

Fair and mutual research partnerships: 10 principles for community–university partnerships

1 A commitment to strengthening the partnering community organisation

Any partnership between a university and a community/cultural organisation or group should be premised on leaving that organisation stronger than before the participation. This might take the form, amongst others, of building capacity and knowledge within the organisation, the development of new products and services, the opportunity to take a strategic look at the work of the organisation, the building of new networks. Importantly, the partner organisation needs to know that the collaboration will not leave them financially or organisationally weaker than when they began the project.

2 A commitment to mutual benefit

Any partnerships between universities and Black and Minority Ethnic communities should address mutually beneficial needs and concerns. There should be sufficient time in the development process for the project to identify what these are on both sides and to clearly articulate the mutual benefit for each partner prior to projects being funded. Intrinsic to exploring mutual benefits is the need to acknowledge in a constructive and open mode prevailing prejudices and discriminatory practices that sustain inequality.

3 A commitment to transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability needs to operate at multiple levels from the institutional level to the individual project level. Universities need to be clear about how and why they are forming partnerships with particular communities and what the processes are for building new partnerships with other organisations and communities. It should be clear how communities might approach universities for partnership and on what basis. In relation to bid development between partners, there needs to be complete transparency about the funding process, the allocation of budgets and how and why resources are being allocated and to whom. This transparency should be reflected in ethical procedures that are not reliant on obscure or legalistic processes, but which are written and communicated in ways that ensure that all partners understand what is happening in a research process and have clear and ongoing opportunities to give or withhold consent for participation.

4 Fair practices in payments

Partnerships must be characterised by fairness in the payment process. This means that the process for payments is clear and transparent; ensuring that payment is made promptly in a timely manner, and in advance if necessary given the needs of the project or the partner. It means ensuring that the bureaucratic processes for claiming payment are not so onerous that partners are dissuaded from claiming, and that there are clear mechanisms for addressing difficulties with payments.

5 Fair payments for participants

Payments to participants in research projects should recognise the time and valuable expertise that partners are contributing to the project, ensuring that they are remunerated in a manner commensurate with that expertise – unless the partner has clearly and willingly identified that they see these activities as a core part of their own mission and priorities. Any payments should take into account not only the activity cost, but the core costs of the organisation and the opportunity cost of not participating in other activities.

6 A commitment to fair knowledge exchange

This principle reflects the fact that research partnerships should build upon and recognise the knowledge and expertise of all participants. This means that all partners will be recognised and expected to contribute distinctive knowledge and expertise to the project, that no partner will be expected or entitled to bear the full weight of theorising or interpreting the work of the project, and that all partners will seek to build dialogue across different sets of knowledge and experience. Critically, a commitment to fair knowledge exchange also recognises that some forms of knowledge traditions are associated with and belong to particular communities and therefore cannot be freely shared or used without permission.

7 A commitment to sustainability and legacy

The value of a fair and mutual research project will be judged not only in its immediate outcomes, but over the longer-term. Project participants will be expected to develop plans for longer-term legacy and sustainability by agreeing how data and outputs from projects will be protected, shared and accessed over the long-term, and by whom. This does not mean that all projects themselves need to be sustained in the long-term (indeed, some projects and interventions are successful precisely because they are temporary), but that the question of sustainability and development should be posed from the outset.

8 A commitment to equality and diversity

All communities are dynamic and comprised of different groups and interests within them. The intersection of these different interests and experiences should be considered wherever relevant. Projects should actively seek to avoid reproducing and intensifying already existing prejudices and stereotypes within and between communities. Partnering organisations should actively promote equity and inclusion and constructively engage in dismantling structural racism and discrimination. Attention needs to be paid in all partnerships to the specific experiences of both university and community partnering organisations, including recognising what claims for representation can and cannot be made by the organisations involved.

9 A commitment to sectoral as well as organisational development

Fair and mutual research partnerships are understood to be making a contribution to the wider knowledge landscape and to the wider public good. Arrangements will therefore need to be made to ensure that project outputs are captured in ways that enable them to be shared with a wider community, and that the learning from these projects is available and accessible to be shared with a wider academic and community constituency. This means paying attention to questions of documentation, archiving, attribution, communication and publishing and to the important issue of longer-term legacy and sustainability of the work.

10 A commitment to reciprocal learning

Fair and mutual research projects will be expected to contribute to the wider knowledge base about how to build better university–community collaborations and to reflect and document what has been learned about partnership processes during their project. This will involve learning that is reciprocal, with large institutions often having as much (or more) to learn as smaller ones, and in which the process of dialogue is ongoing. Where appropriate, project teams will be expected to advocate for and build capacity in partnership working with other organisations and networks. Public reporting by universities and funders on progress against the principles of fair and mutual research partnerships will be essential to compliance with these principles.