

Trust in Action: Lessons From Community-Engaged Scholarship Across Three Case Studies

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Abstract

Community-engaged scholarship can elevate collaborations between universities and communities by allowing partners to leverage their collective knowledge and resources to address local needs. At the heart of this work is a critical yet underexamined element: trust. In this research, the authors delve into dimensions of trust in action by exploring three case studies of university and community partnerships. We first explore a 20-year collaboration between an education faculty and a state forestry service. The case study highlights how shared goals in environmental education and consistent communication fostered deep trust, resulting in the enduring success of the Forest Day program. The second case study explores a collaboration between a criminal justice faculty and the local police department. Through mutual respect and integrity, these partners produced research on photospread methods that influenced national policing reforms. The third case study investigates a sociology faculty's collaboration with a cancer support organization. It emphasizes how providing culturally relevant support for the Asian community entailed a focus on personal commitment and empathy, nurturing trust, and expanding community initiatives. Common themes across these cases include the importance of shared purpose, mutual respect, effective communication, and integrity. Fostering trust within university-community partnerships can enhance goal achievement while ensuring meaningful and sustainable impacts. By unpacking the intricacies of trust within these real-world contexts, this paper contributes to a nuanced understanding of trust and its implications for successful partnerships. In approaching the cultivation of trust, one size does not fit all.

Community-engaged scholarship (CEnS) can be a powerful force in establishing connections between universities and the communities they serve, allowing partners to leverage their collective knowledge and resources to address local needs. Key strengths of CEnS lie in its potential to address real-world issues, generate equitable knowledge, and empower communities (Bowman, 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Ortiz et al., 2020; Wallerstein et al., 2020). At the heart of this mutually beneficial endeavor lies a critical yet often underexamined element: trust. Trust, a multifaceted construct, permeates various aspects of partnership dynamics and plays a pivotal role in shaping collaborative efforts (Frerichs et al., 2017).

This research delves into dimensions of trust in action by exploring three case studies of university-community partnerships. Our paper contributes to a nuanced understanding of trust and its implications for partnership success by unpacking its intricacies within these real-world contexts. Trust is an invisible thread that binds researchers and community members, enabling open communication, shared decision-making, and collaborative knowledge creation (Giesecke,

2012; Minkler, 2005; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005; White-Cooper, 2009). Understanding the dynamics of trust is crucial for fostering impactful partnerships.

Setting

Sam Houston State University is a Carnegie-designated "Community Engaged" campus. The curriculum incorporates Academic Community Engagement (ACE) courses in disciplines across the university and offers numerous and varied opportunities for applied learning in and with communities. Recognizing that community engagement is not exclusively linked to pedagogy, the university began an effort in 2020 to explore CEnS models. Our author team came together through an interdisciplinary Faculty Learning Community (FLC) focused on CEnS, developed through the university's Center for Community Engagement in partnership with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Literature in Brief: Trust in CEnS

The concept of trust in CEnS encompasses various dimensions and interpretations, such as

reliability, credibility, committed partnerships, sustainability, flexibility, and mutually respectful and reciprocal relationships; it also includes authentic, effective, and transparent communication (Frerichs et al., 2017; for review Luger et al., 2020; Nelson, 2021). University and community partners must believe both parties will fulfill their stated commitments and act in good faith throughout any project (Nelson, 2021).

Openness and transparency, sharing information openly, and fostering honest communication are crucial for building trust. Openness allows partners to address concerns constructively and navigate potential conflicts effectively (Frerichs et al., 2017; Luger et al., 2020). Furthermore, trust extends to a sense of mutual respect and understanding. Partners need to acknowledge the different knowledge systems, perspectives, and expertise each brings to the table (Luger et al., 2020; Nelson, 2021). This requires a willingness to learn from each other and recognize the value each contributes to the project.

Finally, trust incorporates a sense of shared purpose and vision. Both parties must be willing to invest in the project's goals and believe the collaboration will benefit the community (Luger et al., 2020). A shared vision can foster collaboration and motivate partners to overcome challenges. While research has examined the dimensions of trust in CEnS, this paper adds value by showing those principles in action.

