



Equitable Partnerships for Civic Engagement

A toolkit for civic, community
and university partners

Authors

Sarah Gifford · Alison Blunt
Daisy Payling · Kimberley Freeman

This toolkit has been developed by the Centre for Public Engagement and Civic Engagement team at Queen Mary University of London as part of the Research England funded National Civic Impact Accelerator programme (NCIA), led by Sheffield Hallam University. It draws on workshops in London, Sheffield and online in 2023 and 2024 with 50 civic, community and university partners.

Authors

Sarah Gifford, Alison Blunt, Daisy Payling and Kimberley Freeman

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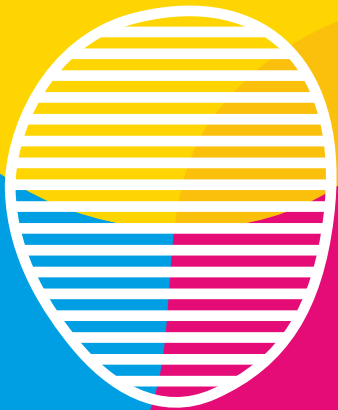
This toolkit can be downloaded from:
civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/about-us/ncia and qmul.ac.uk/civic

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Find explanations
to **acronyms** used
in this toolkit on the
inside back cover

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Introduction

Why a toolkit on equitable partnerships?



By working together, universities and partners from different sectors can achieve much more than if they work alone.

Strategic and wide-ranging, the civic role of universities spans research, teaching, and knowledge exchange, as well as other core work including employment practices, procurement policies, and approaches to sustainability.

The **UPP Foundation Civic University Commission** inspired many universities – often building on strong civic roots – to develop Civic University Agreements with partners and communities to address place-based priorities.

Partnerships are one of the four principles – together with place, public, and measurement and impact – identified to underpin Civic University Agreements and other civic work. Partnerships are essential for impactful civic engagement – but some partnerships can be more equitable than others.

Universities work with a wide range of partners to make a positive impact in, with and for their local places and communities. By working together, universities and partners from different sectors can achieve much more than if they work alone. We explore more of this in the case studies in Part 4.

We acknowledge that partnerships with universities can look and feel different, be managed by various teams and individuals, and have varying levels of formality. This could include contracts, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), collaboration agreements, intellectual property obligations and signatories.

Whilst our focus in the toolkit is on civic, community and university partnerships, the guiding principles for equitable partnership can also apply to commercial partnerships that support research and innovation. The scope and span of partnership working can vary by university and partner organisation, but the guiding principles that underpin equitable partnership working should remain the same.

Realising their civic ambitions requires partners to find ways to collaborate even when their working styles, budgets, levels of resource, motivations for engaging, and operating environments are different. In practice, collaboration between civic, community and university partners can fall short of their shared ideals of mutual respect and mutual benefit.



Use the Place Navigator

Partnerships power place-based change, but making sense of the local landscape isn't always easy. The Place Navigator is a visual tool built to help you understand your local area. It maps key players, sectors, and systems.

[civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/
resources/place-navigator](https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/resources/place-navigator)

Identifying ways to make the reality of collaboration match the values enshrined in civic work requires behind-the-scenes work influencing policies, processes and ways of working across partner organisations. It also requires open and honest conversations. This toolkit aims to help partners have these conversations, whether you work in a small community organisation, a large anchor institution such as a local authority or NHS Trust, or at a university.

This toolkit explores how we can effectively embed an equitable approach to partnerships into our institutional and organisational practice with a focus on non-commercial partnerships. It provides practical exercises, case studies and resources for you to develop principles for equitable partnership in your place and context.

Civic university partners can include:

- Local authorities
- NHS Trusts
- Further Education colleges
- Schools
- Charities
- Community and Voluntary organisations
- Arts, cultural and heritage organisations
- Councils for Voluntary Service
- Faith groups and organisations
- Police services
- Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
- Industry
- Regeneration agencies
- Innovation and growth networks

National Civic Impact Accelerator

The **National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA)** is a three-year programme funded by Research England and led by Sheffield Hallam University working in partnership with Queen Mary University of London, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, City-REDI at the University of Birmingham, Institute for Community Studies, and the OECD.

The NCIA is building a civic evidence base to understand what works, for whom and in what contexts; delivering an action learning programme to pilot civic approaches and build capacity in universities across England; and scaling up civic engagement through a programme of support, tools, training and communications.

This toolkit has been developed by Queen Mary University of London as part of the NCIA programme. Queen Mary is also a founding partner of the **Civic University Network (CUN)**, ‘a national network of universities committed to transforming lives and places,’ established by Sheffield Hallam University in 2020. The CUN provides resources and support for universities as they develop, embed and evaluate the impact of their civic work.



Material for this toolkit was developed through a series of workshops held in 2023 and 2024:

- at Queen Mary University of London to develop principles for equitable partnerships in public engagement;
- in London, Sheffield and online, convened by Queen Mary’s civic and public engagement teams as part of the NCIA programme.

We couldn’t have written this toolkit without the civic, community and university partners who participated in these workshops. We thank them for sharing their experiences, challenges, ambitions, and, above all, for their inspiring commitment to working in equitable partnership.



Participating organisations

- Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality
- Ashiana Community Project
- Barts Health NHS Trust
- British Science Association Ideas Fund
- Cinema Nation CIC
- Community Wellbeing Collective
- Derby Cathedral
- Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council
- Gleadless Valley Regeneration Team, Sheffield City Council
- Good Food Oxfordshire
- Harmony Works
- Institute for Community Studies
- Kings College London
- Lancaster University
- Leeds Citizens
- Liverpool John Moores University
- Mettle
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)
- Oxford Biomedical Research Centre
- People Know How
- Pixel Literacy
- Queen Mary University of London
- Republic London
- Sheffield Hallam University
- Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Social Benefits Consortium CIC
- Staffordshire University
- Stoke Creates
- The Brilliant Club
- The Mersey Forest
- The New Black Film Collective
- TimeBank Hull and East Riding
- Together 4 Peace
- UCL Partners
- University College London
- University of Bedfordshire
- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- University of Derby
- University of East Anglia
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Hull
- University of Leeds
- University of Lincoln
- University of Reading
- University of Sheffield
- Waltham Forest Council
- Whitley Community Development Association
- Writerz & Scribez

The Queen Mary approach



Queen Mary's commitment to civic, public and community engagement* fuelled our desire to better understand what makes a good partnership, and how we can support our staff and students to work collaboratively across East London and beyond.

In 2023, Queen Mary's civic and public engagement teams held a series of workshops with community partner organisations and Queen Mary staff and students to explore expectations and experiences around partnership working in public engagement. These workshops formed the basis for the workshops on equitable partnerships for civic engagement delivered by Queen Mary as part of the NCIA programme.

The first workshop explored expectations and priorities with civic and community partners who work with the university. This workshop was then repeated with staff and students at Queen Mary who work in collaboration with civic and community partners. The final workshop brought everyone together to co-create a shared set of principles for equitable partnerships in university public engagement.

Unlike a Memorandum of Understanding or Partnership Agreement, these principles aim to capture the underlying values, expectations and priorities shared across the university's public engagement partnerships.



See **Section 5** for links to resources and tools to help build successful, equitable partnerships.



These principles aim to capture the underlying values, expectations and priorities shared across the university's public engagement partnerships.

The public engagement team continues to embed these principles in their training, funding schemes and in the advice they provide to staff and students who are planning engagement projects.

Queen Mary is not alone in seeking to establish an overarching set of principles which govern their engagement work. There are other tools available to help universities consider how they might form successful, equitable partnerships, including:

- **NCCPE partnership tools** developed from two projects: the Museum-University Partnership Initiative (MUPI) and School-University Partnership Initiative (SUPI);
- **Principles of Practice for Community-University Partnership Working** developed by UK Community Partner Network (UKCPN) and NCCPE;
- **Research 101 Manifesto** for equitable research in Vancouver's downtown Eastside;

- **Terms of Engagement** produced by the Community-Based Action Research (CBAR) network in Parc-Extension, Montreal;
- **Working with a Partner** created by the Being Human Festival of the Humanities.

By holding these workshops with people who had experience of collaborating on projects with Queen Mary, we could develop a set of principles which were appropriate for our place and context.

* In 2021, Queen Mary was the first university to be awarded the Platinum Engage Watermark by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. Queen Mary launched its **Civic University Agreement** in 2022. Queen Mary's strategic civic partners – who are all represented on the Civic Advisory Board – are London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Barts Health NHS Trust, East London Business Alliance, Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service, Citizens UK, Women's Inclusive Team, Ocean Estate Regeneration Trust, Drapers' Multi-Academy Trust, University Schools Trust, and Newham FE College.

