guidelines are associated with specific grants, the language within offers an opportunity to operate in this manner in the larger relationship, even if not explicitly stated.

In reviewing the documents of this relationship, it was often the case that when important aspects of partnership like accountability and communication were included, the direction of responsibility for engaging in behaviors supportive of these principles were directed at the College as the grantee. The type of work arrangement necessary to achieve the goals of a specific grant were also not clarified. When a grant was more transactional in nature and did not require a high degree of joint problem solving, a vendor type relationship was not defined. Likewise, when the scope of work and level of complication necessitated a true organizational partnership in which they needed to learn and grow together, that was not defined either. In this study, it was found that while both organizations had seemingly similar understandings of what these kinds of arrangements looked like, it was not formally clarified in grant agreements as to what kind of relationship any particular grant represented. This added a new level of complication to communication over time in this relationship.

As communication in this relationship was found to be quite dependent on the approach of and relationship between changing individual players, this presented challenges in consistency. While senior leaders had an impact on establishing norms around communication

(both internal and external) and transparency, overall, this was mostly left to the individuals engaged in the work of a grant to navigate. This reality resulted in insufficient intention being placed on communication at the organizational level in this long-standing relationship. Based on the literature, communication seems to be the bedrock of transparency and of building and maintaining trust. In this relationship, inconsistent communication sometimes resulted in negative impacts because questions around capacity, intent, and accountability were raised.

When there was alignment and clear communication internally, the result was better communication with the organizational partner and increased trust. Communication between senior College leaders and program staff was found essential in delivering on promises made to the Funder and making sure everyone was on the same page. When internal College communication was not aligned, different messages were sent to, or perceived by, the Funder when directly communicating with them. The same reality happened within the Funder as well, which resulted in perceived inconsistent communication with the College at times. However, when the miscommunication stemmed from lack of alignment within the College, this sometimes led to the Funder questioning the College's capacity.

Theme 4B: Miscommunication, Goals, and Trust

Results. All participants pointed to instances when trust between the organizations was impacted due to miscommunication. As in this study norms for communication were found to be defined at the individual level, and that approaches to such by changing players varied, it is not possible to know whether miscommunication in these instances was due to how messages were sent versus how they were perceived. No matter the reason for the miscommunication, the result was that the organizational relationship was influenced through it.

Community College Staff One:

Trust is about being humble, knowing when you've made a mistake, owning up to it, and being very open and communicative about it. Once trust was marred a little, I think because the Funder felt there was lack of communication. There was communication, but they felt it was lacking in us being definitive around decisions we made. They said they were unaware of those decisions, but we thought we had communicated with them, so clearly there was miscommunication somewhere. That caused some damage to the relationship at the time, and we all had to get past that before we could focus on rebuilding.

In our partnership, I think they have been clear as much as possible, but there are times when it's not so clear to us. I think they have gotten more open and direct about how they may feel, but certainly there are some areas in which things can still be not so clear to us. I mean, we had the grant goals and all, but what were they (the Funder) really looking for? What did they want to see happen?

Community College Staff Two:

Once a decision a decision was made that resulted in me feeling like there wasn't really complete truthfulness and honesty in terms of why a shift of direction was happening. It created a level of distrust, and I think that impacted our ability to communicate with each other after that.

Funder Staff One:

Once somebody made a judgment call not to talk to the Foundation about an issue, and it spiraled out of control and became complicated. I now understand their rationale for that, but we can't help or support grantees if we don't actually understand the landscape of what they are dealing with.

Funder Staff Two:

Sometimes I know there's a concern about sharing things that may not be working, for fear that funding won't continue. I think that has been true in this case between these two organizations, but I also think that in a particular instance in one grant, I felt like we had achieved the level of trust as individuals where open and honest feedback was given.

I think it's setting the up-front expectation that this isn't a relationship where we're purely just holding you accountable for achieving what you said you would do in the grant, but that we're problem solving together and that we recognize that we're going to be in regular enough communication so if something doesn't go the way we thought, we can make a mid-course correction. The work can continue, and we can learn together, adapt together and make the work better as opposed to it being a pass or fail type of thing. That takes us as individuals agreeing to work together like that.

We (the Funder) want to help. We want to be as flexible as possible. When we don't have enough details though, we can't do that. Sometimes when a grantee isn't as open as

would be helpful, it can lead to questions around their capacity to an extent. Even if that's not the issue, we have no way of knowing that until more information is provided. I think sometimes it can be related to things we are not a part of, like internal processes within that organization, but we have no way of knowing that at the time.

Different approaches were taken in documenting decisions made and agreed upon next steps as related to current grants. There was not a standardized process by which information was captured in writing, and thus the processes used varied by the individuals involved. When looking at pending grants, it was also sometimes the case that the College and Funder were differently interpreting terminology contained within these documents.

In one example, important decisions related to a grant extension were communicated verbally and in some emails, but no formal documentation was developed to ensure everyone was on the same page. The result was inconsistency among the players' understandings of the implications of the decisions. By the time the miscommunication came to light, actions had already been taken that led to the temporary marring of trust in the larger relationship.

Community College Staff One:

Once trust was marred a little, I think because the Funder felt there was lack of communication. There was communication, but they felt it was lacking in us being definitive around decisions we made. They said they were unaware of those decisions, but we thought we had communicated with them, so clearly there was miscommunication somewhere. That caused some damage to the relationship at the time, and we all had to get past that before we could focus on rebuilding.

Funder Staff One:

I would say that everything goes back to communication. For example, when things once got complicated for a second, it was because of lack of communication. It's since been resolved, and is not a big deal, but in that particular situation, it didn't have to go as far as it did if people had just kind of communicated and said, "Look, here's the situation. This is the call we had to make, you know, it's gonna have some implications, but it's how we want to do this," and I think nobody would have had an issue.

In another example, even when a formal document related to a pending grant was available for reference, there was terminology within it that led to miscommunication. In this

instance, the Funder and College were unknowingly defining the scope of service recipients differently. By the time this reality came to light, the College had already verbally promised services to recipients that the Funder had not intended to include in the grant. This resulted in having to work through a situation involving multiple organizations, shortly before the grant was to be implemented. One College representative described the impact of this situation as follows.

Community College Staff One:

We thought we were on the same page (with the Funder), so we had made commitments to some of our other partners. We told them (the other partners) that we would be serving them through the grant. A few weeks before the grant was supposed to launch though, we discovered that we were defining the grant's service recipients differently. That was tough. We had to figure out how to maintain those relationships with our other partners that it turns out weren't intended to be served through the grant, but they were already sort of counting on getting those services. We have to be really clear about things like that. We have to make sure we are on the same page and defining things the same.

