Putting Impact First: Community-University Partnerships to Advance Authentic Neighborhood Sustainability

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Abstract

This article profiles a partnership between the Living Cully ecodistrict and Portland State University's Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative. The case studies presented in this article explore how Living Cully leveraged PSU assets to advance their goals, highlighting successes and lessons learned. This article also addresses how the partnership was formed, what makes the partnership innovative, the role of interdisciplinary/intercommunity organizational strategies, and how the community partner commits to urban sustainability and social justice.

Recently acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for its commitment to community health, economic development, and urban sustainability, the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) at Portland State University (PSU) collaborates with Living Cully, an environmentally marginalized neighborhood, to create multiple sustainable community engagement projects with students across the university (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] 2015). Ranging from small-scale projects that have short-term objectives to larger projects carried out over several years, the diversity of community-university partnerships reinforces the need to develop an understanding of the nuances associated with forming authentic relationships between communities and institutes of higher learning. Often the subject of scrutiny, previous community-university partnerships teach us that top-down approaches and power imbalances leave community partners with negative perceptions of the university system (Strier 2010; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, and Lewis 2005; Maurrasse 2002). However, there are remarkable examples of successful community-university partnerships, employing a bottom-up strategy in which the community and university work together to develop shared goals (Cooper et al. 2014; Sandy and Holland 2006).

This article examines an example of a community organization utilizing the resources of a university to achieve its objectives and is co-authored by a university, community, and student representative who have all been engaged in the partnership. We will outline the development of this partnership and the main elements allowing it to strengthen over the past four years. Specifically, this article will do the following: 1) provide a description of how two coordinating bodies (community partners and university institute) created an interdisciplinary and multi-level community organization approach to a partnership, 2) discuss how both parties developed a strong commitment to one another's success, and 3) illustrate the depth with which the

community partner strives to achieve equity and social justice within its northeast Portland neighborhood.

Key Elements and Benefits of a Community-University Partnership

Although varied in duration, location, and scope, there are several key aspects to every community-university partnership. Since each partnership must effectively engage university personnel (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) as well as the community (i.e., organizations and residents), both the *approach* to and *execution* of the partnership are critical elements of the partnership's success. Previous research highlights mutuality as primary to the foundation of a good community-university partnership (Jacoby 2003, 14; Enos and Morton 2003, 20-31). When applied in the partnership setting, the concept of mutuality extends beyond respect to include reciprocity in developing shared goals and objectives, and understanding the needs of both the university and the community (Jacoby 2003, 14). In order to accomplish this, every stage of the partnership must rely on interpersonal factors such as mutual respect, communication, and trust (Sargent and Waters 2004, 311-313). With such a dynamic structure, including the initiation of the partnership, clarification of the nature of the project(s), and implementation and completion of the collaboration, creating and maintaining mutuality can be rather challenging (Sargent and Waters 2004, 311). Given the propensity toward asymmetrical partnerships in which the university is presumed the expert, building trust and mutual dependence on one another can help foster a transformative relationship (Strier 2010, 86-88; Enos and Morton 2003, 24-28).

In a transformative relationship, partnerships move beyond instrumental and potentially limited project-based commitments toward engaging experiences with a broader scope beyond what may have been the initial focus of the partnership (Jacoby 2003, 24-25). In this environment, both the university and the community partner are leaders within the partnership (Jacoby 2003, 25). McDonald and Dominguez (2015) suggest that service-learning projects focus on defining the community and establishing a framework for the partnership. Developing strategies for communication between faculty, students, and the community partner is one part of this process (McDonald and Dominguez 2015). To ensure that the overall success of the partnership and that community partner goals are ultimately met, it is vital to create clearly defined roles and responsibilities at the onset of the partnership and to understand the needs and perspectives of the community and its agencies (Buys and Bursnall 2007, 78-79; McDonald and Dominguez 2015).

Engaging in a partnership that evolves into a transformative, rather than transactional, relationship is a significant advantage to any community-university partnership. In addition to the potential to develop a long-term relationship, successful partnerships result in marked benefits to both the community partner and the university. Focus groups with community partners and service-learning coordinators emphasize the direct impact that students are able to have in the community as a result of their

involvement in the partnership, the ability of nonprofit organizations to strengthen their capacity for service in the community, and the garnering of resources for organizational development (Sandy and Holland 2006, 35-36). In many cases, effective partnerships can lead to financial investments in the community (Cooper et al. 2014). An enhanced and transformative learning experience is a noteworthy benefit of a fruitful partnership; analyses of the impact of service-learning on students indicates positive effects on student attitudes toward learning, sense of responsibility to the community, and leadership skills (Fitzgerald et al. 2012; Sandy and Holland 2006; Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki 2011).

The partnership described in this paper is the result of a longstanding relationship between Living Cully and Portland State University. The nature of this partnership is outlined in the following text, through a description of both the partner and the university, and through discussions of previous and existing projects within the partnership. Central to this partnership are the unique strategies employed by Living Cully to build assets within its organization and community through the utilization of the resources available at PSU.

The Partnership: Living Cully and the Institute for Sustainable Solutions at PSU

The following section outlines how the relationship, illustrated in Figure 1 below, developed. Chronologically, the article describes the formation of Living Cully and PSU's Institute for Sustainable Solutions (ISS) and then brings these two groups together in creating the formal partnership that exists today. With regard to the community, the Cully neighborhood is located in northeast Portland, Oregon. One of Portland's largest neighborhoods (4.5 square miles and 13,300 residents), Cully has clear environmental, economic, and racial disparities when compared to the city as a whole. Residents in the Cully neighborhood are more racially diverse than the city average and are significantly affected by a lack of environmental resources (i.e., parks and greenspaces), in addition to experiencing disparities in transportation and income. For example, households in some census tracts spend the majority of their household income on transportation and housing, contributing to high levels of food insecurity. Children and families within the community often walk along busy, unsafe roads, and Cully's poor transportation infrastructure also has negative environmental impacts such as limited access to safe roads and walkways for pedestrian and bicyclists in the neighborhood.