Queen Mary principles of equitable partnership in public engagement

These principles were co-designed with representatives from local community organisations and their Queen Mary collaborators to provide foundations to build and sustain equitable partnerships in public engagement.

- 1 Take the time** to develop your understanding of each other's contexts and communities.
- 2 Share your motivations** and expectations for partnership and listen to those of your partners.
- 3 Recognise power imbalances** and identify how you can proactively work to minimise them.
- 4 Decide clear aims, outcomes and outputs** from your activities, agreeing what success looks like for all and how this will be measured.
- 5 Share the resource needs** for your partnership. Identify what resources you and your partner already have access to and decide where it's appropriate and feasible to share them. This may change over time, so revisit when new opportunities arise.
- 6 Be honest and transparent** about each organisations' policies, processes and working practices and clarify any distinctions between partners.
- 7 Agree whether and how participants are recompensed** for their time, and be transparent about timescales and processes of payments.
- 8 Agree ways of communicating** which are timely, clear and work for both partners. Create opportunities to check in on progress.
- 9 Respect each other's contributions and time** in and outside of meetings. Be proactive, share ownership of tasks and follow through with actions.
- 10 Recognise when things don't go to plan** and take appropriate action. Adapt to changing contexts and be flexible.

Resources could be funding, space, knowledge and expertise, access to organisational support.



Organisational processes could be recruitment processes, copyright, payment processes, how actions from meetings will be recorded and shared.

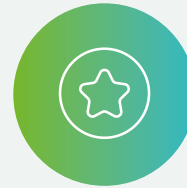
Queen Mary values for equitable partnership in public engagement

Queen Mary's commitment to create a truly inclusive environment, building on our cherished cultural diversity, where students and staff flourish, reach their full potential and are proud to be part of the university.



Proud

We will work with partners to build something that we all can be proud of and celebrate our shared successes.



Inclusive

We will be inclusive, with transparent processes and opportunities that are accessible to all our partners. We will value different types of skills, knowledge and expertise.



Ambitious

We will seek to build meaningful and impactful partnerships, investing energy and time to see activities through.



Collegial

We will listen to and act on constructive feedback, providing it in turn. We will work together to resolve issues respectfully with patience and empathy.



Ethical

We will value our partners' time and expertise, taking shared ownership of the project from work to reward.

These are Queen Mary's core values as outlined in our Strategy 2030 qmul.ac.uk/strategy-2030

For further information please visit qmul.ac.uk/publicengagement

NCIA workshops with civic, community and university partners

In 2024, the civic and public engagement teams at Queen Mary delivered workshops with other universities and their partners across the UK as part of the NCIA programme.

We hoped that by attending these workshops, civic, community and university partners would be well placed to start drafting their own principles for equitable partnerships, which would be unique and meaningful to their own place and operating context.

We held three workshops, one in London at Toynbee Hall, one in Sheffield at The Circle, and one online.

Universities were asked to register to attend the workshops with a civic or community partner. Participants were then supported to complete the exercises you will find in this toolkit; identifying who needs to be 'in the room' when these principles are developed; and exploring expectations and how they may or may not overlap.

Participants also provided valuable feedback on the process, shared insights from their collaborations on civic projects – some of which we include as case studies – and shared useful resources and connections.

In total... **48 people** participated, representing:



15 universities



24 civic partner organisations



19 partnerships

In keeping with the Principles of Partnership for Equitable Partnerships in Public Engagement, civic and community partners were compensated for their time to attend the workshops and share their experiences with us.

Following these workshops, we produced a Beta version of the toolkit and launched this at CiviCon 2024.

In Autumn 2024, we then held two online reflection sessions for those who had worked with the toolkit or intended to use it, to gather feedback on content, usability, design and other helpful resources.

We have incorporated feedback into this final version of the Equitable Partnerships for Civic Engagement toolkit – improving the usability as a toolkit, providing more context and sharing more case studies.



Civic and community partners shared that it would be helpful to include more details on how to navigate a university and find support for forming new relationships.



Universities told us they had shared this across different Knowledge Exchange teams to come together internally and plan their partnership approach, embedded the exercises into researcher engagement training and were considering how to adapt this to guide evaluation and impact of partnerships.

2

Considerations for equitable partnership working

The workshops identified overarching themes and shared concerns.

At the heart of many conversations was the need to clarify the purpose and scope of working in partnership.

Why are you seeking to collaborate?

What are you seeking to achieve together?

What do you think you add to the partnership?

What do you need from the partnership?

Taking an asset-based approach to collaboration and engagement is the key to building equitable partnerships and ensuring work can be mutually beneficial.

The considerations identified during the workshops fell into two broad categories:

- **for organisations**
- **for projects**



Organisational considerations

The workshop discussions revealed considerations that can't be solved at an individual project level; many need structural change within universities.

The need for flexibility

Civic organisations are not all the same and they do not have the same expectations or resources. This means developing processes that are flexible enough to be adapted to different projects and relationships.

Who builds and holds these relationships?

What support – training, funding, and a wider infrastructure where partnership work is made possible and valued – is available? How is the time needed to develop and maintain relationships with partners recognised within workloads?

Who takes the credit?

How can it be shared more equitably, both between and within partner organisations?

How can partnerships be sustained over time?

What support and resources are required to sustain longer-term partnerships beyond specific projects?

What does a university's physical infrastructure and estate say about its capacity to collaborate with civic and community partners?

Are its buildings accessible and welcoming?
Are there spaces to meet? Can civic and community partners access and make use of university spaces to support their own work?

Do university processes and procedures make collaboration possible, or do they make it more difficult?

Do your values align with your ways of working?
What process improvements can enhance partnership work, including for payment and contracting?

How can potential civic partners contact the university?

Do you have an open door, literally or figuratively?

How can you remove barriers to project delivery, while also ensuring staff and students have the skills they need to work effectively and in keeping with the university's stated values?

Should all staff be required to undertake training in equitable partnerships and engagement practice before being able to access or apply for funding which requires collaboration in project delivery?

Be honest about your motivations for engaging with civic partners

If your civic engagement ambitions are to help you demonstrate social value and to help you to deliver your aims (such as developing and delivering high-quality research and teaching), are you willing and able to adequately compensate community partner organisations for their contribution to those endeavours? Why should they do this for free? How can you ensure projects are truly mutually beneficial and equitable? Resource might not just come from the university, civic partners might well be able to contribute in-kind support and/or financial support to the partnership or project if their motivations align.

Does your university, or civic partner have agreed rates of compensation or rates for expertise for different types of engagement?

For example, the [National Institute for Health and Care Research \(NIHR\)](#) guidelines are a helpful starting point but don't reflect the levels of expertise you may be seeking from partner organisations.

Do your reward and recognition processes adequately value work with civic, community and other partners?

If not, what changes can you make and how can you communicate them effectively to staff?

Fixed-term contracts and workload models can actively prevent collaborative working

How do staff experience working in your university? What might this mean for how they are able to represent the university in their work with partners? How can relationships be supported and sustained beyond individual contacts?

Project considerations

Resources

Who has what?

Who needs what?

How is the work being resourced and funded?

This is a key consideration and is all too often left to the last minute or not fully costed. This should be agreed with potential partners and costed in from the very beginning – for contributions during project development and pre-application stages, as well as for when carrying out the joint initiative.

Does your budget reflect your values and expectations?

Civic partner time is too often costed at minimum wage, especially when the partner is a community organisation or charity, while university staff are paid at a higher rate and students may be paid nothing. What does this say about which partners are more valuable to you and your project?

If your project relies on colleagues helping you to reach out to potential project partners by acting as a broker, is that work accounted for in the project plan?

Does it have budget allocated? Time, travel, meeting spaces, tea and coffee all cost money.

Not all civic partner organisations are the same, and neither are all universities

Organisations can vary in size and scope from international to hyper-local, and from large complex organisations to just one person.

Don't make assumptions about what each organisation can add to a project and what they might need to be able to collaborate with you.

Discuss ownership of shared outputs at the start

Who will hold the Intellectual Property Rights to data collected and ideas generated collaboratively? If research outputs are expected, will ethical review processes take the collaborative nature of the work into consideration?

Funding for engagement projects is often short-term, which can be challenging

However, relationships can and should be developed and invested in over the long-term – not just when there is external funding to cover the costs.

Power Dynamics

Real and imagined

Consider the power dynamics of the relationship

Understand how your potential partners view you, and how they view themselves. You may consider yourself equal to them, but do they consider themselves equal to you?

Spend as long thinking about what you can add to the partnership as you spend thinking about what you could get from it

Don't make assumptions about what is possible, or what your potential partners might find valuable.