When miscommunication and missteps occurred that damaged trust, individual players were often able to get past such instances and rebuild trust, but there was less attention placed on the impact for the larger organizational relationship in the long-term. Not working through misunderstandings at this level and capturing lessons learned in a permanent way, impacted their ability to maintain and increase trust in the organizational relationship over time. Following are participant comments around the impact of miscommunication, goals, and trust in this relationship.

Community College Staff One:

I think we're now better. I think we've learned, at least I hope we have, you know, from some of those detours in the road so to speak when the situations arose, I think that now we've been able to say let's be as transparent as possible, communicate as much as possible. I think mistakes can be made. The challenge is that people's lives are involved in some of those mistakes, and I think owning up to that and then being very open about everything is, what you have to do. Otherwise, you won't be called back to the table around funding. I just think all this can damage the relationship.

Trust is about being humble, knowing when you've made a mistake, owning up to it, and being very open and communicative about it. Once trust was marred a little, I think because the Funder felt there was lack of communication. There was communication, but they felt it was lacking in us being definitive around decisions we made. They said they were unaware of those decisions, but we thought we had communicated with them, so clearly there was miscommunication somewhere. That caused some damage to the relationship at the time, and we all had to get past that before we could focus on rebuilding.

Community College Staff Two:

Once a decision a decision was made that resulted in me feeling like there wasn't really complete truthfulness and honesty in terms of why a shift of direction was happening. It created a level of distrust, and I think that impacted our ability to communicate with each other after that. We have to be on the same page if we are working together, otherwise there can be miscommunication that damages our ability to do that.

Nothing is perfect, but we have to keep miscommunication to a minimum by agreeing to connect regularly. We tried to have almost monthly meetings. They didn't always work out, but there was a certain level of sustained communication over time. One time there was a shift in who was involved in a grant, and then the communication felt less transparent than it had previously. Even though it was just with that one person, looking back, that made it really difficult to be able to build a sense of trust with the whole organization. Things like that can linger even after the person moves on.

Funder Staff One:

Once I knew my main point of contact wanted to talk to me about something but was not able to due to internal processes. Things came to light as it played out and it required several conversations with several people there, but a lot of that could have been simply avoided by letting the person communicate with me. And I completely understand now why the call was made not to share, but it made stuff really difficult then. That whole thing felt like there was just a lot of miscommunication going on.

What's impacted trust between the two organizations in this study? I would say that everything goes back to communication. For example, when things once got complicated for a second, it was because of lack of communication. It's since been resolved, and is not a big deal, but in that particular situation, it didn't have to go as far as it did if people had just kind of communicated and said, "Look, here's the situation. This is the call we had to make, you know, it's gonna have some implications, but it's how we want to do this," and I think nobody would have had an issue. That lack of communication led to some larger miscommunication though, and that had broader implications for how we worked together for awhile.

Funder Staff Two:

In a particular instance, I felt like we had achieved a level of trust where open and honest feedback was given. Some of the most difficult and helpful feedback that I received came

from an employee of the Community College. They were very willing to give direct feedback about things that the Foundation was doing that were or were not helpful, not just for the College, but for the community. I think that was able to happen because we had personally built trust over time together.

I think the relationship changes over time depending on leadership. When organizations change leaders, you are kind of reevaluating the relationship. I think as each of our institutions have gone through those types of changes, we've just had to work again at reestablishing that trust and that relationship and getting clear on anything that's changed or hasn't changed.

I think communication is really critical. It's the basis of a good partnership. If you're not clearly communicating, then it's really hard to gain trust and be in alignment to hold each other accountable. You have to avoid miscommunication, because that can set things back.

So, I think to build trust, it kind of goes back to open lines of communication, receptivity to feedback on either end, and the ability to give that feedback without fear of negative repercussions. Time builds trust. Recognition of past errors builds trust. Consistency of message and purpose I think builds trust. When an organization is inconsistent, I think it's difficult for people to know what they're doing or if they can trust them.

I have found that to be effective takes establishing trust early on, so that when a real big challenge comes up, you have that foundation to be able to address it. If you don't have that foundation of trust, then when you try to address something big, instead being vulnerable in a positive way people become defensive. I've seen that, not just in this relationship, but in others. That just doesn't really get you very far.

There was one instance when I was wanting someone [from the College] to tell me what they thought needed to happen. I think they thought they were doing that. Looking back, I think there could have been clearer communication all around though. What did they think? Did they know what we [the Funder] really wanted to see happen?

Overall Analysis. In this relationship, different approaches were taken in documenting decisions made and agreed upon next steps as related to current grants. There was not a standardized process by which information was captured, and thus the processes used varied by the individuals involved. When looking at pending grants, it was also sometimes the case that the College and Funder were differently interpreting terminology contained within these documents. These factors combined with having multiple and changing players, resulted in miscommunication, missteps, and even damaged trust in the relationship at times.

Sometimes, it was found that the College was waiting for direction from the Funder to be sure they were proceeding as desired, but that the Funder was waiting for the College to take the lead and present ideas based on the fact that they were the ones doing the work on the ground. At times, this miscommunication led to lack of movement and overall progress on achieving the goals of some grants. This left the Funder questioning the College's capacity, and the College feeling unsure of the Funder's expectations.

As discussed throughout this chapter, a convergence of organizational constraints often invisible to the other partner, combined with varying individual approaches to communication, were found to be factors in this relationship. Together these resulted in perceived lack of transparency, which at times, impacted trust. Actions consistently seemed to stem from a lack of awareness of the other organization's needs and realities, versus an intentional attempt to conceal information. Increased intention placed on establishing clear and mutual communication practices has the ability to reduce incidence of miscommunication in this organizational relationship.

Research Questions Answered

The research questions in this study were developed to provide a better understanding of the relationships of community colleges and charitable foundations and identify barriers and best practices in their work together in order to increase effectiveness. A case study of a long-term relationship between a funder and community college was used to answer research questions and inform the practice of others engaged in similar work and relationships. The research questions were

1. How do community college and funder perspectives on their working relationships and partnerships differ and align?
2. How do these perspectives impact their work together?

3. How can community colleges and funders leverage partnership best practices to the benefit of their mutual goals?

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the themes included in this chapter are presented. The remainder of Chapter 4 is devoted to addressing the research questions of this study as related to those themes.

Research Question 1: How do community college and funder perspectives on their working relationships and partnerships differ and align?

Alignment. This research confirmed that, overall, the Funder and College of focus in this study share similar perspectives on what constitutes a good working relationship and partnership. The language used by participants to describe such factors were aligned with one another and the literature on this subject. All participants verbalized that factors such as relationship history, leadership, trust, commitment and motivation, decision making and accountability, communication, transparency, mission and goals, values, and resources all played important roles. Emails and formal funding documents included language reflecting many aspects of the partnership best practices described above as well. Examples aligned with the literature included commitment and motivation, compromise, decision-making and accountability, change, communication, mission and goals, values, and resources.