Methods

Research Design

The authors used qualitative semistructured interviews with faculty and their partners engaged in CEnS. Interviews are well-suited to build an understanding of individuals' thoughts, perspectives, and experiences (Denzin & Giardina, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Additionally, a case study approach is appropriate because it focuses on exploring a phenomenon in its real-world context (Sjoberg et al., 2020).

Participants

With IRB approval, the authors surveyed university faculty to examine their participation in CEnS. From the 59 responses, we used purposive sampling to identify 14 faculty who represented a variety of community partner relationships. Those faculty gave us contact information for their community partners, of whom six responded to our interview request. Each case was chosen for its partnership longevity and rich, varied insight

into diverse contexts, outcomes, and participant perspectives. In addition, the selected partnerships highlighted the principal roles of faculty in teaching (i.e., forestry education partnership), scholarship (i.e., criminal justice partnership), and service (i.e., cancer support partnership). Table 1 on page 3 lists the partnerships and pseudonyms used in the paper.

Data Collection

The interviews centered around participants' experiences in university-community collaborations. Each interview started by broadly exploring the nature of the project and partnership and then delved into each participant's perspectives and experiences, such as roles, relationships, communication, objectives, outcomes, successes, and challenges. Each interview was tailored to the participant's role as a faculty member or community partner. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded. Each interview lasted about 75–90 minutes.

Data Analysis

The research team transcribed the interviews and then reviewed and thematically coded them in Taguette. We employed an iterative approach to data analysis, reading each interview multiple times to identify emerging themes, going back and forth between the data and literature, and alternating between diving deep into the data and stepping back to assess key learning from the emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maietta et al., 2021; Vanover et al., 2021). In addition, faculty and community partners engaged in CEnS peer-reviewed our paper to help us check for clarity and resonance.

Results

Case Study #1: Education Faculty (Dana and Lucia) and State Forestry Service (Jessi and Clay)

"Look, this is important. We need to get our students outside, and even when our students are outside, they're on their phones." (Dana)

Partnership Overview

Screen time on digital devices can lead to a myriad of adverse outcomes for children, including myopia (Lanca & Saw, 2020), sleep disturbances (LeBourgeois et al., 2017), decreased fine motor skills (Suggate & Martzog, 2021), and decreased academic achievements (Oswald et al., 2020). This university-community partnership aimed to connect preservice teachers with actionable classroom curricula, covering subjects from STEM

Table 1.

Partnership	Faculty Pseudonyms	Community Partner Pseudonyms
Education Faculty and State Forestry Service	Dana, Lucia	Jessi, Clay
Criminal Justice Faculty and City Police Department	Jim	Franklin
Sociology Faculty and Cancer Support Organizations	Xiaoshan	Yang

to language arts, to connect students with nature. In today's increasingly digital age, environmental education is more crucial than ever. Fostering a sense of connection to the planet goes beyond learning about trees and animals; it is necessary for a thriving future. The choices we make today echo throughout generations.

In this partnership, education faculty from the university (Dana and Lucia) collaborated with the state forestry service (Foresters Jessi and Clay) to organize "Forest Day," a day-long professional development program on environmental education using curriculum developed by Project Learning Tree (PLT). The outdoor event, hosted once each semester, led preservice teacher candidates in hands-on, nature-based learning activities that the educators could later implement or adapt in their classrooms. A key benefit of the program was getting teacher candidates out of the classroom and "into the wild" (Jessi), with the goal of fostering a greater appreciation for the outdoors that organizers hoped participants could one day infuse into their own teaching. Over the 20+ year history of this partnership, the Forest Day event has grown from participation by a few faculty in a few classes to serving the entire program, comprising approximately 180–200 teacher candidates each semester.

Trust

Each semester, Forest Day thrived thanks to a committed university-community partnership nurtured by a deep well of trust. This trust was not built overnight; it was the product of shared purpose, mutual understanding and respect, information sharing, relying on each other's expertise, and open and honest lines of communication.