University campuses and buildings are often inaccessible and unwelcoming, which can be a significant barrier to engagement and collaboration

Consider meeting locations as well as timings and format – who will be comfortable and who won't?

Seek to understand any cultural considerations in working together

Mutual respect and understanding are essential, and they take time to build.

People are more likely to build trusting relationships faster with people who look like them and with whom they have things in common

Think about who is included in projects and what that says about your organisation. Historic inequalities and harm done by organisations like universities throughout their history, and historical harm done to marginalised communities in pursuit of research goals, continue to shape interactions today.

Trust is hard won and easily lost

It takes time to build trust between individuals and organisations. Relationships need to be cultivated over the long-term, not created and then discarded on a project-by-project basis.

You are all experts

Don't assume the partner organisation is always right about things if it doesn't sit well with your experience. A system of checks and balances in quality control across the project may help to ensure nothing is taken for granted.

Manage your expectations

People have lives outside of work, and things happen – try to build some flexibility into everything you do.

Who is the relationship between?

Is it a partnership between the university and the civic or community partner? Or is it a relationship between one team or department or an individual and a civic or community partner? Who holds that relationship within the organisation? If it is a new partnership linked to a particular strand of research, does that research project include time and resources to build the relationship so the work can be done?

Partners may value further connections within a University or organisation to build relationships and contribute to other initiatives

Make sure to offer this to each other, and connect with the relevant teams where you are able to.

On the flip-side, don't assume that pre-existing working relationships between universities, civic and community partners can be re-purposed to support new projects

Just because a partner was interested in one project, it doesn't mean that another project will also interest them.

Communication

Tone, timing, and transparency

Relationships are valuable

They can form the basis of being able to operate in a particular area. Don't assume that organisations or individuals will hand-over contact details or share who they work with without consideration of how that might affect the relationships they have with those people.

Who knows who, and does it matter?

Relationship management can be complex. Large organisations are likely to be working in partnership on multiple projects at a time. Mapping those connections might be useful, but connections change all the time and the outputs of relationship mapping exercises become outdated quickly.

Communication

Tone, timing, and transparency
(continued)

Own-up when you make a mistake

Partnerships need regular, honest communication to thrive. Assuming one partner has dealt with issues or is the lead on certain project sections can cause problems.

Communication styles vary across organisations, and it is important to consider how your tone and style might affect a developing working relationship

It's not just about deciding if email is preferable to phone conversations or face-to-face meetings, but also about considering levels of formality. Are you willing to share personal contact details? Use messaging services like WhatsApp? Or are you expecting communication to be limited to 9-to-5 working hours and be via official channels only?

Short-term project funding, fixed-term contracts for staff, and students graduating all mean that projects and partnerships can end suddenly

Being clear about project duration and if there is scope for projects to continue longer-term is essential. Honesty and openness is always the best policy.

Don't assume that potential partner organisations know who you are and what you do

It's always worth spending time explaining what you do – and how and why you do it.

It's common for not everything to be smooth sailing in many partnerships and projects, but how can you handle difficult conversations with partners when something isn't going so well?

Being upfront and honest, communicating challenges early instead of waiting for a check-in meeting and applying partnership monitoring milestones into project plans will hopefully help to alleviate this pressure. Prepare for this conversation, listen well and focus on finding solutions together.

If your partnership is project specific and bound by time, make plans early on together on what the end will look like

Might there be opportunities to develop the partnership further in the future? Are there connections you can make to others to continue the relationship in different ways? Even a lunch together to mark the end point and closing of a project will be valuable.

Values and principles

The values and principles individuals have who often enable equitable partnership working in their universities and civic partner organisations – professionally and personally are important to recognise here also, both at organisational and project levels.

These were identified by NCIA action learning set participants who are civic champions, leaders, enablers and connectors in their universities. There will also be synergies with roles in civic organisations, as well as academics in universities also.

Values

- **Respect for others**
- **Empathy**
- **Curiosity**
- **Kindness**
- **Honesty**
- **Integrity**
- **Generosity**
- **Socially just**
- **Humble**

Principles

Collaboration

Working together for meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Support and generosity

Welcoming support and being generous with time and work.

Openness and transparency

Valuing colleagues' efforts and being honest about constraints.

Trust and long-term engagement

Building long-term, tangible links and trust.

Empathy and understanding

Listening, understanding, and creating space for others.

Humility and reflexivity

Acknowledging we don't have all the answers and challenging our own biases.

Equity and inclusivity

Striving for equity, diversity, and inclusion in partnerships.

Positive impact

Committed to making a positive difference and delivering public benefit.

Flexibility and risk-taking

Embracing uncertainty, complexity, and learning from mistakes.



3

**Planning for equitable
partnership working**

Are you about to embark on a project in partnership with a university or a civic partner?

Are you seeking to better understand how your organisation might form equitable partnerships to support local civic ambitions?

If so, the following exercises are designed to help you develop principles of equitable partnership in your own place and context.

In addition to the materials listed in each exercise, you will need:

- **Funding to reimburse people for their time and expertise**, if they are not already being paid for their time by undertaking this work as part of a paid day-job.
- **A space where people can meet** that is accessible and comfortable, whether virtual or in-person.
- For people to attend, engage freely and comfortably, and feel that their contribution is valued, you may also need to provide: **interpretation or translation**; appropriate **catering**; and **costs for childcare, travel expenses** and/or **internet access** if you are meeting online (i.e. mobile top-up cards).

Exercise 1

Who needs to be in the room?

What you need

Paper and pens
to draw and make notes

OR

An online design tool
e.g. Miro Board, Padlet etc.

Who you need

People who have a working knowledge of how each partner organisation is structured

What do you need to do?

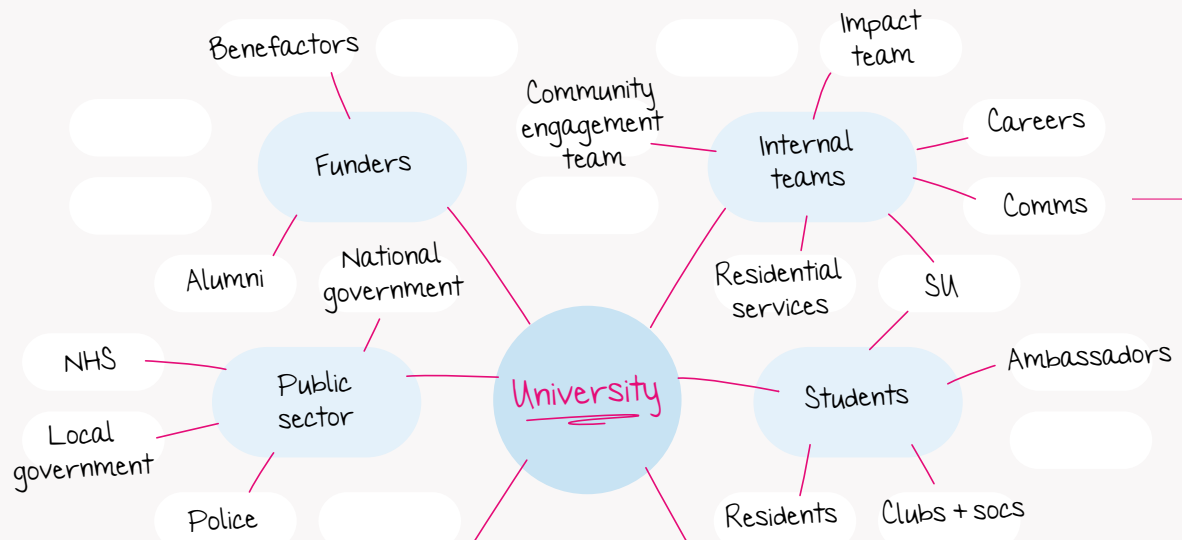
Map the areas, teams and people across your organisation who work in partnership with external organisations.

Who is responsible for managing the processes, systems, and spaces you might need?

Create a stakeholder map which captures everyone who should be involved in developing a set of Principles for Equitable Partnerships.