Misalignment. Although a good deal of perspective alignment was found on what constituted a good working relationship and partnership, there were some aspects of misalignment as well. This came when comparing formal funding documents to participant insights and email communications.

Funding documents contained language around decision-making and accountability that is common in such documents, as they serve to clarify the expectations of a grantee as the recipient of funds. Participant comments and email threads showed shared accountability in

achieving mutually agreed upon goals. However, when compared to the language used in formal funding documents, the documents placed more accountabilities on the College's behaviors than those of the Funder. While many aspects of a good partnership were acknowledged across the board in this relationship, the day-to-day details and practices of how these played out were left up to the individuals involved to decipher.

Another area of misalignment was related to communication. How this played out in the relationship varied depending on the players involved, even though language related to some aspects of communication were referenced in funding documents. In these documents, it was clear that the College needed to communicate at specific times and around specific content to the Funder, but not vice versa. Participant comments and email conversations showed efforts by individuals from both organizations to practice what they perceived as good communication regardless of funding document details, but as such practices were not clearly defined for both partners, miscommunication sometimes resulted. As formal funding documents were not used as "living documents" in this relationship to guide the interpersonal behaviors of all the players involved, this resulted in opportunities lost to embed communication best practices in the day-to-day relationship of these organizations.

Research Question 2: How do these perspectives impact their work together?

As noted in the discussion of research question one, perspectives on partnership best practices were quite aligned. Where misalignment was found, it was more in how mutual accountability and communication were practiced in the relationship, and less a question of whether both partners felt those factors were important. This came to light in comparing formal funding documents to participant insights and email communications. Inconsistency in how these factors played out in the relationship was likely due to the absence of clear and shared

expectations for both the College and Funder. The following considerations contributed to this reality.

Impact of individuals. While all participants verbalized similar factors as being important in this organizational relationship, all were also quick to point out that the impact of these factors was quite person dependent. Norms and expectations of interactions were not clearly and intentionally defined for both partners at the organizational level. The length of time an individual had been involved in the larger relationship on any level impacted their ability to navigate this landscape. Depending on the ability of individuals to negotiate these spaces, this positively or negatively impacted the larger relationship at various times. Likewise, the depth of learning that accompanied these instances was influenced by the approach of the players, as was success in deepening the relationship as missteps or miscommunications were worked through.

In addition to the program level staff in this relationship, senior leaders were found to play an important role as well. As drivers of organizational culture and processes, these leaders have the power to define the parameters of this relationship for the staff executing its activities on a day-to-day basis. In this relationship, the nature of engagement among senior leaders varied based on who the leaders were at the time. Their role was found to be of heightened importance in this specific organizational relationship, as it has been decades-long, involved millions of dollars invested in their joint work in the community, involved somewhat frequent changes in program level staff and, to a lesser degree, changes in senior leadership as well.

Impact of organizational factors — invisible realities. Individual behaviors exhibited in the relationship were impacted by the organizational structures within which they had to operate. Aspects of internal organizational culture related to transparency and communication impacted individual practices, and thus the larger relationship. Internal practices related to

decision-making also affected a player's ability to navigate the relationship, as these structures dictated the scope of authority within which they had to make a decision in the moment. The more people involved in the approval process, the greater the impact on the pace at which decisions could be made and communicated back to the partner. This led to not only slowed progress in some instances, but to questions around capacity to accomplish the work, which lingered until the reason for the delay was better understood.

Both organizations were found to be large and politically powerful in their shared community. As such, this translated into a larger web of organizational partners that may or may not have been involved in a particular grant between these two organizations. Both felt pressure from these partners to come to the table for community work or play a leadership role within it in some way. When the nature of this work overlapped with a current grant, this placed increased pressure on the College to navigate meeting the needs of its other partners, while still maintaining increased focus on the work of a grant that only targeted select service recipients. In light of the College's mission to serve the community very broadly, this put them in sometimes awkward positions with segments of the community.

Impact of organizational factors — unknown organizational structures. As a private foundation, the Funder was found to sometimes enjoy more flexibility related to the pace at which it could make decisions and take action. While aspects of decision-making are admittedly a part of informal organizational culture, at other times governance and funding structures within which each organization had to operate played a role as well. Both organizations are bound to the state and federal rules and laws of their sector, but there were some differences of note.

As a privately funded institution, the Funder retained more control of its funding mechanisms and how its board was appointed and operated. While it still had to comply with

state and federal fiscal reporting and other requirements, where it chose to grant its money and specifics of how it chose to distribute it were mostly within its control. Likewise, although as a nonprofit organization there were requirements related to board functioning that had to be followed, the make-up of this appointed board and aspects of its internal scope of authority was left to the Funder to decide. This was related to internal policies impacting the organization's daily operations.

As a publicly funded institution, the College had less control within its financial and governance structures. Part of its funding was allocated through state appropriations, over which it had no control related to amount or timing of disbursements. Likewise, as a recipient of different forms of federal funding, the College was at the mercy of these related government processes and timelines that impacted how much funding they might receive, and when. In both cases, this translated into them sometimes having to wait for these processes to play out before they could be sure financial resources were available that may have impacted a grant with this Funder.

In terms of governance, the College's board is publicly elected. This translated into lack of control over the board's make-up and meant that a member could not be appointed based on their experience, connections, or other important characteristics they possessed. As a nonprofit organization, the College is subject to the same rules and laws as the Funder related to the role of a board, and like the Funder, it retains more control in setting internal board policies related to many day-to-day institutional operations.

Research Question 3: How can community colleges and funders leverage partnership best practices to the benefit of their mutual goals?

Specific recommendations related to all research questions and larger study findings are presented in Chapter 5. In answering this research question here however, aspects of the themes

that emerged through this study that impacted the organizations' abilities to leverage partnership best practices are discussed.

Changing players. The relationship between these two organizations has been long, and the reality of changing employee roles within it noted. This has resulted in the relatively frequent introduction of new players into this organizational relationship, and also the departure of others. When program level staff at either organization changed, this resulted in norms related to interpersonal interactions having to be negotiated as they learned to work together. As discussed throughout this chapter, with individuals representing their larger organizations in this relationship, this translated into these interpersonal level relationships serving as a surrogate for the larger organizational one in the moment. Without acknowledging this reality and its potential impacts, this meant that leveraging partnership best practices was left to individuals, and thus not consistently embedded within the larger organizational relationship over time.

Unique grantee. While the length of this relationship made the College relatively unique among the Funder's grantees, this was especially true as compared to other community colleges. This was heightened by the frequency with which they worked together, and the amount of financial resources involved. Additionally, the degree of interdependence between the two organizations in delivering their mission work in their shared community was noted as a characteristic not common with most other local grantees of this Funder.

Overall, the Funder does not often rely on most other grantees in the same ways or as much as it does this College. This reality was further amplified through the overlap of service recipients supported via their missions. The unique aspects of this relationship offered increased opportunities to leverage partnership best practices to the benefit of both organizations and their joint work over time.