Shared Purpose. When both parties feel invested in a project—in this case, jointly driven

by a shared passion for environmental education and community engagement—trust is enhanced. This shared purpose can lead to more sustainable and impactful outcomes. For example, Jessi stressed that a good partnership is "one where we can work together for the common goal of just giving these toolkits to these preservice teachers to be able to incorporate environmental education into their classrooms." In our interviews, partners frequently affirmed their passion and dedication to the Forest Day program, underscoring that everyone involved genuinely cared for the quality of the students' educational experiences and the importance of bringing environmental education to life for them. In describing the shared purpose within the partnership, Dana used the word "companions" to highlight how the state forestry team is a companion in the journey to foster a love of the outdoors among future teachers.

Mutual Understanding and Respect.

Knowing each other well was central to trust within the partnership. Jessi stated:

It's definitely just evolved from a purely professional relationship on the first meeting to more of a friendship-colleague type relationship where you just know each other a lot better. You're joking around. You have faith in each other to do what they say.

Dana echoed this sentiment, emphasizing, "We're all in this together. I think that's a big thing. And if that's communicated early, then we respect one another, and we expect that we're going to do our jobs." The partners emphasized that understanding and appreciating each other as human beings, not just colleagues, was essential

to a trusting relationship. “A good community partnership begins with the human beings,” Dana said, “If [the relationship] is going to work, you’ve got to know the folks involved.” Knowing the people they work with enhances support for each other and the project.

Sharing Information. Trust was also cultivated through sharing information. Clay regularly prepared grant applications through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative for PLT and contacted the university with possible grant opportunities. The university partners provided information Clay needed to complete the grants, such as faculty agreement to participate, university demographic data, syllabi, number of classes taught, and number of students enrolled. Clay had completed grants two years in a row with this university “because it’s so easy to work with Lucia.” In addition to grant work, studying feedback from the Forest Day event was important to information sharing in the partnership. Lucia and Dana collected event evaluations from the students and met regularly with Clay and Jessi to discuss possible improvements and revisions to lessons.

Expertise. Relying on each other’s expertise was another aspect of the trusting relationship the partners had built. Jessi shared that it was nice to be recognized by collaborators as “an agency that brings value, whether it’s through a perspective or through being able to teach a class.” Partners also highlighted the importance of knowing and building on each other’s strengths. For instance, Dana shared how she and Jessi brought different strengths and interests to the project, such as Jessi’s expertise in reports, spreadsheets, and organizational skills, and Dana’s skills in presenting in front of an audience.

Open and Honest Communication. Communication was also essential to a trusting relationship. For example, Jessi stated:

I think they have faith in me, and I have faith in them that I don’t feel like I have to just micromanage them, and they don’t have to worry about something being done. If I say I’m going to do it, they know. And I think it helps us to be open with things.

He added that open and honest communication helped to reduce conflict: “Probably the greatest thing is just opening up a line of communication and knowing that there’s not going to be hard feelings, where you can say something a little bit tougher

and not be taken the wrong way.” For Lucia, the most essential aspect of communication was that partners responded in a timely manner. Clay had a similar desire for responsiveness and timeliness when working on grants for universities, stating, “I’ve had other universities where communication has been a problem.”

Project Impact

Fueled by the PLT curriculum, the Forest Day Program positively impacted the preservice teachers, university, community partners, and broader community. The impact on the preservice teachers was not limited to that one day and carried into their teaching practice after graduation. Dana said they regularly heard from former students, “I love doing PLT activities [in my class]. The kids love it.” These teachers liked going outside with their students and intentionally aligned PLT activities with state standards in their discipline. Forest Day also benefited preservice teachers by allowing them to serve, providing the experience of working with community partners, and helping them practice networking to become comfortable reaching out to community partners in the future. Lucia stated that students might not know what resources are available to them, and she enjoys “[helping] them be exposed to these different types of resources” in environmental education.

Dana and Lucia also used Forest Day to gather research on how a single outdoor training event impacts teacher candidates’ perceptions of the environment. They analyzed pre- and post-event drawings completed onsite at the event and evaluated the drawings for statistically significant changes. They found that Forest Day fosters a deeper connection to nature. Students started off viewing the environment as an external entity, often depicted as distant or generic, but after the training, they incorporated more personal surroundings, drawing the natural world around them.