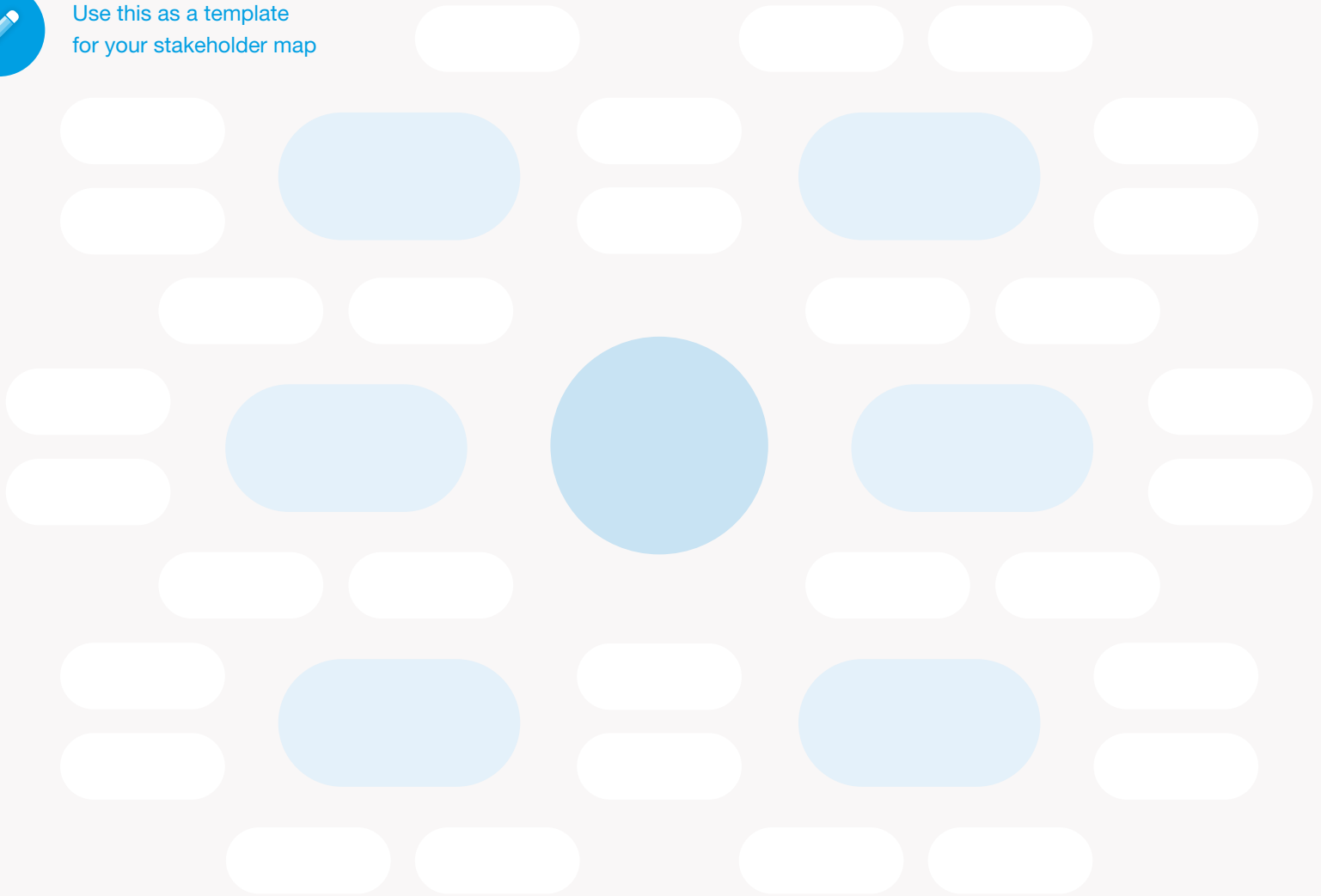


You could share this completed exercise with your partners, including key contacts where appropriate.





Use this as a template
for your stakeholder map





The terms used and the roles and teams available could be different for each university.

Why is this important?

It is important to **identify all of the teams and roles in your organisations** who you need to involve in establishing a project specific and an organisation-wide approach to equitable partnership working. This will support you and your partnership, buy-in to the importance of this, and enable the sharing and embedding of the principles once finalised.

Working through this together with your civic, community and/or university partners is a helpful exercise for you all to **understand the variety of people and roles you are engaging** in establishing this equitable way of working together.

For universities there are many teams and roles who could be involved in supporting partnerships in different ways, as partnership brokers, enablers, connectors and supporters.

Some of the key roles and teams in universities identified through the workshops

- Public Engagement Managers, Coordinators, Officers, teams
 - Civic Engagement Managers, Coordinators, Officers, teams
 - Community Engagement Managers, Coordinators, Officers, teams
 - Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) leads
 - Knowledge Exchange
 - Place-based teams – focus could be regional, local or campus specific
 - Business Development
 - Research engagement and impact
 - Research Management office
 - Strategic Partnerships roles
 - Faculty, School or Department-based support staff
 - Innovation teams
 - Individual researchers and academics
 - Students' Union staff members and elected representatives
 - Careers service
 - Events teams
 - Public affairs functions
 - Communications teams
 - Widening Participation roles
 - Alumni and Development
 - Arts, culture and museum teams
 - Archivists and libraries
 - Estates and facilities
 - Finance and procurement
 - Senior Leadership – Vice-Chancellors, Pro Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors / Principals, Vice-Principals and Deputy Vice-Principals
- ... and many others!

- 2** Each organisation makes a note of how they work and what they have to prioritise as an organisation.

Try to answer these questions:

- 3** As individuals, repeat the above exercise for your own work.

How does this differ from the organisational answer?

What is most of your budget spent on ...	What do you spend the most time doing ...	What do you prioritise ...
... as an organisation?	... as an organisation?	... as an organisation?
... as an individual?	... as an individual?	... as an individual?

4 As a group, discuss whether there is **alignment between your answers to sections 1 and 2**, and if there is **alignment for individuals across your answers to 2 and 3**.

Identify connections and agreements between and across all of the answers.

Connections and agreements:

5 As a group try to answer the following questions:

Is there enough connection to make a partnership a good idea?

Do your values align enough to work together?

Do you want to work together as individuals or as organisations?

For example, maybe the organisational values don't align, but the personal values do – so one project might work but if those people leave their respective organisations the relationship is unlikely to continue.

Why is this important?

This exercise is important to understand the **values underpinning our organisations, our partners, and us as individuals.**

Identifying where these align to **establish parameters and foundations for the partnership** is important, and this also helps with **transparency and opportunity spotting.**

Exercise 3

What are your expectations?

What you need

Paper, pens, and post-it notes

Who you need

People who will be involved in the partnership/collaborative project, representatives from the teams you identified in *Exercise 1: Who do you need in the room?*

What do you need to do?

1 Ask yourself the following questions:

What would you expect from partnership in a best practice situation?

What expectations do civic partners have of universities and researchers?

What expectations do universities and researchers have of civic partners?



To listen

Shared values

- 2 Discuss, and write expectations on post-its
- 3 Stick post-its onto a flipchart under the headings 'Expectations of universities/researchers' and 'Expectations of civic/community partners'

Spend more time together on the shared expectations identified to establish what needs to be put in place to enable and embed them in your partnership.

Expectations of universities/researchers

To provide a safe space for discussions

Respect

Agree the outputs and impacts we want to see together at the very beginning

To provide explanations to unfamiliar terms

To not use jargon and acronyms where possible

They can make things happen which would not otherwise be possible

Shared expectations

That community organisations will be paid, not do things for free/in-kind

Shared ownership of data

Honesty

Transparency

Expectations of civic/community partners

Challenge and critique

Help us recruit interpreter support from our local area

Contribute to a case study to showcase our partnership

- 4 Discuss: are there similarities or differences?
- 5 Capture the shared expectations – keep the paper and the post-it notes or take a photo of the completed exercise

Why is this important?

Understanding the expectations of each other is vital to ensuring what you are setting out to achieve together meets the motivations of all partners. Completing this exercise together will identify expectations which may be different to what was anticipated or likely.

Develop your own principles of equitable partnership



See **page 9** for an example of the Queen Mary principles for public engagement

Once you have completed these exercises, you should have all the information you need to draft your own shared principles for equitable partnership on both organisational and/or project levels.

Get everyone back together to review and refine drafts and remember to revisit them regularly to make sure they are still being used and are still relevant.

We hope that you find these exercises useful, and that by completing them you are able to create a set of guiding principles for your partnership that are appropriate to your place and context.



Schedule time between key milestones to evaluate the effectiveness of your partnership.

Reviewing the effectiveness of partnerships is important to ensure that partnerships are equitable and work for all parties. This allows space to reflect on the principles agreed upon and establish if motivations and expectations are being met.

Capacity, time and the number of partners you may be working with will determine what monitoring and evaluation methods are manageable and feasible.

Discussing and planning this with your partner organisations early allows parties to monitor,

measure and learn from the partnership – in assessing performance but also strengthening commitment and trust.

Methods could include a **series of 1:1s, a partnership survey, a workshop capturing views and ideas, and/or external facilitation.**

For **research partnerships** this could also be included in **ethical review processes.**

Check out the *Good Practice Guide: Assessing Partnership Working* for more ideas.