Getting to Know the Community Partner: Living Cully: A Cully Ecodistrict

In response to northeast Portland's lack of environmental infrastructure and communities' evident health needs, Living Cully was developed. "Living Cully: A Cully Ecodistrict" is a coordinated effort by Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East, Hacienda Community Development Corporation, the Native American Youth and Family Center, and Verde to drive environmental investments into the Cully neighborhood in response to existing community needs like jobs, education, housing,

and an improved quality of life. Living Cully uses an anti-poverty strategy, focusing on the needs of low-income people and people of color. Living Cully believes that sustainable development efforts focused on neighborhoods (i.e., ecodistricts) can be reconceived as anti-poverty strategies, a means to address disparities in wealth, income, health, and natural resources by concentrating environmental investments at the neighborhood scale, and as a means to prevent displacement of low-income people and people of color. Similar to many cities, Portland has a history of redevelopment that has displaced low-income people and people of color. Living Cully is working to write a new story by building wealth by, and for, low-income people and people of color without displacement. Unlike efforts focused solely on fostering economic development, Living Cully can meet social service and community development goals by building environmental wealth, and can support greater cross-organizational collaborations by combining community engagement, environmental improvements, and economic development under one concept and in one single geographic area.

Living Cully is made up of organizations that provide housing support for families in the community and educational support for the youth in Cully. Hacienda Community Development Corporation (HCDC) develops affordable housing and builds thriving communities in support of working Latino families and others in Oregon by promoting healthy living and economic advancement. Most HCDC residents earn 30-60 percent of median family income, below the poverty line. Another Living Cully partner, the Native Youth and Family Center (NAYA), provides comprehensive wrap-around services to the Native American community: after school tutoring, youth development, emergency housing, energy assistance, employment services, domestic violence prevention, homeownership support, and community economic development. An additional partner is Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East (Habitat). With more than thirty years of experience in home construction, Habitat is one of the only organizations consistently building and selling affordable homes, and has chosen Cully for its Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which is a block-by-block approach to building stronger neighborhoods. As the lead organization to Living Cully, Verde has developed social enterprise programs and outreach-advocacy programs to ensure that low-income people and people of color benefit from sustainability investments. Collectively, these four organizations have more than five decades of experience serving low-income people and people of color in Portland. Additionally, the organizations themselves have developed high-levels of trust among one another which has been facilitated by mission alignment around serving low-income people and people of color, their years of collaboration, and because the organizations are also primarily run by staff and boards composed of people of color.

It is important to note that Living Cully is a collective impact initiative (Kania and Kramer 2011; Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer 2012), which is a shared commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors (affordable housing, cultural identity, environmental wealth, home ownership) to a common agenda (sustainability) for solving a specific social problem (poverty) through collaborative, programmatic, and signature project activities. In this collective impact initiative, Verde functions as the “backbone organization” (Turner et al. 2012) helping to coordinate across different

stakeholders in order to execute on the following collaborative, programmatic, and signature project activities:

Collaborative Activities: Through collaborative activities, the Living Cully partners secure long-term resources to sustain and replicate Living Cully. Examples include the Living Cully Performance Indicators, seventeen economic, social, and environmental metrics that measure collaborative outcomes and support scale and replication.

Programmatic Activities: Through programmatic activities, Cully residents gain economic security and build capacity to design, build, and access new sustainable assets in the Cully neighborhood. Policy activities allow for driving anti-poverty investments into the neighborhood, mitigating gentrification impacts through a cohesive anti-displacement agenda, and reforming public agency practices toward explicit equity outcomes and partnerships.

Signature Projects: Signature projects is a growing series of leveraged investments in Cully that combine economic, social, and environmental justice goals; examples include creating new parkland, green affordable housing, culturally-based habitat restoration, and alternative energy.

Getting to Know the University: PSU and the Institute for Sustainable Solutions

As noted elsewhere in this journal issue, over the past two decades PSU has developed a strong reputation for excellence in community engagement and faculty-led programs across campus that bring to life the university's motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City." From launching one of the nation's first senior interdisciplinary capstone service-learning requirements at a large public institution in 1996 to implementing graduate-level curricula that actively connect students with municipalities to advance regional planning projects, there are countless examples that demonstrate how PSU is an engaged university. Students, faculty, and staff take the motto at PSU seriously. This is best reflected by our "Community Engagement" classification" in 2005—and re-classification in 2015—from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Community Engagement (Portland State University 2015). At the same time, both the City of Portland and PSU have garnered a reputation for sustainability excellence that continues to shine on the national stage. Portland was heralded as the first US city to create a local plan for reducing carbon emissions in 1993, and as a site for communities that have literally shaped the city through a legacy of neighborhood engagement and effective organizational advocacy on livability issues (Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003; Bureau of Planning and Sustainability 2015).

Given the university's connections with the city of Portland, as described above, it is not surprising that over the past two decades PSU has also developed a national reputation for excellence in sustainability. The Institute for Sustainable Solutions (ISS) plays a critical role in advancing sustainability at PSU. ISS is a hub for sustainability, supporting interdisciplinary research, curriculum development, student leadership, and