Communication, miscommunication, and trust. Through this study it was frequently noted that communication served as the bedrock of achieving mutual goals and building trust in this relationship. This is aligned with the literature on building successful partnerships. In spite of this reality, intention placed on developing agreed upon norms for two-way communication was found lacking in this relationship at the organizational level. Likewise, chances to deepen the relationship via the learning possible in acknowledging and working through missteps together were lost at this level as well. When missteps were worked through, it was often at the individual level. This translated into missed opportunities to leverage partnership best practices to the mutual benefit of these organizations and their joint work over time.

Power. Although still present, the power dynamic in this relationship was found to be less obtrusive than is typical in most funder and grantee relationships. This was partly due to the positions of power both organizations held in the local community, and the financial and staffing resources each possessed. It was also due to their interdependence in best delivering aspects of their mission. These factors combined meant that while neither needed the other to survive, they did need them if they wanted to expand their reach and achieve their goals. This presented the opportunity to more easily leverage partnership best practices in their joint work, because a more equal power balance can better translate into increased honesty and transparency in communication.

Chapter Summary

This case study combined participant interviews and intensive document analysis to identify themes important in the relationship between a community college and funder with a long history of working together in their shared community. With large historical and ongoing investments of time and money between these organizations in an effort to create positive local

community change, understanding how to leverage best practices in organizational collaborations is important.

In this long and active relationship, it was clear that both organizations and their staff understood the importance of the larger relationship in expanding their organization's reach and enhancing mission work. It was also clear that at the individual level, staff had similar views of what constituted good organizational collaboration and worked to act in a manner they felt supported a good partnership.

Through the evidence collected and analyzed, several factors were found as central to the reality of this organizational relationship. These factors include the impact of (1) frequently changing individual players on the organizational relationship, which is heightened due to the often minimal organizational level parameters established around critical aspects of collaboration (communications, transparency, mutual accountability, etc.); (2) invisible organizational realities such as culture, communication practices, and community expectations, and their impact on the larger work of the partnership; and (3) organizational structures unclear or unknown to the other partner, such as funding and governance requirements, that sometimes effected the pace of decision-making and ability to maneuver within the work.

Related to the above factors, there were found to be some unique aspects in this relationship which offer the opportunity to overcome one of the most typically pronounced barriers to effective funder and grantee relationships – the power imbalance. The sheer size, financial resources, and local political power of each organization affords them increased freedom in deciding who they want to work with, when, and why. At the same time, a level of interdependence exists between these organizations, as together they can both expand their reach when it comes to fulfilling their missions. This interplay between independence and

interdependence results in the opportunity to overcome challenges created by power imbalances in these kinds of relationships.

In Chapter 5, the conclusions of this study, which are minimally referenced here in the chapter four summary, will be presented in greater detail. Recommendations for future research and practice will also be presented.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 4 presented findings and answered the study's research questions. In this chapter, conclusions are drawn and recommendations offered for future practice and areas of possible research.

Five years of experience as a program officer in the funding community, three years of responsibility in overseeing the re-granting of funds from various funders, and over 15 years in higher education at the four-year and community college levels provided the researcher with a unique perspective into these sectors and their work together. This perspective aided in identifying the focus of this study as one which was not only critical to the work of these kinds of organizations but lacking in the literature at the community college level. The researcher's connection to both of these sectors and these specific organizations allowed access to the many documents reviewed as part of this research, and also the interview participants significant in this organizational relationship.

Considering the researcher's history of experience, strategies discussed in Chapter 3 were employed to restrict bias, and to ensure the study's validity. According to Yin (2009), prior experience and an in-depth understanding of the case study can strengthen analysis. As such, the researcher's deep knowledge and history of related work impact the impressions, conclusions, and recommendations presented.

Significance of the Study

As a former program officer and practicing community college administrator, the researcher had a personal interest in conducting this study. In doing so, it was hoped that challenges impacting the joint work of these organizations would be identified, and related solutions uncovered. Likewise, where strengths existed, the intention was to acknowledge and build on those. By documenting these realities from the personal experiences of those involved and comparing those to the documents that formally structure this relationship, the potential exists to inform the practice of similar organizations and relationships.

Philanthropy is a sector that is always seeking to maximize the return on its grant investments in the communities supported. These communities can be defined (1) demographically and exist across a vast geography, (2) by the literal physical boundaries of a location, or (3) by concern for issues such as the Arts and Culture Community, AIDS Community or the Environmental Community, etc. In many instances, it is a combination of the three. The focus areas and amount of resources invested by funders also varies widely, as does the frequency with which they enter in to a grant relationship with specific organizations. When a funder makes a grant-making commitment to the geographic community within which it resides, devotes significant financial resources to it, and implements a strategy to support this, the level of complication in the related relationships is increased for the many reasons discussed throughout this study.

Funders have stakeholders to which they are accountable, and various pressures which they must consider. All funders have trustees that oversee their organization's work, so they must be always cognizant of the expectations of this group. Likewise, they are also accountable to any government agencies that regulate aspects of their work, such as the Internal Revenue Service. Private foundations are responsible for being good stewards of the funds invested by their

founding donor(s), by aligning their grant-making with the donor's intent. This same responsibility exists for any funder who manages donor advised funds. Funders also feel pressure from the communities they serve, no matter how they have defined community. As whom they serve is central to their mission, they have built a reputation on effectively serving these groups, individuals, and causes. Finally, Foundations exist within a sector that values investing wisely in the people or causes they support. This translates into pressure and a general expectation that the work of a funder will "make a difference" for those served.

Community colleges have more variance in terms of the kinds of people they serve than is typical of funders that may support them. While foundations may grant funds anywhere in the world, when their mission is to help people, they typically focus their investments in support of specific populations such as children and families, the homeless, etc. While a funder's geographic scope may be broader in comparison to a community college's, who a community college serves in a distinct location is very wide-ranging.

While a community college's commitment to service recipients is defined primarily by geography that does not mean community college students reside within their service district. As an institution with open access to educational and career pathways, a community college's student markets are always evolving. This evolution is impacted by community employment trends, the economy, changes in K-12 institutions in general and locally, government funding and policy decisions, and changes in the sectors with which they partner to serve their students and steer them into as career pathways. This constant need to respond to the plethora of factors that impact their mission work necessitates flexibility, but also that they work to stay at the forefront of emerging trends that impact their students.

Clearly community colleges and funders both have stakeholders to which they are accountable. Both also feel external pressures based on who they serve and how. In general, however, community colleges have more expectations placed on them from their broad spectrum of stakeholders such as students, taxpayers, employers, school districts, elected officials, trustees, etc. than a funder. This contrast between these two types of organizations results in community colleges having more restrictions when operating within the parameters of their relationship with a funder.