Reflections



To be able to work in partnership with civic and community organisations, universities need to address some structural issues which can make the reality of collaboration more challenging than is ideal.

Universities work in partnership with an incredible array of civic and community partners. In doing so, they can play a vital role in understanding the challenges of the communities around them, and in making meaningful, positive change in their local places.

However, to be able to work in partnership with civic and community organisations, universities need to address some structural issues which can make the reality of collaboration more challenging than is ideal. We hope that this toolkit sheds some light on the shared challenges universities face in realising their civic ambitions, and in doing so, challenge civic-minded university leaders to make positive changes within their own organisations as well as in, with and for their local places.

We also hope that this toolkit provides a potential starting point for anyone looking to work with a civic, community or university partner. We hope that the exercises, case studies and resources in this toolkit inspire open and productive conversations that lead to a set of principles of equitable partnership which are unique to their local context.

Finally, we hope that the considerations shared in this toolkit feel like an accurate reflection of the concerns, insight, frustrations, and optimism shared with us by all those who attended the workshops at Queen Mary and in London, Sheffield and online as part of the NCIA programme.



4

Case studies

The Food Systems Equality Project

- **Whitley Community Development Association**
- **University of Reading**

The Food Systems Equality project (FoodSEqual) is multi-disciplinary UKRI-funded project, looking from farm to fork at a range of aspects of ‘food’, climate change, supply chain, policy, cost of living, food waste etc. A key aspect of the research is focussed on the impact of all of this on already ‘disadvantaged’ communities. It is essential therefore that we hear the voice of those most impacted.

I worked on FoodSEqual as a Community Development practitioner, on this occasion working both for a local community organisation involved in the project, Whitley Community Development Association, and for the University of Reading as the Community Lead for the wider project. In this case study, I will be referring particularly to the work in Whitley, Reading.

In more disadvantaged areas, work can be challenging at times as people don’t feel that they have any control over issues which affect their everyday lives. The local authority, health services and many other agencies are seen as organisations

which do things for you and to you and certainly not organisations where people that feel that they have some say and can actually affect long term sustainable change. Clearly there was a lot of work to be done to effect change and ensure that residents not only had a voice but the voice that they were able to develop was actually used to inform issues which are directly affecting their daily lives.

With this project there was clearly an opportunity to involve those affected by the issue being researched but, in order to achieve meaningful, impactful results, the question needed to be asked: should we research with the community or about the community? Should we be using a Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR) approach, ensuring that those who have lived experience of the issue are heard, or bring academic ‘experts’ in to undertake the research?

CPAR is an approach grounded in principles of equal partnership, collaboration and community action, and a key issue is ‘trust’. We’ve all been

By Trisha Bennett

Whitley Community Development Association and the University of Reading



Feedback your findings, it demonstrates that residents were listened to, encourages further engagement and builds trust.

For further information please visit research.reading.ac.uk/food-systems-equality

asked for our views on things for various formal or informal research activities but on this occasion, we were asking about topics which can uncover issues such as dignity and stigma. If we are to ensure that we hear the ‘real-life experiences’, then we must ensure that the research methodology is underpinned by trust. In Whitley Community Development Association, we have spent 10 years building the trust of local residents and, we feel, were well placed to hear real experiences.

Three years in we have a vibrant research project where local residents come forward keenly to be involved.

This project, whilst multi-disciplinary, was lead from a scientific discipline. There has been a lot of learning along the way, which on the whole has been well received. The most important learning from my Community Development perspective is that partnership with community organisations and communities themselves should not be taken as an easy option unless you want mediocre result which ultimately will have no sustainable impact. As well

as ‘upskilling communities’ a phrase often used we need to consider upskilling academics who wish to follow a route of community research. We all have much to learn but by learning more about CPAR and building long term, trusted, relationships with our local communities the change we all strive for is possible.

A key message for universities is: feedback your findings, it demonstrates that residents were listened to, encourages further engagement and builds trust.

In conclusion – without trust there is nothing!

Cardiff Parent Power

- **The Brilliant Club**
- **Cardiff University**

Cardiff University work in partnership with award-winning charity **The Brilliant Club** to deliver the Parent Power project.

Cardiff Parent Power (CPP) is a project empowering parents to support their children's future. CPP works with families predominantly from the Grangetown area of Cardiff who are traditionally under-represented in higher education, as well as families with children eligible for Free School Meals. The project supports parents to develop skills in community organising and provides advice and guidance on accessing higher education. Parents are empowered to make change to support their children's future and ensure their children have a fair chance in education and their future careers.

Parents have been supported by The Brilliant Club and Cardiff University staff to secure a series of strategic wins, which have included:

- Parents won a bespoke open day to Jesus College, University of Oxford, attended by 25 families in 2023.
- CPP met with Cardiff University early 2023 to propose changes to the university's prospectus and communication of their contextual admissions policy, with Cardiff agreeing to honour five key asks.
- Following a series of successful campaign meetings with local politicians and Cardiff Council, parents secured a meeting with the First Minister of Wales to discuss work experience opportunities for young people.
- Parents/carers and young people campaigned for and won a bespoke 'Exploring Careers at the BBC' event.
- The Widening Participation team at Cardiff University delivered a Winter celebration event for CPP, which marks and reflects on the campaign wins of the group so far, concluding a listening campaign with parents and young people, informing The Brilliant Club and Cardiff University about what they want to achieve through Parent Power in 2024.

By Nia Oatley

The Brilliant Club



The key to the success of this project is that the model places parents at its centre. The parents themselves decide what activities will benefit their communities.

Partners

The partnership between Cardiff University and The Brilliant Club is a fantastic example of effective collaboration. The key to the success of this project is that the model places parents at its centre. The parents themselves decide what activities will benefit their communities, such as tailored visits to universities for young people, visits from university alumni, or training on tutoring, student finance and university access.

Relationships

The community organising expertise of The Brilliant Club, in tandem with the localised HE information, advice and guidance knowledge of Cardiff, has ensured that strong relationships have been developed with parents and that they now feel equipped to support their young people to university and beyond.

Belonging

Cardiff parents have built a sense of connection and belonging with Cardiff University, making the university feel more accessible. This will have a positive long-term impact on collaboration between the Grangetown community and the Cardiff University community, with a well-developed sense of trust underpinning the co-creation of meaningful change. Parent Power is about empowering parents to secure opportunities for their children and support them to achieve their academic potential.

Opening Doors: A Transformative Partnership

- **The New Black Film Collective**
- **UCL Students' Union**

We have had an almost magical experience regarding our partnership with UCL so far – specifically the Students' Union but also various other departments. The funny thing is that I feel like I have been knocking on UCL's door for years and I have had the odd meeting with staff members in the past but it is like that old adage says 'it's not what you know, it's who you know!'

I came across the UCL Community Research Initiative (CRIS) via a referral from another organisation after asking for help for research on a project. Anne Laybourne from CRIS got in touch and the rest was history! She was the lead and gave various solutions to my projects' objectives with links to relevant departments, societies and even external organisations. She then passed the baton to Molly McCabe who took up an extra gear and before I knew it, we were pulling together briefs for Hackathons, taking on MA level student placements to execute tasks from writing literature reviews, working on marketing campaigns and assisting at events.

Since then, we have used their state of the art cinema in their East London campus to host free community screenings, we have been commissioned to partner on a three year Eugenics reparative healing public art programme, been booked as a speaker demystifying the media industry to their students, and hosted a session at their Open City Documentary Festival two years in a row.

We did not have a clue that universities offered this kind of support to small companies, which is vital for a social enterprise like ours to survive. On top of that, we feel like an important cog in their ecosystem and that our contribution is worthwhile.

My advice to anyone who would like to pursue a partnership with a university is to keep your mind open and don't be intimidated by a connection with an institution. It would be easy to think that you must have your stuff together but that is far from the case. For some universities, they have a social contract that they would like to fulfil through grassroot outreach, for others they want to pilot

By Priscilla Igwe

The New Black Film Collective



From the perspective of CRIS, the partnership with The New Black Film Collective has not only been incredibly rewarding for our students, but it has also allowed us to co-create and shape our ways of partnering so we can have partnerships where both sides thrive.

We have learned from The New Black Film Collective to meet our community partners where they are at and to get creative with our ways of working.

We hope to continue to challenge how we think and how we work to create a continuously open and welcoming space to collaborate with the community.

Students' Union UCL Volunteering Team

ideas and there is always the ongoing need to provide a real-world work environment for their students. Partnering with universities is a quid pro quo relationship. You don't have to feel indebted to the university, instead both sides are forever enriched by the experience.