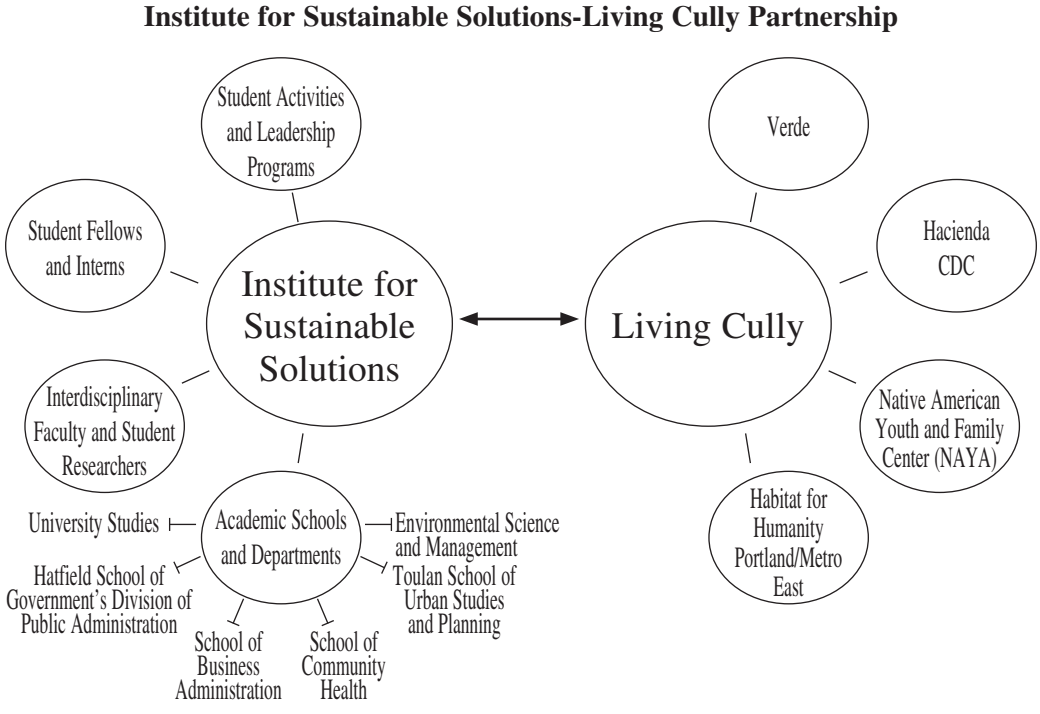
meaningful community partnerships that contribute to a just, prosperous, and vibrant future for our region and the world. ISS administers the ten-year, $25 million challenge grant made to the university by the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation in September 2008 which provides funding for ISS-led programs and catalytic resources to other colleges and departments to integrate sustainability across the campus. By using sustainability as a driver for institutional innovation and excellence (Sharp 2015a, 2015b), ISS seeks to unleash the ability of higher education to better address some of the world's most complex challenges in the region and beyond.

In the context of community-university partnerships, ISS has seen the tremendous opportunity to capitalize upon the interests and strengths of the university, city, and local nonprofit organizations to provide rich opportunities for research and teaching while rapidly advancing the sustainability of our region. To date, the primary approach for advancing partnerships across the university has been for each college, its different departments, and its individual faculty members to independently negotiate and sustain a variety of partnerships with public, private, and nonprofit organizations including teaching, research, or internship/practicum-based partnerships (Portland State University 2015). While this approach has allowed myriad partnerships to flourish and for PSU to grow a national reputation for its work, as a result, the university also faces challenges in understanding and communicating the impact and value of these relationships (see the article "From Capstones to Strategic Partnerships: The Evolution of Portland State University's Community Engagement and Partnership Agenda" elsewhere in this issue for more information.) Additionally, the university's dispersed approach to partnerships has presented barriers to the creation of opportunities in which PSU faculty and programs from across different academic and administrative units can better coordinate and organize partnerships in order to more effectively collaborate with one another—and the community—for greater cumulative impact (Portland State University 2014).

The PSU Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative

Recognizing the opportunity for using the Miller gift to address these institutional challenges, in 2013 ISS developed and launched the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) to test a new model for how long-term, collaborative, place-based community-university partnerships could be leveraged for increased community impact while enhancing student learning by grounding oftentimes abstract discussions about "sustainability" in local sustainability issues. At its heart, the SNI honors PSU's legacy of engagement and the region's strength in sustainability by facilitating applied teaching, learning, and research opportunities that advance sustainability goals in Portland's neighborhoods. Through the SNI, the Institute for Sustainable Solutions functions as a key piece of infrastructure that systematically focuses a portion of the university's community engagement efforts into long-term, place-based strategic partnerships with different organizations working to advance neighborhood-scale sustainability efforts around the city. Figure 1 illustrates the different components that entail the Living Cully-PSU partnership and highlights how Living Cully and the Institute for Sustainable Solutions serve as entities that organize and coordinate the partnership.

Figure 1. Mapping Out the Living Cully-PSU Partnership



As administrators of the SNI, ISS works closely with these partners to identify important neighborhood challenges that the university might be able to support and then systematically connects faculty experts and motivated students with partners to co-develop research and applied projects that enhance the student experience and increase community capacity to strengthen economic resilience, promote social equity, and restore and enhance ecological systems. To ensure these partnerships benefit both the community and faculty and students at the university, ISS staff function as a broker (Brundiers, Wiek, and Kay 2013) between all parties, working closely with SNI partners to first identify important neighborhood challenges that the university might be able to support through research and applied projects. After understanding local priorities, ISS staff then return to the university and approach faculty who may have research interests that align with community questions or will be teaching courses that could serve as a platform for community-based learning projects. Increasingly, ISS staff also seek out opportunities to deliver on community-identified needs by connecting with PSU staff who administer student leadership programs, pitching projects directly to student groups, or creating internships or fellowships where students can work one-on-one or in small groups with SNI partners outside the classroom.

How the Partnership Was Formed

In launching the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative, ISS knew early on that it had significant work to do to develop new ways to engage stakeholders, both within the

university and the community. To better understand the community context, ISS conducted informal research on neighborhood-based sustainability efforts, interviewing more than two dozen community activists, nonprofit leaders, and City of Portland staff on the challenges and opportunities to working collaboratively across different organizations at the neighborhood scale. At the same time, ISS felt it was important to quickly establish a working relationship with potential partners. To do so, for example, ISS connected Living Cully with a PSU course to explore some community-based learning projects and funded a graduate student in a paid internship with the community partner as early as September 2013 (Table 1). The ability to financially support a student through an internship helped demonstrate the university's value to a potential partner by increasing their capacity to advance their goals.

To cultivate support within the university, ISS convened an internal advisory board to provide governance and help launch the SNI. This body consisted of supportive faculty and senior leadership with wisdom and experience in community-university partnerships, and it advised ISS and helped refine the concept, connect with key stakeholders, and navigate institutional dynamics. Based on findings from community interviews and guidance from the advisory board, staff and advisors were acutely aware of real and perceived imbalances of power that could exist between the university and community organizations, so ISS determined that extending invitations to organizations to partner with PSU would be a better approach to developing long-term, place-based partnerships than issuing a request for proposals. One reason for this was that an invitation helped balance the uneven power relationship that is naturally present between the university and community, particularly inasmuch as a community organization could readily decline our invitation to partner, or accept but on its own terms.