The conclusions of this study are aligned with its findings and research questions, and address five key points: (1) the impact of interpersonal relationships is important, (2) the influence of the partners' shared community is noteworthy, (3) if addressed, currently unacknowledged power dynamics may represent a unique opportunity to strengthen joint work, (4) communication practices and processes must be more defined for the relationship to be successful, and (5) the relationship's structure needs to be made clear and explicit.

Conclusion 1: Individual Relationships — Acknowledge the Importance

Individual relationships serve as a surrogate for the larger relationship between these organizations. This fact is important and not likely to change. Accepting this reality is not only important, but both partners need to put measures in place to ensure these relationships are successful in helping achieve the goals of a grant.

Both organizations in this study are seen as community leaders who leverage their large networks to address complicated local challenges separately, but often together. Being large organizations in terms of staffing means the players change over time at all levels in both organizations. The answer is not how to fight this reality. More logically, the solution is focused

on how to best support these individuals to ensure alignment between them, within their respective organizations, and between the organizations together.

When changes occur at the senior level of either organization, the partners have the opportunity to revisit and even redefine the relationship. During and between these opportunities, senior leaders can intentionally steer the direction of norms associated with communication, transparency, and approach to joint learning, but also internal practices related to decision-making and how those are communicated. In this study, there was lack of clarity between the partners in these areas at the organizational level. This meant it was mostly left to individuals to navigate through interpersonal relationships. As individuals serve as surrogates in the larger relationship, increased clarity for those executing grant work day-to-day work can improve the organizational relationship by promoting transparency and consistency in communication. This can positively impact the pace at which work is completed.

When organizational factors impacting pace are unclear to the other partner, this leads to questions around capacity and intent that linger over time. In instances where there has been lack of internal alignment between senior leaders and program staff, or when there was lack of clarity for the other organization, this lack of alignment has sometimes resulted in missteps. Although senior leaders in this relationship were sometimes involved in initially addressing larger missteps, much of the repair to damaged trust was often relegated to, and worked through, among program staff.

Even if clarity existed at the organizational level around norms and practices related to transparency and approach to joint learning, and internal practices related to decision-making consistently communicated to the other partner, it would not ensure program staff were prepared to represent their organizations in alignment with such stated expectations. In this study, several

factors were found that influenced program staffs' preparedness in this regard, which include (1) the length of time spent in their respective sector and this relationship, (2) their understanding of how the other sector's governance and financial structures impact pace when it comes to decision-making and implementing work, and (3) the history of their shared community in providing context for the organizational relationship. Understanding the impacts of more nuanced aspects of organizational culture is more challenging, but open and honest conversations are a way to start down this path. Having clear and stated norms for transparency and communication at the organizational level would aid in preparing individuals to engage in conversations in this way.

Overall, the key is to acknowledge that having players who change regularly is going to greatly influence this organizational relationship, and that partners need to intentionally build in supports so that individuals can effectively engage with the other partner on behalf of their organizations. Doing this requires the organizations to clarify best practices that they will follow, and clearly state the accountabilities that come with those. If these supports are not in place, the quality of the organizational relationship will continue to be dependent on the players, who come to the work with varying degrees of information.

Conclusion 2: Shared Community — Acknowledge the Influence

A great strength of this partnership is the organizations' deep commitment to positive change in their shared community. Core to each of their missions is a goal to strengthen the community and benefit its residents. In pursuit of this shared goal, the organizations have long seen each other as natural partners that can leverage resources and connections for the greater good.

In pooling their considerable human and financial resources, they have built vast community networks of organizations and individuals, which are now critical to their work both separately and together. This large and interconnected web influences the work of grant projects between them. Often formal partners apply this influence in collaborative grant projects, but at other times the influence is felt even without a formal affiliation to a specific grant. In these instances, the College may be placed in a position where it must assure its other partners that specific services will not be altered or diminished because of the College's active role in a grant program. The degree of pressure felt by the College to mitigate this discomfort in these situations may not always be apparent to the Funder.

Because of the leadership positions each organization holds in the community, there is the expectation that they will both be in conversations about high-level community changes. This work is often focused at the community's systems level, as that is where deep and lasting change takes root. For the College, this work, while aligned with their mission, can sometimes place them in awkward positions where they may have conflicted aims to please both the Funder and community partners. This work may also stretch their resources, when unanticipated changes in the funding streams, or in governmental decisions with policy implications have affected their resources.

For the partners, while the value of broader community relationships contributes to the partnership's strength, it also increases the number of complications and possible political pressures from within the community. To address these possible conflicts, the partners need to identify practices to help them identify these organizations and understand the impact they might have on both partner's work. Communication and transparency are critical to allowing these

complex relationships to come to light, so that they can be considered appropriately in their joint work.

Conclusion 3: Power Dynamics — Take Advantage of Opportunities to Equalize

One of the most important factors that can be leveraged to the benefit of the partnership's work is the relationship's power dynamic. While this research found that the College wields more power than is typical for many other local groups funded by the Foundation, the inequality in financial resources still gave the Funder more overall power. However, even with these balances, this partnership had other unique equalizers.

Probably the most important equalizer is the degree of interdependence between the partners in pursuing their individual organization's mission, especially related to systems-level community change. The College has needed the Funder to implement innovative projects it found important. In turn, the Funder has needed the College to receive and act on the intent of their grants, and strategically pursue some of its local mission-related work. Without this partnership, the College would be more limited in providing services that meet its students' and community's emerging needs, and the Funder would be less able to have the local impact it desires. Each organization also plays a powerful role in different community systems, and both have relied on the other to access and impact these interrelated systems at many times in their history. Community work necessitates a reliance on partners in order to have far-reaching impact, and this relationship reflects that dependence.

In spite of their interdependence, each partner is also independent from the other in ways that equalize the power dynamic between them. Each organization has substantial human and financial resources. This means that as each partner is able to stand alone, neither needs the other to sustain its daily operations. While both could exist without the other and still have a great

impact in the community, they recognize that they are stronger and can have more far-reaching effects together. They also understand that each possesses expertise that benefits the other.

With the College's human resource pool, comes its capacity to engage in complicated community work at a level not possible by most other local organizations. Likewise, the Funder's human resource pool represents an array of expertise that can benefit the community and College. As the relevant literature has indicated, power dynamics most consistently impact funder relationships with their grantees. In this study's relationship, however, the opportunity exists to remove or greatly minimize the power dynamic as a barrier, with both partners acknowledging it and working together. Taking these steps to adjust the power dynamic will require a level of transparency not always found in funder / grantee relationships. In this instance, however, the steps may be more possible because of their more equal standing within the community.