My advice to anyone who would like to pursue a partnership with a university is to keep your mind open and don't be intimidated by a connection with an institution.

For further information please visit
studentsunionucl.org/volunteering/cris

Creating Relational Engagement through The Ideas Fund

- **University of Hull**
- **Timebank Hull and East Riding**
- **British Science Association Ideas Fund**

By Gill Hughes and Kate Macdonald
University of Hull and Timebank Hull and East Riding

Gill Hughes and Kate Macdonald have worked together for over 10 years, sharing a commitment to community-led participatory engagement that shifts power and fosters equitable trust-based relationships between communities, universities and partners.

The Challenge to working in an equitable partnership between universities and communities

- 1 Funders set the theme for bid applications and often with short deadlines.
- 2 Academics often interpret the funding theme and decide what projects they want to do.
- 3 Academics invite communities to partner – but with little input into shaping the applications because of tight deadlines and often without remuneration – requesting in-kind contributions.
- 4 A key question in collaborative projects is who owns the data and is it shared accessibly?
- 5 Partnerships and engagement often end when the funding ends.

Despite good intentions these issues can lead to co-optation of communities. Often the language of engagement is appropriated suggesting co-production, but the pre-determined themes, timescales, ownership, outputs, targets and withdrawal often counter the intent. This can create tokenism and extraction with no feedback loops to maintain connection. There may be an institutional ethics process in place but the ethical and moral responsibility for engaged equitable and sustainable partnerships can be lost.

Different ways of deciding and doing

Wellcome Trust, funded the British Science Association [BSA] to co-design and deliver a programme that could engage grassroots communities. The **BSA Ideas Fund** [IF] is an innovative community-led knowledge exchange programme in four pilot areas, **Hull**, Oldham, Highlands and Islands and Northwest Northern Ireland, with 4 criteria:

- 1 community-led
- 2 a defined geographical area



The Ideas Fund allows time to support the creation of partnerships, which have the potential to make a difference in addressing community identified needs.

- 3 a broad theme of mental wellbeing
- 4 develop a relationship with a researcher for equitable knowledge exchange

The IF allows time to support the creation of partnerships, which have the potential to make a difference in addressing community identified needs.

The projects

Across the 4 areas **over 70 community-led projects** have achieved some amazing outcomes. Mostly with successful community/researcher partnerships. Where these have not quite worked, we have been able to learn what constrained relationships. We have funding to embed change through an **Infrastructure programme** and projects in each area applied for **Evidence Building Grants** to gather the magical ‘what works’ ingredients for community/researcher relationships, including how thoughts, feeling, reflections, focus, practices and approaches have changed. See also our **Insight report** and **Impact Framework**.

People Support – Development coordinators

The BSA IF team created the innovative role of the development coordinator [DC] and together the national team and DCs are weavers, brokers, enablers, connectors, catalysts, matchmakers, power-shifters and facilitators supporting the project changemakers. Having local DCs provides a people-led, place-based approach to support the whole process from initial expression of interest [EOI] to completion of projects and beyond has been valuable. In Hull DCs mirrored the Ideas Fund projects model with a community (Kate) and university (Gill) partner working together – both well connected with Hull’s communities.

Emergence needs time and trust – incubators

There is a crucial need to slow down to nurture equitable partnerships. Time enables relational engagement and the emergence of co-created ideas through participatory processes:

Change happens at the speed of trust

(Stephen Covey). The IF afforded 3 months and £3k for Round 2 projects, the time taken then



These processes enable everyone to have an equitable voice and opportunities to understand each other's situations, deeper than pure words, facilitated in a safe space to be both curious and vulnerable.

allowed for speeding up the co-creation of ways to address the initial needs identified.

Co-production – simplicity and flexibility

The IF has no hard and fast rules, it is an iterative process, which embraces co-development. It creates a relational dialogical fund, with flexible deadlines, the ability to co-create solutions, which required the need to unlearn static, inflexible traditional approaches to funding applications. Groups could apply for funding to identify needs – a rarity rare because normally it must be quantified 'how many', 'when'. This felt like genuine co-production with rules and projects emerging as opposed to being predetermined funder themes. The invaluable grassroots real-world knowledge informs academia and policymakers.

Humanising Engagement

The facilitation of both the IF Community of Practice and **Hull Poverty Truth Commission** monthly meetings have a foundational practice of taking time to build relationships and trust through

getting to know each other as humans beyond roles or (often) imposed identities and situations. These processes enable everyone to have an equitable voice and opportunities to understand each other's situations, deeper than pure words, facilitated in a safe space to be both curious and vulnerable. This improves the conditions for joint approaches to problem solving, mutual support, iterative learning and emergent practice. Again, this means unlearning conventional practices of how meetings are run in favour of circle practice along with personal check ins and check outs.

Risk + trust = shifting power and changing systems – the 'Flipped University Model'*

The IF required HE institutions to take risks and engender trust in community-led approaches with no traditional output measures. Barriers emerged e.g. a university 12-page jargon-laden contract issued to community project hosts, challenged a more relational approach. However, systems are surmountable. For example, with Research and Knowledge Exchange directorates,



Start with building trust
– simple check-ins make
meetings more human.
This builds equity:
connect as people first,
roles second.

Sarah and Lynne provided invaluable help to navigate systems and procedures. Thus, 12 pages became a 3-page simplified version. The complex university ethics process impeded participatory needs-led projects; we secured internal funding for IF project partners to work with interested academics to visualise a more enabling system. This learning continues to inform bid development practice at the UoH, with professional service staff exploring ways to ‘open up’ project development and ways to build more equitable partnerships into projects (e.g. via governance, finance and work programme structures).

This commitment requires some crucial changes to transform current systems, cultures and practices:

- Increase community-driven funding themes and longer deadlines for co-creation
- Foreground interactive rather than extractive approaches
- Prioritise relational rather than transactional partnerships
- Co-create knowledge exchange rather than one-way knowledge transfer

We are hopeful that our learning will contribute to a more trusted, equitable and relational approach to university/community collaboration.

For further information please visit
theideasfund.org

* (Hughes and Knight 2023)

Barton Hill Micro-campus

- **Wellspring Settlement**
- **University of Bristol**

In 1911, two academics, Hilda Cashmore and Marian Pease from the University of Bristol founded a ‘University Settlement’ in Barton Hill in East Bristol, where staff and students could live and work alongside local residents to provide social services and promote social inclusion.

Early work included the first ante-natal clinic in Bristol, an open-air school for children recovering from tuberculosis, and clubs and classes for people of all ages.

Early Settlement workers pledged: ‘To share all they have to the full... to keep the doors open, to create an atmosphere so alive, and yet so patient of difference, that a meeting ground is made for men and women of various classes and of conflicting views, a place for free discussion and the birth of new ideas’ (Hilda Cashmore, first Settlement warden, 1919).

Fast forward over a hundred years and it is now an independent organisation at the heart of the community, **Wellspring Settlement** – and the partnership with the university is still going strong!

In 2020, we leased three adjoining shipping containers on the Wellspring Settlement site to create the **Barton Hill Micro-campus**, a space to host teaching and short courses, co-produced research, outreach and other university services.

Five years since we got the keys and the micro-campus is a bustling hub of activity, providing a welcoming space to engage, learn and create new connections between the community and the university.

Last year, we welcomed over 160 people into the space each week, and hosted activities in collaboration with 58 local and national partners.

The weekly Little Library provides the ‘front door’ to the micro-campus and is open to all. It was developed with local community representatives, who worked together over several months to establish an offer that would benefit the community. It has developed the reading and literacy skills of people aged 6–60+, particularly those whom English is their second language.

By Ellie Cripps
University of Bristol



Our advice to others embarking on a civic partnership is to take your time. Get to know local communities before you start, listen carefully and build the relationships that will be the foundations of your engagement.

For further information please email community@bristol.ac.uk

The university's School of Education have been supporting local organisation Power Education Ltd to host **after-school study support sessions** in the space for local pupils particularly from the Somali community. The sessions are attended by 90 11–16-year-olds every week and have significantly improved attainment and GCSE grades.

All our activity is underpinned by the partnership with our hosts, Wellspring Settlement, who we meet with regularly to review our provision, establish new activities and reflect on our shared values. Keeping up this conversation means that together we can be responsive to shared priorities and new opportunities. We have also benefitted immensely from having a physical space on their site to allow us to think longer-term.

This long-term approach has also been supported by our funding. The micro-campus pilot was initially funded by the engagement strand of the university's new **Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus**, which will open in September 2026 close to Barton Hill. Since 2023, it has been core-funded by the university and

embedded in the work of the Civic Engagement team. There are also many other sources of internal and external funding for the activities themselves that are hosted in the micro-campus – from funds embedded within research projects to our Access and Participation Plan.