Before issuing these invitations, though, ISS developed a list of attributes that it felt would be important for organizations to already possess and which would ideally already exist between the university and the community in order to collaboratively developing a unique type of community-university partnership. Criteria included elements such as the pre-existing level of collaboration between organizations, their prior success, capacity to partner with the university, and previous level of experience working with the university, as well as whether or not their project ideas and research questions were ideal for student and faculty engagement. In November 2013, ISS met with seven potential partners to let them know the institute was embarking on a new partnership agenda, seek their feedback, and obtain information about their organization on the aforementioned criteria, as well as their interest in working with the university. After reviewing this information and openly communicating with potential partners, ISS officially launched the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative in May 2014. Noteworthy aspects of developing this initiative are listed below.

Critical elements for PSU:

- The existing level of collaboration between different organizations focused on neighborhood sustainability issues aligned well with PSU's desire to create partnerships with the community.
- Staff at ISS conducted community research and some PSU organizational leadership

research to come to understand how to effectively construct a partnership.
- Partnership criteria were developed, organizations were vetted, and potential partners were asked to submit letters of interest regarding a partnership with PSU.
- Organizations submitted letters of interest, but took the opportunity to vet a potential partnership with the university.
- The total timeline to develop and fully launch SNI took approximately nine months.

From the outset, it was clear that Living Cully was interested in partnering with PSU but was also skeptical about the demonstrated commitment on the part of PSU and ISS, specifically, to equity and the requisite ability to work effectively with traditionally underserved communities. In their letter of interest, Living Cully insisted that they did not want the partnership to develop into a research project, one in which Living Cully became a subject for study by the university. Living Cully members reinforced the importance of being able to advance their agenda. In addressing their criteria for the partnership, Living Cully laid out the following expectations:

Critical elements for Living Cully:
- ISS would need to be receptive to community needs.
- Increasing the cultural competence of ISS staff was paramount.
- Overall, partnerships with the university should help Living Cully stakeholders acquire additional resources to address poverty, gentrification, and displacement in their neighborhood.

These conversations were important because they laid a foundation for trust and clear communication. While these high-level discussions were occurring between ISS staff, internal advisory board members, and potential partners, on-the-ground collaboration continued through community-based learning projects and the ISS-supported intern.

Focusing on the Impacts: Living Cully and ISS Over the Years

Table 1. Summary of Projects through the Living Cully-PSU Partnership, 2008-2015.

Department/Course Title/Project Format	Project Focus	Project Description(s)
Masters of Urban Planning; ISS paid internships; Health and Social Inequalities course	Anti-Displacement	Development of a "Not in Cully" report that offers strategies for preventing displacement; evaluation of the mental and physical health effects of displacement.

ISS paid internships; Urban Planning and Environmental Issues courses, Business Strategy capstone course	Land banking	Students on these projects conducted research on best practices in promoting affordable housing through public-sector "land banking." Additional research included policy analysis, financial modeling, and real estate identification.
Business Strategy capstone course; Urban Planning and Environmental Issues course; Environmental and Ecological Literacy course	Affordable housing	In this project students developed a business/economic model in order to identify and prioritize properties that could be purchased to preserve low-income housing and/or redevelop to create additional affordable housing. Additional projects included faculty and students engaged with the Cully Weatherization 2.0 project, which is an effort to braid local resources from community-based organizations and government agencies to weatherize homes in the Cully neighborhood so that residents may not only enjoy a healthier place to live but also avoid displacement.
Business Strategy capstone course	Economic development	Project in which undergraduate students conducted a feasibility analysis on a commercial aquaculture venture with Living Cully at the Columbia Biogas site. After reviewing market demand, talking with suppliers/buyers, exploring the legal and financial implications, as well as technical specifications about the facility, students advised Verde that the return-on-investment was low and wouldn't be a financial success. Findings have informed other efforts to launch new social enterprises.

Public Affairs Program evaluation course; ISS paid student sustainability fellows; ISS-supported student research	Health	A group of graduate students worked closely with Living Cully partners to evaluate how their delivery of community-based services under the collective impact model can positively impact the health of local Cully residents. A graduate student team reviewed the possible health benefits of Living Cully programs, as well as developed a process to evaluate any health-related performance indicators that Living Cully might track across their many programs. Additional projects included submitting a grant proposal to Kaiser Permanente's "Healthy Eating Active Living" request for proposals (funding TBD as of this publication).
University Studies senior capstone course; ISS-supported student research	Youth and community education	Projects included facilitating work parties to maintain the tree canopy at the Cully International Grove, coordinating a bilingual book drive, tutoring youth, and organizing a cleanup of the grounds at Rigler Elementary School. In addition, students in the community health department conducted a Photovoice research project with Cully youth to identify safe/unsafe and healthy/unhealthy places in the Cully neighborhood.
Urban Studies and Planning course; community-based participatory GIS mapping research project	Transportation	Project engaged graduate students in modeling transit flow in order to inform community-led efforts to purchase and revitalize a strip club that was a blight on the neighborhood. ISS-supported researchers have also worked with Living Cully to visualize community-collected perceptions on transportation and pedestrian safety issues in the neighborhood.
ISS-paid internship; ISS-paid Student Sustainability Fellow	Financial investments	Projects included extensive searches for additional funding for health and environmental infrastructure projects in Cully.

Student Leaders for Service paid internship; Entomology Club; University Studies course; Urban Studies and Planning	Environmental	Projects included support for the Cully Critter Cruise project that included an interactive naturalist tour of four Cully neighborhood gardens. Participants were primarily local elementary-aged children and their families, and the volunteer teams were composed of various Portland-area experts and enthusiasts of birding, entomology, native plants, mycology, and urban ecosystem sustainability.

Highlighting Exemplary Projects within the Partnership

In the past five years, the extensive partnership between PSU and Living Cully has evolved to produce dozens of projects impacting numerous students, departments, and community organizations throughout Portland. Table 1 effectively, though briefly, captures these intricate relationships by giving an account of several projects that have been conducted since 2008. In the following section, three projects are highlighted as prime examples of service-learning projects in support of a community-driven agenda. The projects included here are divided based on whether or not the project was conducted by undergraduate or graduate students. In each description, we hope to capture the nuances in the project that would make the project replicable in a similar community-university partnership. Each project speaks to the mission of Living Cully to enhance the existing environmental infrastructure in Cully, provide avenues to mitigate the effects of displacement, and ultimately understand the needs of the Cully neighborhood as described by its residents.