Conclusion 4: Communication Practices — Define and Clarify

As noted in the literature and supported through this study, communication plays a critical role in the structure upon which a relationship is built. This holds true in this relationship as well. In this instance, two situations drive the communication practices and provide opportunities for enhancing the partnership. First, communication norms are negotiated mainly at the individual level, and second, communication processes between the organizations have a history of inconsistency. In the past, when miscommunication has occurred, it has negatively affected the partners' trust in each other. Even when that trust was repaired, the root of the miscommunication was not typically addressed at the organizational level. With the many changing players, this has meant stops and starts, instead of a deepening of overall trust that can come when important lessons are faced and learned.

Inconsistent communication practices have also occasionally resulted in perceived lack of transparency. Eventually clarity has emerged, but in the interim, questions that were raised around intent and capacity lingered. If more formal communication processes and practices were established at the organizational level, and parameters and expectations more clearly defined at the informal and interpersonal levels, these improved communication practices could greatly aid in avoiding miscommunications, missteps, and any related negative impacts.

The systemic level at which these two organizations regularly work together requires a shared commitment to joint learning. The humility required for such an approach is best supported through good communication practices and a high degree of transparency, which are intertwined with organizational culture. As senior leaders are drivers of such culture, they are best positioned to clarify related expectations in this area, and establish this as the norm, versus the exception, for how work is conducted together. Without clarity and intention, such practices will rely on the approach of individual players, which is a challenge in light of the frequency of personal changes.

Conclusion 5: Structure of the Relationship — Formalize

As noted throughout this study, except for the requirements outlined in official funding documents, the formal structures of this larger relationship have not always been clearly spelled out. Within those gaps, individual staff are left to determine the best course of action in representing their organization. This person-dependent approach does not support consistent and sustained best practices over time. Senior leaders should define the structure of this relationship, not just when grants are involved, but in between grants as well. Doing so would provide a road map for new program-level players as they enter into the picture.

Some formal communication structures are outlined in various grant documents, but responsibility for communication is typically one way and specifies expectations for the College as the grantee. Nothing is stated about the expectations for the Funder. As supported by the literature, however, a partnership requires mutual accountability. In this study's relationship, accountability is often practiced at the interpersonal level, but mutual expectations are not made clear at the organizational level. In addition to mutual expectations about communication practices, there are no consistent practices for making decisions, discussing lessons learned, or defining the context surrounding both. Over the partnership's history, different practices have been implemented with varying degrees of success, but these were too often person and situation dependent. The changing players in this relationship makes establishing such practices all the more critical.

Another complicating factor for establishing consistent practices is that much of this relationship is impacted by the somewhat invisible funding and governance structures within each organization. The only way to understand these structures is through time and experience, both in the relationship and their sector, and through understanding the partner's sector as well. No clear mechanisms exist to support new players and help them understand the history of the relationship, the other sector, the historical relevance of the community in their joint work, or the influences of "invisible" funding or governance structures. Working together to capture this history in writing, and then implementing practices to transfer this information to future players, would create a clearer picture of the structure of the relationship.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Clarification at the Grant Level: Add a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formal grant agreements to clarify the type of relationship each grant represents.

Even though this organizational relationship has a long history, the goals of individual grants vary. This means the nature of the relationship is impacted by the goals of each grant. When the Funder needs the College to serve as a vendor who merely provides specific services in the community, this role represents a transactional level relationship. High degrees of problem-solving and joint learning are not required in these cases. However, when the organizations partner to address more complicated or systemic level change in the community, this role necessitates a deeper partnership with higher levels of trust, communication, and joint learning. In these instances, working from a place of true partnership is essential to the success of the grant.

Actualizing the recommendation. As an addendum to each grant agreement, a MOU should be developed. In general, it should complement the binding aspects of formal grant agreements, which typically includes things like grant period and legal aspects of the awarding and acceptance of funds. The MOU should build on the standard aspects of grant agreements by specifically outlining things such as (1) goals/purpose of the grant, (2) nature of the relationship required (vendor/transactional vs. partner/transformational) to achieve those goals, (3) agreed upon definitions and working arrangements of transactional and transformational relationships, (4) outline of each partners' roles in the grant, and (5) mutual partner responsibilities/accountabilities in their work together (which includes agreed upon communication practices through the grant).

2. *Clarification about Power in the Relationship: Have ongoing and open conversations about the power balance.*

Open and honest conversations about the realities of the power dynamics in this relationship must be intentionally inserted into the work. Even though the power imbalance is less pronounced in this relationship than is typical for most funders and grantee, the power still leans towards the Funder. This means they must take responsibility for making sure these conversations stay at the forefront of their work together and reassure the grantee/College that it is safe to share even difficult information. In turn, the College must commit to transparently sharing such information.

Actualizing the recommendation. In this particular relationship, the Funder has access to information from a grantee perception survey they currently administer through a third party. While not providing information specific to this grantee's relationship with them, this survey will provide general grantee feedback around perceptions of working with this Funder. Not all funders administer a survey such as this, but as this particular Funder does, the information captured by this instrument can be used to add additional depth in understanding the impact that power has on their funding relationships with grantees in general. However, as power in funder / grantee relationships is such a complex and important reality to navigate, relying on this survey data alone is insufficient to truly understand power in relationships like this one.

To ensure the power balance is considered and acted upon to the benefit of community college and funder relationships and their work, it is recommended a neutral third party be engaged to facilitate a process through which this dynamic can be explored. Through this process, barriers can be identified, and solutions uncovered to overcome them.

The process should begin with the consultant gathering feedback from various program staff and senior leaders at both organizations who are involved in the relationship. This could be

accomplished through a questionnaire to allow the free sharing of anonymous feedback that can serve as a basis for deeper, in-person conversations at a later date. Topics for feedback should shed light on the structure and practices of the relationship, and focus on areas such as:

- *Communication* – To what extent is a common and agreed upon language used in your work together? How responsive is the partner to requests for information? Does the level of communication meet your organization’s needs? Does one partner initiate contact more than the other? Is your partner’s messaging around goals and strategy consistent? Are both partners held accountable to the same level and kind of communication and information sharing in the relationship?
- *Transparency* – Overall how transparent is the partner with your organization? How well have they kept you informed when factors over which you had no control, negatively impacted the timing of a grant or its related processes? Are both partners held accountable to the same level of transparency in the relationship?
- *Decision-making* – Does your organization carry equal weight in decisions that impact the work of the partnership? How are decisions made when there is disagreement and stakes are high? Has the partner ever made a decision in which you felt your organization had little input, or none?
- *Respect and Trust* – Overall, how respectfully does the partner treat you? What is the level of trust between your organizations? Is their behavior consistent in a way that builds trust?
- *Ability to Exercise Power in the Relationship* – In general, how comfortable do you feel approaching and being completely honest with the partner if a problem arises? As you develop grant proposals together, how has your organization been able to influence priorities for the work? Have you felt pressure from the other partner to make modifications as proposals were developed?
- *Political Implications* – Have there been negative political repercussions for your organization when missteps are made in this relationship?
- *Partner’s Approach and Willingness to Share Power*
 - To what extent is the partner open to ideas about changes in strategy?
 - What kinds of opportunities have been presented to reflect and learn together in the relationship? Did both partners act upon them?
 - How many strings are attached to the grants and funding between the partners? Have there been opportunities for multi-year or general operating grants? If so, were they acted upon in any way?