Jessi’s background in PLT ran deep; he had started his career more than 10 years ago at the Forestry Service doing PLT outreach and education in underserved communities. Along with organizing Forest Day, he also guest lectured occasionally at the university and worked with Lucia’s class doing general forest measurements. Jessi talked about the partnership’s positive impact on him and the state forestry service: “I’ve really enjoyed it [the partnership]. I think it’s a great opportunity for us to get our name out and to educate students and provide a good reference for people to get information.” For Jessi, getting out

and working in the community was the aspect of working at the forestry service he was most drawn to.

“Force multiplier” was how Clay described PLT’s impact on the broader community. He gave an example of a first-year teacher at a large public school district inspired by her participation in Forest Day, her PLT certification, and her professor. She proposed incorporating PLT throughout the district to her administration, which led to Clay writing a grant to fund training for the entire district staff. These training efforts were highlighted in the local newspaper. The district later started a program called Green Schools in which students conducted energy audits for the campus and offered recommendations to the administration for increasing energy efficiency. These positive outcomes for the school district resulted from the ripple effect of a single student’s enthusiasm and PLT training. Jessi viewed the broader impact on the community similarly:

I look at the domino effect. . . . You’ve got an opportunity to sit down with 200 students who are going to be preaching environmental education or conservation education or the general outdoors to 20 kids a year for the next 30 years.

Case Study #2: Criminal Justice Faculty (Jim) and Local Police Department (Franklin)

“We’re putting innocent people in jail, and we need to address it.” (Franklin)

Partnership Overview

Wrongful convictions are an ongoing challenge in the United States justice system. Over 3,000 wrongful conviction cases have occurred since 1989 (University of Michigan, n.d.), with eyewitness identification errors being one of the primary factors (Wells et al., 1998).

In an effort to reduce wrongful convictions, detectives from a large metropolitan police department (PD) wanted to examine the reliability of their method of using photospreads to identify a perpetrator of a crime. In this procedure, an eyewitness is shown a group of similar-looking photos to determine if they can identify a suspect.

In 2011, the state legislature passed a law encouraging PDs to use a specific method of conducting a photospread. This “sequential” method (showing only one picture at a time) was based on research conducted by cognitive psychologists, primarily in a lab with college students or with adults with staged crimes (Sauer

et al., 2019). The local PD was reluctant to use this method “being pushed by academia,” according to Franklin and wanted to conduct its own research study in the field with actual eyewitnesses to real crimes. The PD believed using a photo array (showing six to nine photographs simultaneously to a witness) was just as effective. Additionally, using the sequential method costs the department more time and money.

The detectives met Jim, a criminal justice professor, while he was presenting at a conference. Jim had the research expertise to help the PD examine if there were any significant differences between the sequential and photo array methods. Thus began a successful partnership that lasted more than 10 years.

Trust

In addition to the factors contributing to trust highlighted in the previous case study, trust manifested in additional ways in Case Study #2. Three key themes emerged: trust developed between the partners based on (a) mutually recognized expertise and respect, (b) personal characteristics, and (c) integrity.

Expertise and Mutual Respect. The community partner emphasized the importance of finding a university partner with the appropriate level of expertise to help the PD. Franklin recounted a former attempted partnership that did not work out: “When [I] asked a university to help, they just sent two graduate students.” Franklin explained that those researchers lacked a criminal justice background, whereas the university partner in the successful partnership had that expertise. Franklin knew he had to partner with someone with knowledge he could trust, and he said that Jim was “the right person to connect with” because of his research expertise.

Although Jim did not explicitly discuss the community partner’s level of expertise, it was clear that he also felt the partnership’s success rested on mutual respect. In Jim’s words, his role was to “listen and learn from them . . . to approach them and to listen to hear their perspective.” He carefully explained that building respect and trust does not happen quickly:

Trust is going to take time. It might just be a slow process. It might take you 6 months to establish an ‘I know this person, they know me’ and build up a degree of trust and respect and then you can hit the ground and start to get the work done.

Despite the time investment required to build a trusting relationship, Jim emphasized its importance in a productive partnership, stating, "I think the process is very important that people respect each other, they work together as a team, and they work toward a common goal."

Personal Characteristics. Expertise and mutual respect are based on formal characteristics of credentials, experience, professional accomplishments, knowledge, and skills. However, developing trust also has much to do with personal characteristics. Franklin spoke numerous times about feeling comfortable and relaxed with Jim. He described Jim as a good listener, responsive, and generous with his time.