In spring 2013, when the SNI was still in early planning stages, Living Cully worked with a group of master's students in urban and regional planning to create a roadmap of strategies to prevent displacement in the Cully neighborhood. The students worked extremely hard over two academic terms in the community, conducting focus groups and one-on-one interviews and co-hosting town halls. In total, the students conducted thirty-seven interviews with community leaders and community engagement practitioners, three walking tours, four discussion groups, and two community workshops, and they received over one hundred survey responses from community members (Banuelos et al. 2013, 37). The result was a comprehensive report, titled "Not in Cully: Anti-Displacement Strategies for the Cully Neighborhood." The depth with which graduate students were able to develop a report and connect to the community reflects the course faculty member's ability to design their class in a way that met the needs of the community. They also did extensive research into the strategies and tactics that worked to prevent displacement in other communities around the nation. The extensive engagement and detailed analysis that the students provided was a resource the Living Cully organization did not have the time to research and produce, and this has proven invaluable to Living Cully's ongoing effort to prevent displacement. Any potential partnership would benefit from taking a similar approach to designing a course.

In 2014 and 2015, several projects worth noting were conducted in courses with both undergraduate and graduate students. In the spring of 2014, PSU and Living Cully created the Cully Neighborhood Youth Project. The project was implemented under the supervision of faculty in PSU's community health department, PSU graduate and undergraduate students, and Hacienda Community Development Corporation (HCDC). The primary purpose of the project was to collect and analyze visual and spatial data on how youth perceive their neighborhood. PSU students led Cully youth in walks around Cully while the youth took photographs of places where they felt safe or unsafe and places that they felt were healthy or unhealthy. GIS mapping was used to cross reference photos to specific locations in the neighborhood. As a whole, the project provided several lasting benefits to the community, partner, and PSU students. (Additional details regarding impacts are described in a subsequent section of this article.) This project is a great example of how university resources (i.e., GIS mapping) can be used to enhance a community's ability to inform its residents about important community needs. Additionally, in 2015 Living Cully worked with a group of master's students in public health to identify the health impacts of displacement. Over the ten-week term, an interdisciplinary group of graduate and undergraduate students performed a literature review on the mental and physical health consequences of gentrification and displacement, while another student team identified potential funding sources for projects that could help to prevent displacement.

Subsequent to the completion of the project in 2015, ISS provided a stipend for one of the students to work with Living Cully partner Verde in writing a grant to improve health outcomes. Having a student on this project was very valuable to Verde, as securing additional funding allows for the ability to enhance the existing infrastructure in Cully and continue to promote the health and well-being of its residents. Subsequent to the completion of the project, ISS provided a paid fellowship for one of the graduate students to continue to collaborate with Verde over the next two academic terms in grant-related work to improve health outcomes. This provided value to the community by enabling Living Cully to extend their fundraising capacity, while offering the students real-world experience in a community setting. The graduate student worked closely with Verde's executive director to pursue two funding opportunities, and Verde's letter of intent was recently accepted, with the organization being invited to submit a full application, which is currently pending. As a whole, the initial commitment to a ten-week course evolved into a paid position for a student, offsetting costs for the community partner and accomplishing valuable work for the community as well as applying for additional funding.

Creating a Cumulative Impact: Negotiating Community and University Needs

While many community-university partnerships have exemplary projects to demonstrate as outcomes, ISS plays a particular role in fostering cumulative impact with partners like Living Cully. The following section outlines how ISS staff and graduate assistants function as brokers to intentionally connect the university and community, and details how—and why—projects were selected for an SNI partnership.

As a broker, ISS works with partners like Living Cully to develop and understand their priorities, which is rooted in the work that they are advancing to meet community needs. Through a series of face-to-face conversations, partner priorities are defined, and university staff are left with a clearer sense of what may, or may not, make sense for an applied teaching or research project. With this understanding in place, ISS staff engage faculty through several means, providing modest incentives to faculty who agree to work with ISS partners. In some instances, ISS facilitates faculty support workshops where faculty can meet with partners to hear about their needs, and in other cases ISS staff independently seek out faculty with expertise or research interests in an area that aligns with a partner's needs and pitch them on the potential project idea. In both of these cases, ISS initially seeks to identify mutual interest and enthusiasm around a project, as it demonstrates possible alignment between university assets and community needs. If alignment does not exist, the lack of fit is acknowledged and the opportunity is shelved until a future date when circumstances might prove different. Importantly, since the relationship between the university and community is grounded in a larger, long-term partnership (the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative), organizations like Living Cully feel less pressure to work on each and every project idea that presents itself because they are not faced with scarcity, knowing there will be additional opportunities to work with the university in the future.

In determining whether or not a project might make sense, a particular emphasis is placed on the following design elements. First, it is important to balance the need for student learning with a desire to provide use-inspired research (Stokes 1997; Crow and Dabars 2015) or action projects that advance community impact. While the outcomes of research, an internship, or a course project are always uncertain, putting an emphasis on community impact at the genesis of a project helps ensure outcomes are useful to partners at project close. Faculty are particularly adept at finding opportunities to deepen student learning no matter what the project; ISS puts a particular emphasis on utility in order to ensure that partners may also benefit from the collaborative experience. Second, in considering project utility, it is crucial to understand the resources necessary to support a successful project in relationship to its potential impacts.

Table 2. Strategy Screen for Evaluating Potential Community-University Partnerships

Potential Impacts for the Partner	High	1. High impacts, Low resources	3. High impacts, High resources
	Low	2. Low impacts, Low resources	4. Low impacts, High resources
		Low	High

Potential Resources Required by the Partner (human, financial, etc.)

Beyond mutual interest and enthusiasm around a project idea, Table 2 presents a framework that is used to help determine if a project makes sense to pursue and helps identify barriers that it might be necessary to reduce in order to make a project more viable. Ideal projects are well aligned with partner priorities, and they present opportunities for high impact while requiring a relatively low amount of resources (time

or otherwise) from the partner organization (Table 2, Cell 1). Viable projects are those where there is still alignment with partner priorities, but the risks and rewards are less clear (Table 2, Cells 2 and 3). Impractical projects are those where alignment with partner priorities is not clear, or it is present, but the risks clearly outweigh the potential rewards.