Our advice to others embarking on a civic partnership is to take your time. Get to know local communities before you start, listen carefully and build the relationships that will be the foundations of your engagement – find out what matters to people, the assets of the community, and the organisations who can support you. As you work, reflect often and check in with the communities and partners you're working with. Then give yourself space to adapt your approach in response to what you learn.

Finally, sustaining your work in the long-term is so important. Make sure your activities meet the priorities of all the partners involved. Without this you won't have the resources to keep something going – and that's where you really see the benefits!

Driving Collaborative Research Initiatives

- **Barts Health NHS Trust**
- **Queen Mary University of London**

The partnership between Queen Mary University of London and Barts Health NHS Trust is a shining example of how academic and healthcare institutions can work together as anchors in North East London, to address societal challenges, advance clinical research, and improve the lives of local communities.

The collaboration between Queen Mary and Barts Health NHS Trust has deep historical roots, stretching back to their founding institutions and evolving into a robust partnership that continues to grow today. This shared journey reflects a commitment to serving East London's diverse communities through education, enabling economic growth, healthcare, and research.

We address key priorities that our residents and communities in East London have identified:

- 1 health inequalities, including disparities in life expectancy and health outcomes between different groups;
- 2 access to healthcare, prevention and wellbeing services;

- 3 community engagement that is authentic and representative;
- 4 recognise and improve social determinants of health;
- 5 focus on interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by different demographic groups.

Our Shared Vision

The partnership is underpinned by shared principles of equity and collaboration. To ensure that both parties can contribute effectively and benefit equally, the partnership emphasises full inclusivity and community engagement, transparency through open communication, joint decision making, regular updates, mutual respect, equitable resource distribution, and full accountability to address any issue promptly and fairly.

Together, Queen Mary and Barts Health strive to leverage their combined strengths in education, research, innovation and clinical practice to create meaningful impact.

By Jenny Rivers and

Mays Jawad

Barts Health NHS
Trust and Queen Mary
University of London



... the partnership exemplifies the power of civic responsibility in advancing societal well-being and working jointly to achieve our goals of local economic development and enhanced patient benefit.

These efforts are guided by a commitment to:

- ensuring equitable access to healthcare and education for all communities in East London;
- investing in local talent and resources to drive innovation and sustainable growth;
- addressing systemic health inequalities through collaborative initiatives;
- action that supports the economic growth of our local community.

By fostering innovation, investing in local communities, and addressing systemic health inequalities, the partnership exemplifies the power of civic responsibility in advancing societal well-being and working jointly to achieve our goals of local economic development and enhanced patient benefit. Examples of this dynamic collaboration include:

Joint Research Management Office

The Joint Research Management Office is a unique cornerstone of this partnership, providing seamless management and governance for clinical and

academic research projects for both organisations. Staffed by both Queen Mary and Barts Health it ensures compliance, efficiency, manages joint funding and support for researchers, enabling groundbreaking studies that benefit patients locally and beyond.

Life Sciences

This initiative brings together expertise in precision medicine, genomics, and data science to tackle major health challenges. Through collaborative innovation, it focuses on translating research into personalised treatments for conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes.

Biomedical Research Centre

As a hub for translational research, the Biomedical Research Centre, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care research (NIHR), accelerates the journey from scientific discovery to patient care. The Biomedical Research Centre harnesses Queen Mary's academic excellence and Barts Health's clinical strengths to develop cutting-edge therapies and diagnostics.



By co-locating all our early phase and commercial clinical trials experts including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and governance experts within one area, we will create an efficient research team to deliver clinical trial activity quickly and safely.

Joint funding applications

Joint funding applications drive projects addressing local health inequalities which improve access to healthcare services, community outreach programmes, and targeted interventions for underserved populations.

These flagship initiatives, include:

Clinical Research Facility

A state of the art, National Institute of Health and Care (NIHR) Clinical Research Facility (CRF) is being built on the 15th floor of the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel to provide world-class facilities and services for the delivery of early phase clinical trials, providing a welcoming, safe and compliant environment for study participants and staff. By co-locating all our early phase and commercial clinical trials experts including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and governance experts within one area, we will create an efficient research team to deliver clinical trial activity quickly and safely.

Academic Centre for Healthy Ageing

This new centre, based at Whipps Cross Hospital in Waltham Forest, focuses on understanding the biological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to healthy ageing. Collaborative research aims to develop strategies that enhance the quality of life for an ageing population, ensuring longevity with dignity.



Partnership fosters innovation and economic growth, drives social mobility, and creates a sustainable impact by addressing the region's unique challenges.

Value Added by the Partnership

This partnership delivers significant value not only to Queen Mary and Barts Health but also to the residents and communities of East London. It fosters innovation and economic growth, drives social mobility, and creates a sustainable impact by addressing the region's unique challenges. Together, these institutions:

- enhance health outcomes and reduce disparities in healthcare access;
- generate cutting edge knowledge and innovation that leads to patient benefit to our communities and around the world;
- provide pathways for education, training, and employment for local residents;
- build community trust through outreach and engagement initiatives.

Through this longstanding and evolving partnership, Queen Mary and Barts Health NHS Trust continue to demonstrate the power of collaboration in driving positive change for communities, advancing research, and fostering equitable growth across East London and beyond.

Roots and Futures Project

- **University of Sheffield**
- **Partnership network of 30 organisations**

**By Lizzy Craig-Atkins,
Courtenay-Elle Crichton-Turley
and Rhonda Allen**
University of Sheffield

Roots and Futures is a place-based cultural heritage project focused on elevating the needs and voices of communities underserved by heritage policy in the city of Sheffield. Our inter-disciplinary expertise spans academic fields in the arts and humanities, the charitable sector and local government, and our team is based at the University of Sheffield.

Over the last five years we have been working in co-productive partnerships between the University of Sheffield, community groups, heritage organisations and both grassroots and local government policymakers to build an extensive network of more than 30 partners based on mutual interest, trust and commitment to delivering impact at a local level. We undertake creative consultations with people of all ages which surface the needs of communities who remain invisible within heritage policy. Our findings have fed into the Sheffield City Goals and Culture Strategy, provided proof of feasibility which led to the adoption of Sheffield's grassroots-led heritage strategy by the City Council and we have recently

sponsored a new Heritage and Culture award at Sheffield Youth Awards. We also offer something unique in return for our partners' investment, creating mini-projects such as oral histories, heritage events or exhibitions that directly meet their needs. Participants have reported increased sense of belonging and wellbeing, with one community group reflecting "... we felt proud".

The success of our partnership network has been founded on building strong, equitable relationships over an extended period, which we were able to achieve with dedicated knowledge exchange funding from our university. This created space to fully co-design key aspects of our project. This investment of time, and where possible resources, is something organisations looking to work with universities on equitable terms should seek out.

Building and maintaining supportive collaborations can be challenging for academics due to several factors. Funding for partnership work typically offers less financial support and shorter project durations compared to research-focused funding.



To work more equitably with non-academic partners, academics should carefully select funders and grants that align with the collective needs of their networks.

Additionally, some funders do not allow payments for participant involvement. While academic research funders are gradually becoming more flexible, it's often still expected that partnerships be established prior to securing larger grants.

To work more equitably with non-academic partners, academics should carefully select funders and grants that align with the collective needs of their networks. However, payment processes within universities can be slow and cumbersome. Despite this frustration, academic partners can often navigate their institutions' systems to expedite payments, ensuring that partners receive timely compensation for their contributions.

Managing a diverse partnership network from a university comes with lots of opportunities – funding, facilities, resources and support – but it can also be laborious, bureaucratic and overly-complicated. If poorly managed this can lead to inequitable systems of power between a university and its external partners. However, a committed academic team can help navigate this system for a network like Roots and Futures, unlocking the benefits of a university partner for everyone within the network.