Jim acknowledged that community-engaged research and working with partners "requires a different set of people skills than if we are just at our desk hammering away on data or reading and writing. You have to be able to interface with people. You have to sit and listen." The ability to be personable, to sit down and chat, go to lunch, and not talk about research is essential to building a good working relationship. Franklin said, "If you can connect that way with somebody, that helps out. That was pretty much Jim. He was easygoing. No sense of arrogance at all out of Jim. None!"

From the community partner's experience, it is clear that arrogance is sometimes associated with university researchers and professors. One of the key success factors in the current case study was the absence of arrogance in the university partner. Franklin shared, "Being personal influenced the project. Another thing about academia is sometimes there's this aspect of being arrogant, and when you're arrogant, you are going to shut the door down."

Jim also cautioned researchers to consider the specific context and needs of the community partner, demonstrating a keen organizational awareness and a lack of arrogance. He stated, "What is accomplished has to fit with their local expectations and contexts as opposed to just coming in as an outsider and imposing some ideas and perspectives."

Integrity. As each of the partners discussed the relationship, integrity was central. For example, Franklin referred to integrity in light of a negative experience with a professor from a prestigious university. He related that in a past attempt to work together, the professor disregarded an agreement to refrain from presenting data until the partner reviewed it. "He was so caught up in being first and presenting his study over someone else's that

he circumvented that. I won't work with him now. You've got to have trust, and I didn't see that trust." In contrast to this negative experience, Franklin stated:

I like that Jim was caring and ethical, and those two things are important. I don't want to be with somebody who doesn't care. I don't want to be with somebody that's unethical. If we are both ethical and caring, we are going to hit it off a lot better. I saw that out of Jim all the way around.

The other way integrity emerged in the data was in the university partner's sense of his role in and responsibility to the partnership. Jim stated, "My role and responsibility is to help but also remain objective and sort of nonjudgmental because I am there to do research. But a secondary role is also to point out problems that I see that limit their effectiveness." He viewed his responsibility as a researcher as "to interpret data and to give recommendations back to the community partner."

Both partners stressed their commitment to creating more rigorous, evidence-based processes to improve the system. For instance, "I saw [eyewitness identification] as something that contributes to wrongful convictions, people going to prison for something they did not do, and this procedure that police were using contributed to that," Jim stated. He saw people were pushing the sequential method of identifying suspects that was not supported by science and "that didn't sit very well with me."

Jim and Franklin repeatedly underscored the importance of research in improving the process. Both partners valued the need to "do it right." Jim even contacted additional colleagues to validate the study and ensure it met the highest research standards.

Project Impact

This study, collaboratively designed by the PD and a university professor, challenged the original sequential method of using photospreads recommended by state law. The results showed that the local PD's method of using the photo array method in crime investigations (using a spread with six to nine photos, which they preferred) was as valid as (and more time efficient than) showing single photos. Following the study, local police training sessions were designed, in collaboration with the university professor, to help clarify the process for investigators in the Robbery Division, which

led to police officers feeling more confident and credible in the courts when they used photo arrays as evidence.

The data and results not only identified best local practices with the use of photospreads but also contributed critical data that was used nationally regarding policing reforms. In Jim's words, the results "challenged a lot of the conventional wisdom about what the reforms should look like." He stated that this research "also had the effect of providing some more evidence nationally that people could use when talking about how these practices should be reformed." In fact, at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference, this project on photospreads was given the coveted research award. In the years after this study, the research in this field took new directions. The National Academy of Sciences ultimately agreed that the previous push to use the sequential method should be stopped. Franklin said, "The results settled the whole issue, and it's gone away now." This is another example of a ripple effect generating positive outcomes beyond the project.

In addition to this project's positive impact on local and national policing practices and reforms, other interesting impacts emerged from the interview with the community partner. First, Franklin felt like he had found a friend in academia whom he could call on professionally and personally in the future. He stated, "I throw stuff up there to Jim every once in a while, about 'Hey! This would be something that would be worthwhile studying.'" Jim concurred that maintaining an ongoing relationship was important: "We stay in touch about what they're up to, and they have written references for me. I've served as a reference for them. It was a very, very good, healthy partnership."

Second, Franklin used what he learned through this partnership to continue to improve police education. He presented many workshops for cadets and police officers and even presented the study at several conferences. He said, "Every police officer up until about a year and a half ago has been taught by me how to go and show photospreads."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Franklin believed the most significant impact of the partnership is that fewer innocent people will go to jail: "The greatest thing was reducing wrongful convictions. They may not be a big number, but one is a big number."

Case Study #3: Sociology Faculty (Xiaoshan) and Cancer Support Organization (Yang)

"We have partners in the Austin and Dallas areas. They don't have university help. So, they are our partner, and we can duplicate the program in other cities with other Asian communities." (Yang)

Partnership Overview

A personal experience with breast cancer motivated the partnership between Xiaoshan, a sociology faculty member, and Yang, the director of the Asian Community Care Association (ACCA), which has lasted for more than a decade. The ACCA provides a myriad of community support services. When Xiaoshan was going through breast cancer treatments, she had no clue what to expect, and she wanted to talk to someone she could relate to in her native language. She went to local support groups organized by the American Cancer Society but felt frustrated that she could not fully express herself or find culturally relevant support materials. For example, to figure out the best food to eat while undergoing therapy, she found references to the American diet and not Asian cuisine.

Through her church, Xiaoshan was referred to the ACCA, a faith-based organization offering multiple support services to the Asian community, including screening and support for cancer. At the time, no Chinese American breast cancer support groups existed in the community, nor was there a way for Chinese Americans seeking support to connect with one another. This experience motivated Xiaoshan to connect with Yang and create a culturally relevant breast cancer support group for the Chinese American community.

Armed with faculty experience, Xiaoshan wrote some initial grants to help the ACCA launch this cancer support program. For example, Xiaoshan discovered that the Komen Foundation offered support and training for submitting community grants that emphasized impact measures such as the number of people reached in the community. The Komen Foundation funded the initial grant she wrote for the ACCA, helping the organization rent a small office and hire part-time staff. Over the years, Xiaoshan and Yang worked together on multiple grants, many of which have been funded and have allowed the ACCA to expand cancer screening and support services to other groups within the Asian American community.

Trust

Trust was foundational to the enduring partnership between Xiaoshan and Yang. Their collaboration flourished over the years, characterized by a deep commitment to mutual

goals, transparent communication, and a shared vision of empowering the Asian American community. This trusting relationship was crucial in developing tailored health initiatives to support Asian American communities, from cancer screening to ongoing support. The partners' consistent alignment on objectives and values drove successful projects and cemented a foundation of trust that supported future collaborations. "We already built up the relationship and the trust we have," Yang said. "If we want to move on to a new project, we know we can deliver it." This trust was continually reinforced through their complementary expertise, personal commitment, and active community involvement, all of which contributed to a dynamic and deeply impactful partnership.

Mutual Goals and Vision. Mutual goals and vision formed the bedrock of trust in Xiaoshan and Yang's collaboration, creating a synergy that propelled their joint efforts. Both partners worked toward the goal of helping the Asian American community become stronger. Xiaoshan stated, "Make sure to start thinking about the role of community-based organizations because they are the ones who really work hard in the community, and they need our financial support." Yang echoed this sentiment, appreciating that Xiaoshan not only shared their vision but was proactive in supporting the people: "Xiaoshan has the same vision and is always wanting to help the people."

Effective Communication. Frequent and transparent communication characterized the relationship between Xiaoshan and Yang. For example, Yang highlighted the regular interactions that helped manage the project smoothly: "We have regular meetings of the project, and we discuss the project. We take action and follow up." Xiaoshan emphasized the importance of involvement in every step of the communication process, ensuring that the reports reflect the project's goals and progress: "Mostly, I will be there, just as you know, to make sure everything follows the proposal." These consistent and inclusive communication practices were not just administrative necessities but integral to building a foundation of trust on which both organizations relied to further their joint objectives.

Personal Commitment and Empathy. The personal commitment of stakeholders, especially when they connected their life experiences to their roles in the partnership, also enhanced trust. Xiaoshan's personal experiences with cancer brought a unique depth of understanding and

authenticity. Days after her diagnosis, thinking cancer was a death sentence, Xiaoshan received a phone call from a colleague: "He's a cancer survivor, too. I was so glad he called me in person. He talked to me over the phone for several hours about his own cancer journey and his family's cancer journey." This conversation helped her understand that many people get cancer. She also saw in her own experience and in working with the Asian American community that a lack of knowledge can lead to fear. Her deep involvement went beyond professional obligations, highlighting a profound commitment to the community's well-being.

Community Empowerment. By actively involving community members in the planning and execution of projects, the partnership ensured that interventions were culturally appropriate and directly addressed the community's needs. Xiaoshan highlighted the importance of empowerment in their approach: "Our goal is we want to help you. We give you a fishing tool; we don't just give you a fish." This philosophy built trust and fostered an environment where community members felt valued and capable of managing their health outcomes.

Expertise. Xiaoshan and Yang each brought their unique and complementary expertise to the partnership. Xiaoshan combined her academic knowledge and personal experience as a cancer survivor to design empathetic and scientifically rigorous research projects. She emphasized the importance of deeply understanding community needs: "I want to know the process. If I don't know the process, I don't think I can write a good grant proposal because I don't understand what they need and what the challenges they have." The ACCA contributed strong local knowledge and effective project management, ensuring initiatives were practically applicable and successfully executed. Yang emphasized their role in bringing academic research to life: "This helps build up the credential for the future. From the university side, they know our community organization can deliver." Together, their combined strengths enhanced project outcomes and deepened the trust and collaboration necessary for sustained impact.

Project Impact

The partnership that originated between Yang and Xiaoshan expanded in scope, geography, and funding. Beyond support for survivors, the ACCA grew to provide education, prevention, and screening for several types of cancer, including lung, liver, and colon cancers. The ACCA also recognized the need to create programs supporting

youth mental health and well-being as well as programs for special needs families. Yang and Xiaoshan have worked together to secure funding for these initiatives. They identified a need to navigate health care insurance coverage and, with funding from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, trained bilingual navigators certified as health care navigators and certified by Texas Health and Human Services. Financially, the ACCA's budget grew from under \$20,000 to nearly \$1 million.

Over the years, Xiaoshan and Yang's partnership has helped the ACCA grow and develop relationships with nearly 10 organizations serving Asian communities. It has also extended its reach and services in Houston, Fort Worth, Dallas, and Austin. Now Xiaoshan, Yang, and the ACCA lead grant projects that impact multiple organizations. The community partner now has community partners—another ripple effect started from a university-community partnership.

Both Yang and Xiaoshan considered data an asset for research and helping the communities. Data was collected on the people they served, which supported applying for and receiving new grant funding. The data documented the number of community members served and helped them understand the cultural differences and needs across Asian communities in various locations. For example, the Asian population was more geographically dispersed in Dallas than in Houston, necessitating different approaches to serving community members.

The most significant impact was strengthening the Asian American community's ability to serve itself independently. Engaged community members become empowered to advocate for their own needs. The partners also hoped to create a charity clinic in the future.

Discussion

The three case studies in this paper showcase trust in action and its crucial role in university-community partnerships addressing diverse social issues. Despite their differences, each collaboration thrived on shared purpose, trust in expertise, mutual respect, and effective communication, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of trust. Shared purpose unified each partnership, while mutual respect ensured that each partner's expertise and contributions were valued. Open, honest, and regular communication helped university and community partners manage projects smoothly and address challenges collaboratively.

The biggest lesson learned from these partnerships was the broader impact they had—a ripple effect. For example, a preservice teacher who engaged with PLT activities later advocated for an entire school district to adopt the curriculum, creating a widespread educational transformation. In criminal justice, methods developed for improving eyewitness identification were implemented nationwide, significantly reducing false convictions and enhancing the justice system's reliability. Meanwhile, a small grant for cancer survivor support within the Chinese American community grew into a network spanning multiple cities, offering a broad range of health-related services in multiple languages.

These examples illustrate the far-reaching ripple effects of university-community partnerships, which can often be overlooked by those outside the projects but are a testament to the significance of CEnS work in the larger community. This finding about the ripple effect's significance has inspired us as authors to approach future research with a heightened awareness of the potential for long-term, transformative impact that extends far beyond the immediate project goals. These long-term effects are underexplored in the current body of knowledge. Our study adds to the literature by demonstrating how the ripple effect can amplify and extend the impact of CEnS.

Beyond showcasing trust in action, these case studies revealed unique dimensions of trust specific to each collaborative context. In the Forest Day initiative, the critical trust element was information sharing. Regular exchanges of knowledge and resources between educators and forestry experts were essential for the program's biannual planning and execution, ensuring its continued success over 2 decades. In the criminal justice case, personal integrity was vital for improving eyewitness identification practices. This trust emerged from recognizing each partner's commitment to justice and accuracy. This partnership helped facilitate the adoption of evidence-based practices nationwide. For the cancer support program, empathy and community empowerment were key. The partnership thrived on a deep understanding of cultural nuances and a commitment to addressing the specific needs of the Asian community, which fostered trust and enabled substantial growth and outreach.

Another contribution of our paper to the literature is that the role of flexibility in the emergence of trust is essential. While previous research highlights general aspects of trust (Frerichs

et al., 2017; Luger et al., 2020; Nelson, 2021), these case studies show that effective partnerships prioritize trust elements that best suit their specific goals. The finding that trust is not a one-size-fits-all concept has encouraged us as authors to embrace a more nuanced and adaptable approach in our own collaborative endeavors, acknowledging the diverse ways in which trust can be established and nurtured in different partnership contexts. One size does not fit all regarding trust and successful university-community partnerships. CEnS must prioritize the aspects of trust most relevant to its collaborative efforts.

The implications for best practices in the field are clear: Fostering trust enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of university-community partnerships. Moreover, these partnerships highlight the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in building and maintaining trust. Universities and community organizations should remain open to evolving trust dynamics to ensure their collaborations remain relevant and effective over time and ensure their sustainability and impact. By fostering trust, university-community collaborations can achieve significant and lasting benefits for educational institutions, community partners, and the broader communities who gain from CEnS.

Implications

Drawing on the preceding analysis and discussion, below are several data-driven tips for university and community partners seeking to cultivate trust and effective partnerships.

Cultivate Shared Purpose and Goals

Ensure that both the university researchers and the community partners have a clear and shared understanding of the project's purpose and desired outcomes. Involve all partners in planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project. This shared vision will help align efforts, foster collaboration, and enhance trust.

Prioritize Mutual Respect and Understanding

Recognize and value the diverse perspectives, knowledge systems, and expertise that each partner brings to the table. Be willing to learn from each other and acknowledge the unique contributions of both the university and the community.

Establish Open and Honest Communication

Foster transparent and regular communication channels to facilitate information sharing,

address concerns, and navigate potential conflicts constructively. Ensure that communication is timely, responsive, and inclusive, involving all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Embrace Flexibility and Adaptability

Recognize that trust is not a one-size-fits-all concept and that different partnerships may require different approaches to building and maintaining trust. Be willing to adapt your strategies and communication styles to meet the specific needs and context of each partnership.

Celebrate Successes and Learn From Challenges

Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the partnership, both big and small. At the same time, be willing to reflect on challenges and learn from any setbacks. This will help strengthen the partnership and improve future collaborations.

By incorporating these trust-building practices, university and community partners can foster more effective, impactful, and sustainable partnerships, leading to mutually beneficial outcomes and positive change in the community.

Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this study is the small sample size of three case studies. While these cases offer valuable insights into the dynamics of trust in university-community partnerships, they may not be generalizable to all such collaborations. Future research should expand the scope of inquiry to include a larger and more diverse sample of partnerships, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of trust in various contexts. Additionally, asking participants about the benefits they gained from participating in research about CEnS and reflecting on their CEnS practices would further add to the literature. Future research could incorporate multiple data sources, such as observations and document analysis, to triangulate findings and enhance the validity of the results. Finally, the study focused on successful partnerships, potentially overlooking valuable lessons from collaborations that faced challenges or dissolved due to trust issues. Examining both successful and unsuccessful partnerships could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to or hinder trust in CEnS.

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