- Has your organization ever told the partner “no”? What’s at stake if your organization does this? Does this answer change based on the perceived level of importance of the request?
- Have resources or information ever been withheld by the partner as a result of a misstep in the relationship? Was this action unanticipated?
- Has the partner ever apologized for their role in a misstep?
- *Valued for Expertise* – What resources of value or strengths has your organization brought to the relationship? Has the partner recognized and acknowledged these? To what degree does the partner acknowledge and value your organization’s expertise overall? What resources of value do you bring that your partner does not sufficiently acknowledge or utilize?
- *Partner’s Effort to Understand your Organization and its Needs* – How well are your organization’s needs met through this partnership? What is the overall impact of the partner on your organization when working together? What about in between grants? Has the partner taken the time to understand the following?
 - Needs of other organizations with which you regularly work, and their impact on the work of a grant and/or this partnership
 - Your service recipients and their needs/challenges
 - Field/sector in which you work
 - Local community you serve
 - Your organization’s general strategies and goals
 - Challenges that your organization is facing
 - Social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors that affect your work
- *Suggestions for Improvement* – What could your organization do to help equalize the power balance in this relationship? What could the other organization do to help equalize the power balance in this relationship?

Once initial feedback has been gathered, analyzed, and themes identified, an in-person gathering should be convened that includes program staff and senior leaders from both organizations who are involved in the relationship. This facilitated conversation should be used to explore the themes presented through the questionnaire, in a way that maintains a non-

judgmental focus on understanding the realities of the other partner, the relationship, and on identifying solutions to distribute power more equally.

Once understanding has been achieved and mutual practices to maintain a healthy power balance identified, a process to regularly revisit the power balance in the relationship should be agreed upon and implemented based on an agreed upon time table. As power is such a tricky dynamic to navigate, it is recommended that a neutral third party always be involved when formally revisiting this dynamic in relationships similar to this one, so ongoing solutions to equalize power can be identified, and recorded for clarification.

3. *Clarification at the Interpersonal Level - Support individual players in executing their roles within the larger relationship, by developing a Partnership Practices Guide.*

Together, the organizations need to formally clarify expectations for staff around how to navigate within the larger relationship and provide consistent guidance around expectations for joint work. They need to consider their approach to communication, decision-making processes and related documentation, transparency, joint learning, and each organization's accountability to the other in associated practices.

Both organizations need to understand how their structures and norms impact their ability to make decisions and engage in joint projects. These structures, whether a reality of their sector's governance or funding mechanisms, or an aspect of organizational culture, need to be clearly communicated to the other partner. In addition, influences of outside partners need to be identified, and a plan put in place to work through the challenges this can create. Finally, the historical context of this decades-long relationship needs to be documented and communicated to new players as they emerge and revisited as the community changes over time. These commitments and practices should be revisited regularly to ensure they remain at the forefront of their work together.

Actualizing the recommendation. In order for new players to observe agreed upon norms and practices for interpersonal interactions that will guide the larger relationship, they must receive accurate and current information. Together, current program staff from both organizations should develop initial content related to important topics, which include:

- Processes for communication, decision-making, documenting decisions and recording information, transparency, approach to joint learning, and mutual accountability
- Internal aspects of organizational culture that can impact decision-making, transparency, and communication
- How financial and governance aspects of each sector impact decision-making, transparency, and communication
- Identification of and influences from outside organizational partners, whether involved in grant work or not
- Historical context of their shared community in this decades-long relationship, and its impact on their joint work

Summarized content should be provided to senior leaders for review and clarification, and to fill in any gaps in information that remain. In doing this, areas of misalignment must be identified between assumed and actual practices in the relationship. Final practices, information, and expectations can serve as a guide for new players as they enter into the relationship. Each organization should identify a staff person that will serve as a resource in 1) making sure their new colleagues gain access to this important information, and 2) answering questions they may have as they navigate the relationship's dynamics. The content of this guide should be revisited annually for updates, with this process being initiated by program-level staff at each organization working together.

4. Clarification at the Organizational Level - Develop a Partnership Agreement to guide the larger relationship over time.

A separate partnership agreement should be created that focuses on the best practices of partnership that will be observed at the organizational level. While previous recommendations for practice will clarify aspects of the relationship related to power, specific grants, and norms, practices, and information for interpersonal interactions, the Partnership Agreement should guide the organizational relationship itself.

Actualizing the recommendation. If the partners have implemented the previous recommendations for practice, the outcomes of those efforts can be used to develop a larger organizational level Partnership Agreement. By starting with shared definitions of the kinds of relationships required for specific grants, solutions generated in addressing power imbalances, and agreed-upon norms and information to guide individuals in navigating this relationship, the organizations should be able to add a few more areas of information and translate this into a Partnership Agreement. Overall, this agreement should include:

- A shared definition of “partnership”
- Recommendations to maintain the power balance in the relationship
- A “code of conduct” that draws content from recommendations 1-3, in identifying partnership best practices that both organizations and their employees will observe.

This living document should be revisited at agreed upon intervals by senior leaders and program staff and used to guide current work on joint projects and in the long-term organizational relationship.

For Future Research

The grant work between community colleges and funders can have far-reaching impacts in communities. Through this study, important perspectives of individuals directly involved in

one funder and community college relationship were presented. While these insights focused on the funder and community college in this relationship, when their reflections were considered in conjunction with the documents reviewed as part of this study, important lessons were revealed. These lessons have the capacity to inform and strengthen the relationship between funders and community colleges more broadly. In order to build on the knowledge gained through this study, areas of future research into relationships between funders and community colleges are presented below. In addition, recommendations for future research into similar funder / grantee relationships is also offered.

Recommendation #1

If the study participants had been expanded to include additional program staff previously involved in this relationship, additional insights could have resulted. Often time creates distance that can support the emergence of new perspectives. If individuals no longer employed by either organization were also included, their historical reflections might provide additional context useful in understanding this active and decades-long funder-grantee relationship. Additionally, as the individuals offering these perspectives would not be current employees of either partner, they may feel less responsibility to choose their words in the same way that a current employee might. This could result in increased candor in sharing insights.

Recommendation #2

The results of this study could be the basis for developing a survey tool to gather data more broadly around these kinds of relationships. The survey could be delivered to multiple community colleges and funders at the state and / or national level. It is possible that differences could emerge based on (1) the size of a community college, (2) funding and governance structures across community colleges in different states, (3) whether the funder and community

college share and serve the same hometown or reside in different locations, (4) whether grants between a funder and community college tend to support work at the transactional or systems level, and (5) the different kinds and sizes of philanthropic foundations.