5

Resources

National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) partnership tools

National Civic Impact Accelerator

civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/about-us/ncia



National Civic
Impact Accelerator

Civic University Network

civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk



Civic University
Network

The Partnership Cycle

Outlines a phased model for partnerships – from scoping and initiation, through governance and delivery, to reflection, sustaining or ending relationships, and staying connected – to help make collaborations more intentional and resilient.

publicengagement.ac.uk/resources/guide/partnership-cycle



Partnership tools developed from two projects: the Museum-University Partnership Initiative (MUPI) and the School-University Partnership Initiative (SUPI)

A curated collection of practical tools, frameworks, and resources to help universities and partners design, manage, evaluate, and sustain meaningful partnerships.

publicengagement.ac.uk/resources/collections/nccpe-partnership-tools



Principles of Practice for Community-University Partnership Working developed by UK Community Partner Network (UKCPN) and NCCPE

Outlines a set of shared values – such as clarity of purpose, mutual respect, transparency, communication, constructive discussion, and ongoing reflection – to guide equitable, effective collaboration between universities and community partners.

publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/principles_of_practice_for_cups.pdf



Partnership frameworks, guides and tools

Working with a Partner Toolkit

The Being Human Festival of the Humanities

Offers practical guidance on starting, managing, and sustaining partnerships effectively, with tools, checklists, and frameworks to help partners collaborate smoothly.

beinghumanfestival.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Working-with-a-partner-training-resource-2020.pdf



A Reflective Learning Framework for Partnering

The King's Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund

Offers a set of reflective questions for partnerships – both new and established – to explore their purpose, roles, membership, ways of working, and learning practices.

assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/f72e81c20e/hct_reflective_learning_framework_partnering_2022.pdf



Social Transformation Ecosystem Partnership Programme (STEPP) Framework

Investors in Community

A holistic model to align stakeholders around social value, reduce fragmentation, and empower communities to co-create sustainable solutions through shared governance, data-driven actions, and ecosystem cohesion.

investorsincommunity.org/stepp-framework



Equitable Partnerships Guide

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

Guidance on embedding equity from the start of research collaborations – covering decision-making, funding, governance, capacity strengthening, and reflective practices to address power differentials and ensure fair benefits for all partners.

nih.ac.uk/equitable-partnerships-guide



Impact Framework

The Ideas Fund

A co-designed reflective tool aimed at surfacing and understanding how the Fund's community-led partnerships shift power, enable change, and generate long-term impact.

theideasfund.org/news/introductin-g-the-ideas-fund-impact-framework



Working with Community Partners toolkit

Student Hubs

Outlines best practices, principles, and actionable strategies for universities to build meaningful, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with students and community organisations.

[civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/
portfolio-items/working-with-
community-partners](http://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/portfolio-items/working-with-community-partners)



A Guide to Collaboration: the what, why and how of collaborating

Collaborate CIC

Explains what collaboration is, why it's important, and how to make it work by highlighting six foundational elements – such as shared purpose, trust, infrastructure, and learning – and offering reflection questions to help groups assess the strength of their collaborations.

[collaboratecic.com/insights-
and-resources/a-guide-to-
collaboration-the-what-why-
and-how-of-collaborating](http://collaboratecic.com/insights-and-resources/a-guide-to-collaboration-the-what-why-and-how-of-collaborating)



Partnership Assessment Tool *Nuffield Health Institute*

Provides a structured 'health check' for collaborations, guiding partners to reflect on their relationships, identify strengths and challenges, and plan practical improvements together.

[conservationgateway.org/
ConservationPlanning/partnering/
cpc/Documents/Assessing
StrategicPartnership.pdf](http://conservationgateway.org/ConservationPlanning/partnering/cpc/Documents/AssessingStrategicPartnership.pdf)



Good Practice Guide: Assessing partnership working

Provides a framework for partnerships – especially in social sector initiatives – to regularly audit and reflect on elements like purpose, governance, resource use, stakeholder engagement, and exit strategies in order to strengthen effectiveness and accountability.

[tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/
insights/documents/Good-
Practice-Guide-Assessing-
partnership-working-2014.pdf](http://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Good-Practice-Guide-Assessing-partnership-working-2014.pdf)



Partnership principles and strategies

Principles of Equitable Partnership for Public Engagement, Queen Mary University of London

Outline co-designed foundations for collaboration, emphasising mutual understanding of context, transparency, power awareness, shared resources, fair recompense, and clear communication to support equitable and sustainable partnerships.

qmul.ac.uk/publicengagement/support/guides/principles-of-equitable-partnership-in-public-engagement



Research 101 Manifesto for equitable research in Vancouver's downtown Eastside

A living document outlining principles and commitments for conducting research ethically, responsibly, and collaboratively in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) community, emphasising respect, accountability, transparency, and community leadership.

docs.google.com/document/d/1M2D6_XAVNI78UjxKJpsmBn2N1OR1b9t7uJ6A7y9P3no/edit



Terms of Engagement produced by the Community-Based Action Research (CBAR) network in Parc-Extension, Montreal

Outlines a commitment by researchers to treat residents as expert collaborators, be invited into the community, maintain transparency, compensate participants fairly, share findings back, and build capacity through mutual learning.

cbarparcex.ca/terms-of-engagement



Civil Society Covenant

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

A newly established, principles-based agreement aimed at resetting the relationship between UK government and civil society by promoting respect, genuine partnership, inclusion, transparency, and mutual accountability in how policies are designed, funded, and implemented.

gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-covenant/civil-society-covenant



Supporting guidance

Tools Towards Emotional Safety developed

Community Wellbeing Collective

Provides a set of strategies, practices, and guidelines intended to foster emotional wellbeing and safe relational spaces – especially in group, community, or collaborative settings.

docs.google.com/document/d/12b8MIkELZwAQHFqPavC4iWczJxUYyo_OHQFKbLjLeak/edit



Tips for community groups who would like to work with universities

UK Community Partner Network

Offers tips to community groups on how to navigate universities, identify relevant contacts, and pitch partnership ideas effectively.

publicengagement.ac.uk/resources/guide/ukcpn-resource-getting-started



Indicators of a healthy public engagement system

British Science Association, The Ideas Fund and Collaborate CIC

Defines characteristics of a thriving local ecosystem where communities and researchers share power, benefit from supportive infrastructure and funding, and are embedded in a connected, responsive system that values engagement as part of place-based action.

collaboratecic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Indicators-of-a-healthy-public-engagement-system.pdf



Community Research Partnership Learning Programme Scoping: Final Report

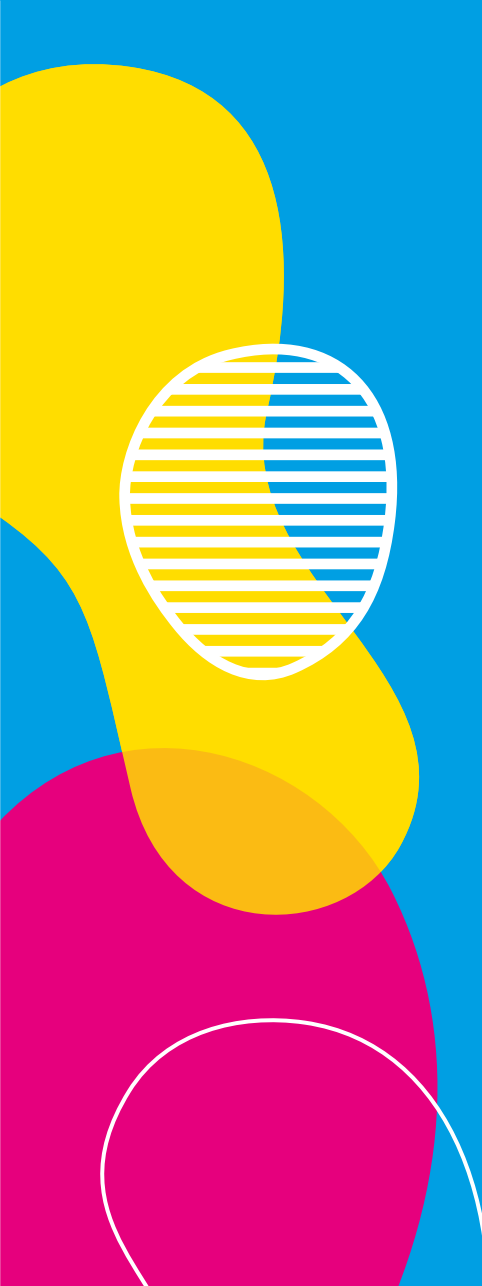
NCCPE and the Young Foundation, funded by UKRI

Presents findings and recommendations on how to build capacity, embed equitable practices, and support actors (universities, communities, funders) in doing more collaborative and impactful research.

publicengagement.ac.uk/resources/reports-and-reviews/crplp-final-report



Acronyms



CIC	Community Interest Company
City-REDI	City-Region Economic Development Institute, University of Birmingham
CPAR	Community Participatory Action Research
CPE	Centre for Public Engagement, Queen Mary University of London
CPP	Cardiff Parent Power
CUA	Civic University Agreement
FoodSEqual	Food Systems Equality Project
NCCPE	National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
NCIA	National Civic Impact Accelerator
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
TNBFC	The New Black Film Collective
UCL	University College London
UKCPN	UK Community Partner Network
UPP Foundation	University Partnerships Programme Foundation
WCDA	Whitley Community Development Association



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