ISS staff talk with partners like Living Cully to explore how a project fits within this framework, screening projects based on factors like potential deliverables; how deliverables align with partner needs; the skills, experience, and capabilities of the students that will work on the project; the faculty member's previous experience with community-university partnerships; and the level of resources that might be required from the partner, such as the number of in-class meetings or frequency of communication with students. These factors are determined through preliminary conversations with faculty and partners and are also informed by the experience of staff that have supported faculty in community-university partnerships. Together, these two criteria play a critical role in rethinking the nature of partnerships to privilege community outcomes—in short, to put community impact first.

If there is relatively clear alignment between community needs and faculty expertise/interest and the project makes sense to pursue, ISS organizes a meeting between both parties to explore project ideas in greater depth. ISS staff facilitate these conversations, asking probing questions to help stakeholders answer the following:

- What are the final project deliverables (physical products like reports, videos, etc., or processes like community engagement, design charettes, etc.)?
- What does each partner need to get out of this collaboration (i.e., how does the project relate to the bottom line of what partners and faculty are hoping to accomplish)?
- What are the learning outcomes for students involved in this project?
- What key resources or background information should students have early on in order to be best informed about the partner and their project?
- Why is this project important (i.e., how does this project help the community organization advance its larger goals, and how does this project contribute to those larger outcomes)?

Through conversations, these questions are answered and both stakeholders (faculty and community partners) play a key role in refining and co-developing the projects, determining scope, and settling on mutually agreed-upon goals or outcomes. ISS staff and graduate assistants then work to formalize answers to these questions in a project scoping document, which faculty typically provide to students early in the term to help them understand the context and expectations around the applied teaching or research project. Once the project is in the hands of PSU faculty, ISS staff typically step into the background, supporting faculty and partners on logistics as needed (e.g., scheduling final presentations, troubleshooting miscommunication, and so on), while starting to cultivate the next round of projects that will begin the following academic term (in approximately two to three months). Near the end of the term, ISS lets students know about the opportunity to highlight their project on the institute's blog, and works with partners and faculty to assess whether or not there might be options to continue to support the project after the term ends.

As a cross-university hub for sustainability, the institute has proven well-situated at working with a partner like Living Cully to start a project in the School of Business Administration, for example, and continue it in other schools, like the Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning, as the project's focus became clearer, the community context changed, and/or additional questions emerged that other disciplines could readily address. Additionally, ISS has leveraged the Miller gift to create opportunities to enrich the student experience and add capacity to community organizations by supporting students in paid fellowships where they continue working on their project after the ten-week term ends. Furthermore, aside from facilitating projects, ISS has also deployed staff with expertise in communications, development, and assessment to work with partners, like Living Cully, to help tell the story of our collaborative work, fundraise around joint opportunities, and assess impacts on the university and community. In short, the Institute for Sustainable Solutions plays a key role in advancing impact-oriented community-university partnerships, shepherding projects across the university, and leveraging assets and engaging new stakeholders in important community work, like making sure the university is an active and productive partner in collective impact efforts to alleviate poverty.

Impacts

Community Impacts: Partner Organizations and the Cully Neighborhood

The primary impact to Living Cully has been added capacity to deliver on community-identified priorities. The community needs are great, and being able to add student capacity to support neighborhood projects has had real benefits. Students engaged in community projects and research have helped Living Cully partner organizations execute programs, enhance projects, and thoughtfully approach the work in front of them. A consistent challenge has been Living Cully's capacity to supervise projects. With help from ISS staff, Living Cully has been able to learn what types of projects work best and share responsibility for supervision of student and faculty projects.

Regarding the community more generally, there have been a number of impacts. The Photovoice project created significant effects for the community: the use of Photovoice and GIS mapping allowed the research team at PSU to provide Living Cully with an idea of the youth perspective on the neighborhood, in addition to locating areas within the neighborhood that needed improvement to increase health and safety benefits for the community. In addition to the Photovoice project, a group of students helped plan for and assist day-of with the Cully Critter Cruise, a neighborhood event to educate young people about the biodiversity in the neighborhood. In a small but important way, the students helped make the project a success, enabling dozens of residents and forty youth to engage in an environmental education opportunity. The work on the "Not in Cully" report discussed in the previous section highlights a larger impact, where the road map that was developed with PSU students is now being deployed through community efforts to prevent displacement. While Living Cully's efforts are ongoing and there is no guarantee of success, the partnership with PSU provided a key piece of analysis to inform the organization's efforts.

Specifically there have been two distinct types of impacts from partnering with PSU. Direct impacts refer to impacts that are explicitly related to the community partner (e.g., improving capacity or ability). Indirect impacts refer to impacts that benefit the partner, but are more distal to the actual community partner's structure, organization, or functioning.

Direct impacts. Direct impacts of the partnership include the following:

- Increased research capability (e.g., answering questions or researching issues that Living Cully does not have the capacity to address);
- Increased capacity to directly engage the community in surveys or community events (e.g., students to assist with planning and day-of logistics for Cully Critter Cruise);
- Creation of a report entitled "Not in Cully: Strategies for Preventing Displacement," a community-based set of anti-displacement strategies for the Cully neighborhood, such as increasing community members' knowledge of sustainable home ownership practices (such as energy efficiency) and increasing financial investments in the neighborhood to bring in job opportunities;
- Market research and analysis to identify urban agriculture market opportunities for a new social enterprise;
- Providing paid interns to Living Cully to work on Living Cully projects (e.g., graduate students to help engage the community in anti-displacement strategies) and providing unpaid students to work on Living Cully projects; and
- Graduate student helped to write a grant to apply for multi-year funding to develop and implement the second phase of a Living Cully program to improve health in the community.

Indirect impacts. Indirect impacts of the partnership include the following:

- Increased capacity to apply for grants and secure additional investments in the Cully neighborhood; and
- Increased competitiveness when applying for grants to bring in additional investments in the Cully neighborhood (as proposals are more deeply grounded in the research and literature).

Impact on the University

Impact on Students. In an end-of-term evaluation, the value of one PSU student's community-based work was reported this way: "I think part of what Living Cully and the PSU research team are trying to achieve is getting the community to work together and supporting them as they keep moving forward on the changes they want to see in their neighborhood."

In the 2014-15 academic year, PSU faculty in eighteen departments collaborated with the four SNI community partners through over forty courses that involved more than one thousand students. Of all the students who responded to our evaluation surveys last year, 80 percent felt that the community partner project deepened their understanding of their course content, and 90 percent agreed that working with

community partners enhanced their understanding of local community issues. In its first year, the SNI supported ten students in paid sustainability fellowships, collectively providing two thousand hours of service to their community partner organizations. In addition to supporting students in their partnership with Living Cully, fellows also support organizations such as Green Lents, a grassroots organization in southeast Portland, which share a similar commitment to community sustainability as Living Cully. These fellows worked to maximize the ease of communication between all of the stakeholders involved, and also compiled data collected by the students in the classes, planned and implemented community events, and presented their work at PSU and in the community. These fellowships provide students with substantive real-world experience to develop and expand their skills and an opportunity to build their professional networks. Anecdotally, faculty also report that students have increased motivation when working on SNI projects. They work harder and are more focused because they are motivated by the community partner's mission and want to provide meaningful work that assists the partner in advancing their mission.

The Student Sustainability Fellows Program emerged out of SNI course collaborations with partners like Living Cully, stemming from the realization that ten weeks is not often long enough to create a lot of value for a partner and to make measureable progress on a community project. Similar to an internship or independent study, this program provides opportunities for select students from SNI courses to continue their work with SNI partners following their original class, picking up where the class left off and extending these projects for an additional ten to twenty weeks.

In the words of an ISS student sustainability fellow, "The fact that students can get involved with a project like this through PSU is phenomenal. Opportunity is everywhere as long as you are willing to accept it. Starting out in [an SNI partner] class last fall, I would have never expected to have the chance to be so involved with my community while also developing professional experience and skills."

Impact on Faculty. One PSU faculty member noted that "ISS was instrumental in connecting the students to the community partners. Without the SNI we would have had several challenges, some as simple as coordinating a meeting time and location, and others as challenging as integrating coursework into ongoing projects. The SNI model is something that can have broad appeal to faculty, students, and community members alike."

PSU faculty also agree on the value and success of collaborating with ISS and the SNI partners. Newly launched efforts to programmatically understand faculty perspectives show that 100 percent of the faculty respondents agreed that students learned skills through the project that they might not have learned in the classroom, and 91 percent of faculty agreed that partnering through the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative provides more benefits compared to traditional partnerships at PSU. Typically, in these partnerships faculty are solely responsible for identifying partners and managing projects, and the community partnership often ends once the term is over. Notable ways that the ISS and SNI collaboration has enhanced faculty experiences include:

- Increased access to community partners as a result of ISS playing a brokering role, stewarding the relationship to the community partner and helping to manage the project;
- Increased ability to integrate social justice issues into the course curriculum;
- Increased relevance and ability to use a hands-on approach to the classroom; and
- Increased use of place-based pedagogies and diverse perspectives in the classroom.

Aside from larger program impacts, faculty who have worked with Living Cully on applied teaching and research projects have reported they valued the partnerships insomuch as they have created strong opportunities to integrate issues like race, class, and economic inequality into their courses in a real and meaningful way, contributing to student learning about important topics that otherwise might be overlooked entirely or only addressed through an academic case study.

Impact on the Institute for Sustainable Solutions. Through SNI, ISS has become an increasingly valuable resource to faculty and administration due to its role as a broker. SNI has enhanced the university's ability to demonstrate commitment to its motto. Furthermore, the partnership with Living Cully demonstrates how sustainability is more than the dominant discourse of recycling, green infrastructure, and biking, and is instead multifaceted and fundamentally includes social and economic issues (i.e., race, class, privilege, discrimination, equity, etc.), which are areas where Living Cully provides significant leadership. While partners have yet to capitalize on extramural funding, the partnership also provides competitive opportunities to pursue collaborative funding and research since ISS already has a strong relationship with the community partner in place. Rather than seeking out a community partner, attempting to develop a relationship, and potentially forcing a partnership in pursuit of funding, with a mature partnership like this one, ISS and Living Cully simply need to have a conversation about whether or not pursuing an opportunity makes sense for both parties as well as for the partnership as a whole. Additional impacts to the university include fostering a shared commitment to reducing barriers to partnership work for faculty and fostering value in the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative to further expand as an intellectual community of practice where faculty can gather around shared work, common practices, and a felt sense of belonging in an often siloed and disconnected institution.

Perhaps the most significant impact to the university has been the ability to create tangible impacts through the SNI partnership with Living Cully and other neighborhood partners. Together, the SNI partnerships have served as a platform to develop and test a model for how a cross-university unit, like ISS, can function as an effective broker between the university and community at large in order to better facilitate innovative city-university partnerships. Through these efforts, staff and partners have realized firsthand the level of cumulative impact that is possible when university-community projects are curated and supported by a third party. Recently, PSU was named one of the most innovative universities in the United States; ISS was listed as a contributing factor in PSU's innovation (Pardington 2015). As the central portal and leadership hub for sustainability at PSU, the Institute for Sustainable

Solutions also seeks to maintain PSU's nationally competitive edge, which means staff must be thinking about how to continually improve upon the work at PSU. As noted above, the SNI partnerships have served as a platform for staff to test and learn about assessment and continual improvement, strengthening both SNI and other ISS-supported programs, which enhances our reputation as a university and has a lasting effect on student and faculty recruitment and retention.

Finally, ISS staff members find it personally rewarding to support local sustainability efforts and organizations like Living Cully. Supporting local sustainability efforts by working with organizations like Living Cully is important because these partnerships help redefine how academia conceptualizes sustainability and ensures that issues like race, class, privilege, discrimination, equity, etc. are not only prevalently acknowledged and discussed in the classroom, but that they also remain central to the larger discourse on sustainability. ISS staff have learned that it is critical to maintain an emphasis on the social aspects of sustainability, particularly since ample research shows how people from underrepresented backgrounds are most likely to suffer from poverty, lower educational attainment, and the disproportionate impacts of climate change, among other things.

Discussion: Lessons Learned and Moving Forward

Considering the partnership between PSU and Living Cully, we believe the positive attributes of the partnership are the following: increased development of resources, clear communication between community and university partners, and increased involvement of students in real-world projects. The challenges, however, are more subtle at times and crucial to our success in the future as we seek to improve the partnership. Worth discussing are challenges around establishing trust, remaining sensitive to the wisdom and agency of the community, honoring a commitment to support community leadership, and communication. In the initial stages of developing the partnership, there were evident barriers to building trust because the university was viewed as an outsider that did not represent the Living Cully community. As a predominantly white and middle-class organization, ISS initially struggled to build trust with Living Cully. ISS had to develop trust with Living Cully and show that the university would not enter the community without permission, nor leave in a year when administrators' priorities shifted. Common ground was eventually created in a shared commitment to equity and sustainability for low-income people and people of color, as well as an ISS desire to support sustainability efforts as the community defined it. Importantly, during this time ISS remained sensitive to the wisdom and agency of the community, recognizing the limited experience of ISS staff, as well as the larger university, in working with these populations. During these early conversations, it was also important for ISS to make the commitment that the community would define the priorities and the projects, as opposed to students or faculty with a specific question in mind. Throughout the partnership, communication has remained a critical element of the collaboration, as facilitating good projects between Living Cully and university students and faculty can prove to be difficult. The following summarizes significant lessons learned from the partnership:

- The importance of the university's recognition of the inherent power imbalance between the more well-resourced university and less-resourced community organizations;
- The utility of having a strong community partner that has a clear agenda, understands its needs, and sets boundaries in order to prevent the power imbalance between themselves and the university. For example, to help keep the partnership focused, Living Cully and ISS staff talk frequently and reaffirm the community's needs in light of new interest from faculty researchers or instructors looking for a project to supplement their courses, constantly vetting potential project ideas against community needs. Living Cully is not afraid to say "no" to an expert's idea if it does not have a clear line of sight to their goals, in part because they know they will have a continued relationship with the university through ISS;
- That said, there may be instances where it makes sense to pursue opportunities that arise for students and faculty that do not provide direct benefits to the community, but instead offer indirect value, and vice versa;
- Reciprocity between the university and the community partner must be nurtured over time, but is more easily attainable through a long-term relationship;
- From the university perspective, balancing projects that respond to the needs of the community partner while also providing a substantial learning opportunity for the students;
- Through the history of the partnership, Living Cully has developed a stronger sense of what to expect from course engagements. However, students often have limited prior experience with community-based learning, and as such, they have varied, and perhaps unreasonable, expectations when first encountering the ambiguity posed by any project. For example, students might start researching one question, but then have to pivot because the line of inquiry does not pan out or because the partner's thinking changes in response to new information that presents itself in our dynamic world;
- Communication between students and partners is another challenge, as students often expect a high level of communication, or regular communication, which sometimes is not available given that a nonprofit partner is often juggling competing demands on its time;
- Acknowledging that partners are incredibly busy (one person doing the equivalent of two or three jobs functions is typical) and that the partnership engagements can be the item that partners make a lower priority when overwhelmed with grants, and projects, which are clear priorities;
- At times, faculty experience conflicting priorities in wanting students to pursue their individual interests while also trying to deliver on community needs. This can mean that a professor has to provide students with more direction and guidance in order to ensure that the ten-week term is impactful for both the students and the community partner;
- The university's ten-week academic term poses real challenges to delivering high-quality projects or products to partners. Deep impacts can often be realized by continuing a project from one course into another or by creating co-curricular opportunities (internships and volunteer experiences) for students to continue working on the project after the term has ended (see the article "Connecting Curriculum to Community Research: Professional Services, Research, and Teaching" in this issue for further thoughts on this); and

- ISS, faculty, and partners need to do a better job ensuring that all students reflect on their community-based learning experience in order to make meaning of it and develop a stronger ability to communicate the value of the experience to others, including future employers.

Many of these lessons have begun to inform current practice. Moving forward, Living Cully and PSU are in the process of prioritizing focus areas to guide the partnership. Together, partners are engaging in a series of conversations that will result in a clear framework for what PSU and Living Cully will and will not work on together, which will provide a shared understanding that can be used to screen the viability of potential projects. These conversations will also help clarify each party's commitments to the partnership, whether it be through contributions of financial resources, human resources needed for joint scholarship, or commitments to collaboratively seek extramural funding.

In addition to lessons learned, reflecting on the partnership brings several questions to mind that may prove useful to other communities seeking to connect with a local university. Regarding community organizations, the Living Cully-PSU partnership demonstrates the ability of community organizations to use the assets in a university to meet community needs. Other communities contemplating a similar partnership might want to ponder the following questions before entering a community-university partnership: How can community organizations similar to Living Cully be more intentional about using university partners to advance community agendas? What role should university institutions such as ISS have in working to fill a potential gap between the university and the community? How can community organizations and universities resolve conflicts that arise during a partnership? How can partnerships maintain a level of reciprocity as the partnership evolves and continues as a long-term relationship? How might universities adopt a place-based approach to their community engagement and work to ensure that university efforts are better coordinated, or at the very least, informed of one another?

Conclusion

Contemporary examples of community-university partnerships have emerged out of a commitment to enhance the learning environment of students through engaged service-learning and promote equity and social justice in the communities in which universities reside (Fitzgerald et al. 2012; Sandy and Holland 2006). The partnership between Living Cully and Portland State University serves as an exemplar in the realm of community-university partnerships in both parties' willingness to confront evident differences (i.e., around class and race). The commitment of both partners to erasing the top-down approach in developing effective communication skills regarding the scope of their partnership and expectations has allowed for over one thousand students and several dozen faculty members to be engaged in a community-centered endeavor that has spanned several academic years and continues to date (Strier 2010). ISS has served as a third party, brokering this partnership to ensure that both Living Cully and PSU are effective in promoting the health and well-being of the residents in the Cully neighborhood (Cooper et al. 2014).

These are just a handful of the lessons learned from the Living Cully-PSU partnership that can serve to encourage future partnerships between universities and communities, hopefully fostering a new commitment to egalitarian partnerships with mutualistic goals and structures. These partnerships may then remain viable across time and create measurable impacts within the community and the university. As we look at the future of community-university engagement, the partnership between PSU and Living Cully also illuminates the importance of university peer-to-peer learning communities about fostering community-university partnerships. What level of community and institutional transformation could be realized if a network of universities were to develop and work intentionally with their communities, sharing strategies, challenges, and lessons learned with both one another as well as their community partners?

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