The Foundation in this study is defined as a private foundation. An example of a different kind of funder that regularly works with community colleges is a Community Foundation. These foundations restrict funding to a specific community, so this aspect of their mission work is in strong alignment with the mission of a community college when they are located in the same area. Community Foundations often offer additional services that a private funder may not. Examples include managing scholarship funds and multiple donor-advised funds of varying sizes. Such differences may contribute to distinctions in the relationship of community colleges with community foundations, as compared to other kinds of funders.

Depending on the state within which a community college resides, their governance structures and funding processes can vary, and this could impact how they work with a foundation. In many states, each college operates independently, or through satellite campuses that constitute a single local community college system. In other states, there are no state governing or coordinating boards. Community colleges can be closely aligned with a four-year institution, or just work with them to create a transfer pathway for students. Each state also decides how much or little financial support they will allocate to community colleges. As no community college has control over governance structure or financial appropriations dictated at the state-level, the details of these requirements could impact how and how often a community college works with a particular funder.

Recommendation #3

As the power dynamic of funder / grantee relationships is of such significance, a qualitative or mixed-methods study focused on this specific aspect of partnership that includes both program-level staff and senior leader perspectives could be pursued. A study such as this may provide additional insights into how the power dynamic in these kinds of relationships can be best managed to the benefit of their joint work.

Power dynamics occur at all levels in the funder / grantee relationship. Sometimes more accentuated power dynamics occur at the program staff level than senior management levels, so increased attention placed on the power dynamic from the perspective of these staff could reveal important insights into how power plays out on a day-to-day basis. Perspectives on power dynamics from senior leaders, such as presidents and vice presidents, could provide a richer view of how the relationship norms between a community college and funder are established.

How norms around communication, decision-making, and joint learning are observed at any staffing level is impacted by individual interpersonal approaches, as well as organizational structures, processes, and culture. Whether work between the organizations tends to be more transactional in nature or focused at the systems level, and the degree to which program staff are supported in their role in a grant, contribute to the impact of power dynamics in the organizational relationship.

Recommendation #4

A study similar to this one could be conducted that focuses on relationships between funders and grantee organizations in other sectors, who both serve as anchor institutions in the same community. As has been shown through this study, when the funder and grantee are both community anchor institutions, this circumstance creates a unique power dynamic between the

two as compared to funders and their other local grantees. Examples of other anchor institutions could include nonprofit hospitals, large community development organizations, and even city governments. Like this study has done for community colleges in the higher education sector, and private foundations in the philanthropic sector, its replication with other types of funders and grantees could provide rich content, and result in unique insights into these kinds of relationships.

Final Reflection

This study emerged from a personal passion of the researcher, who saw the importance of gaining insight into a relationship that has involved millions of dollars, spanned decades, and affected the lives of thousands of community residents. In observing this relationship over time, the researcher questioned why some grant work between the two had been successful, some projects had struggled, and how the details of each situation had impacted the larger working relationship between them. Having a long history of work within both of these sectors, organizations, and their shared community, the researcher was uniquely qualified to conduct this study. The study's intent was to shed light on places of disconnect in this relationship and identify solutions that could assist others in similar funder/grantee relationships. Likewise, it was also to identify areas of strength that could be built upon. An additional aim was to capture lessons learned that could inform the practice of other organizations engaged in similar relationships, to the benefit of their constituents and missions.

At the onset of this study, the economy in which both of these organizations existed was strong, and both stood on seemingly stable ground. Much of their work was devoted to addressing systemic inequities in their joint community. After data collection and analysis was completed, but before the study itself was finished, their community and the world entered into a

period of unprecedented challenge that emphasized the importance of their joint work even more. As the United States and the world navigates its way through the economic and public health crises created by the coronavirus pandemic, and racial unrest has led to protests and demands for social justice, the systemic inequities that exist in society have become even more apparent. While the ground beneath these organizations has now shifted, their work together to address some of the most pervasive inequities in their shared community has taken on even greater urgency.

As this study concludes, the nonprofit sector has already begun to wrestle with questions related to how grantees and funders can work differently, both together and separately, in the wake of COVID-19.

In community colleges, increased flexibility in how education is delivered has taken on greater significance than ever, and services to support students has had to become more nimble. To accommodate this reality, new technologies and staffing structures have been required, which equates to large investments of human and financial resources. In a report by the Hope Center (2021), the impact of COVID-19 on colleges was described as follows:

Because of the pandemic, colleges are also stretching existing resources. Costs have increased due to expanded online learning and coronavirus-mitigation efforts. Staff have also had to adjust support services, figuring out how to support students remotely, while many were dependent on campus resources like computer labs. Furloughs and layoffs also mean colleges have fewer staff, some of whom are experiencing basic needs insecurity themselves. Even after campuses re-open, colleges' costs may remain higher than normal. Coronavirus-mitigation efforts will likely need to continue for some time. (p. 23)

While Legislation like the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act helped off-set some of the financial burden of such shifts for community colleges (Urquhart, 2021), as natural partner funders could also step into this space.

In the philanthropic sector, the conversation has turned to changes in funding practices that could result in things like fewer restrictions on grantees, more funding support for general operations, and a pledge from philanthropy to back off power dynamics (A Call to Action, n.d.).

As stated by the Trust-based Philanthropy Project:

Last week, in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, several of the nation's top foundations pledged to ease or eliminate restrictions on grants, reduce asks of grantees, and support and uplift the voices of grantee partners. From the pledge: "By acting together to provide flexibility to our grantee partners, we believe we can help them move their essential work forward powerfully and confidently in this critical moment." (n.d., paras. 1-2)

In a rapidly changing landscape, community colleges and funders effectively working together to maximize their joint impact for students and the community has now taken on even more urgency. Perhaps this study will offer insights that this funder and community college can consider, to enhance their work together to the benefit of those they serve. It is hoped those insights will also inform the practice of similar organizations in similar relationships, that are grappling with the same challenges and sense of urgency in their communities. This study was unquestionably a worthwhile undertaking for this researcher, and hopefully it will prove worthwhile for other practitioners who see themselves and their work represented within it.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



Date: May 3, 2018

To: Sandra Balkema
From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY17-18-124 Community College and Funder Relationships*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, *Community College and Funder Relationships (IRB-FY17-18-124)* and approved this project under Federal Regulations Exempt Category 2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Approval has an expiration date of three years from the date of this letter. **As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined in your application until May 3, 2021.** Should additional time be needed to conduct your approved study, a request for extension must be submitted to the IRB a month prior to its expiration.

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRB-FY17-18-124. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights, with the assurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual reviews during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregory Wellman'.

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs