Community Nonprofit Organizations and Service-Learning: Resource Constraints to Building Partnerships with Universities

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Articles on service-learning champion its potential to create a win-win-win situation for the university, students, and community; however, substantial scholarly attention to pedagogical benefits for students and universities contrasts with limited research assessing community partner perspectives. This study presents findings on nonprofit organizations participating in service-learning projects as part of a graduate nonprofit management course during 2000-2003. Data indicate resource constraints of community nonprofits lead them to place a high premium on opportunity costs of staff time devoted to service-learning. Because transactional relationships are perceived as having potentially low economic risk (opportunity cost of staff time) and yielding high benefits, they are nonprofits' preferred type of relationship with universities. For universities to engage in more complex relationships, nonprofits' resource constraints must be overcome.

Jacoby defines service-learning as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (1996, p. 5). The emphasis on reciprocity in service-learning distinguishes it from the community as laboratory approach, colloquially known as "hit it and quit it" (Cushman, 2002), that has been all too common in university-community relations. Rather than the end point of the interaction being a faculty member's publication or a student's thesis, all three participants (students, university and community partner) are expected to benefit from the service-learning activity. Scholarly articles on service-learning champion the approach for its potential to create a win-win-win situation for the university, students, and community (Vernon & Ward, 1999). However, substantial scholarly attention to pedagogical benefits to students and universities stands in stark contrast to the limited research assessing the community partners' perspective. In a review of empirical studies from 1993-1999, Eyler et al. (1999) found that only eight studies were published that addressed community outcomes in service-learning. In the subsequent years a few more articles have appeared (Cone & Payne, 2002; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Ferrari & Worral, 2000; Leiderman, Furco, Zap, & Goss, 2003; Schmidt & Robby, 2002; Sullivan, Chao, Allen, Koné, Pierre-Louis, & Krieger, 2003; Vernon & Ward) that have helped to assess the outcomes and understand the barriers to building partnerships with community organizations.

Enos and Morton (2003) propose a framework for building relationships with communities that increases in depth and complexity over time. Starting with transactional relationships that are utilitarian in nature, the relationships move through stages ultimately resulting in a transformative relationship in which the community and university jointly create work and knowledge. For relationships to progress, the community and university must be willing to invest time and resources into ever more complex relationships. The question then shifts to how those investments can be encouraged.

At first glance, participating in service-learning makes a great deal of practical sense for community organizations, particularly if they are nonprofit organizations that often must do more with less. Participating in service-learning provides "free" labor to help nonprofits fulfill their missions. This help can come in many different forms such as direct service delivery (e.g., after school tutoring program) or providing research/technical assistance that a community nonprofit organization (CNO) has neither time nor expertise to accomplish with its own staff (e.g., evaluating a program, conducting a needs assessment). But as all managers know, nothing is ever really free. Participating in service-learning requires, at a minimum, allocating staff resources. As Leiderman et al. (2003) report, the question any manager has to ask when making a decision about allocating scarce resources to a service-learning project or investing in a partnership is whether it is going to yield more benefits than if the resources were allocated elsewhere. The challenge for advancing university/community relationships, especially with CNOs, is to effectively address the resource constraints that

lead to high opportunity cost participation.

This paper examines the experience of CNOs in transactional relationships with a university and their willingness to progress into relationships characterized by greater depth and complexity. Through qualitative analysis of the experiences of CNOs participating in service-learning projects, the research addresses two main questions: (a) did the CNOs benefit from the experience? and (b) would the CNOs participate in service-learning experiences again and, if so, how? The study is based on interviews with CNO participants to assess their experiences with service-learning as part of a graduate nonprofit management course from 2000-2003. In the sections that follow, we first present the Enos and Morton framework more fully to distinguish between levels of community and university relationships. This is followed by a presentation of the research design and analysis of findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of the benefits of transactional relationships and strategies for decreasing barriers to developing more complex relationships with institutions of higher education.

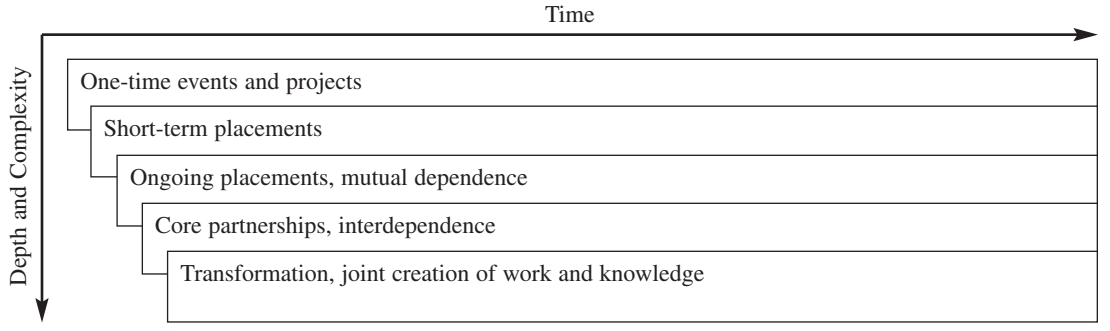
Transactional and Transformational Campus-Community Relationships

Enos and Morton (2003) advance a framework for the development of campus-community partnerships in which the depth and complexity of the relationship increases over time (see Figure 1). In this framework, one-time events and projects are at the lowest level of interaction, followed by short-term student placements, ongoing placements, core partnerships, and joint creation of work and knowledge; and the relationship advances from independence to mutual dependence (at the ongoing placement stage) to interdependence to transformation. When a partnership has reached a transformative stage, the university and community partners recognize and "invite the possibility that their joint work is likely to transform them both" (Enos & Morton, p. 30). In their framework, the authors contrast transformation with transactional relationships. Whereas the latter is exchange-based and utilitarian the former reaches for something beyond utilitarian — fulfillment. The goal of this relationship is to transform the relationships between campus and community into one of joint creation of work and knowledge.

From the university perspective the impediments to relationships with communities are well discussed and include the tenure and promotion system, prestige of "pure" research as opposed to applied work with a community, limitations of the semester calendar, among other issues. But the impediments from the community perspective are less known. Enos and Morton (2003) discuss the importance of building trusting relationships to encourage risk taking, but this issue of risk may have significantly different meaning for communities versus the university. For an individual professor, if the relationship with a community fails, s/he still has a job and will continue to teach and do research. For a community, particularly a CNO with very limited resources, the decision to invest in the relationship may have high opportunity costs and thereby high *economic* risk. For example, in a neighborhood association that has only one paid staff member, allocating staff time to the partnership means that other work will not get done. If the investment of staff time turns out to be a failure, that organization may suffer significant negative effects on its ability to fulfill its mission. If the real or perceived economic risks of working with a university are high, then this may affect CNOs' willingness to move beyond transactional relationships.

The section below presents the research design for assessing CNOs' preferences for interaction with universities. Qualitative data collection allowed participants to express the factors that led to them to

Figure 1
A Framework for Development of Campus-Community Partnerships



Source: Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby & Associates (Eds.), *Building partnerships for service-learning*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Figure 2
Service-Learning Projects' Descriptive Data

Type of CNO	Specialty	Paid Staff[1]	Year	Project Description	Interviewed
Human Services	Autistic Youth	Small	2003	Program Expansion	Yes
Human Services	Youth Recreation	Small	2003	Program Evaluation	Yes
Intermediate Funder	Fundraising	Medium	2003	Mission Development	Yes
Human Services	Adult education	Small	2003	Needs Assessment	Yes
Arts	Ballet School	Micro	2001	Board Governance	Yes
Human Services	HIV/AIDS support	Micro	2001	Board Governance	Yes
Human Services	Jewish college students	Small	2001	Information Technology & Fundraising Management	Yes
Human Services	Legal Aid	Small	2001	Board Governance	No
Human Services	Adult education	Medium	2001	Management Structure	Yes
Human Services	Multiple	Large	2001	Staff Turnover Assessment	Yes
Arts	Opera performances	Micro	2000	Organization Structure	Yes
Human Services	Elderly	Large	2000	Strategic Planning Models	No
Human Services	Childcare	Small	2000	Board Governance & Organizational Structure	No
Community Development Corporation	Multiple	Large	2000	Employee Recognition	Yes

[1] Paid staff key: micro = 1-2, small = 3-10, medium = 11-25, large = more than 25.

engage with the university and their constraints for future engagement.

Research Design

The empirical data for this study are based on the experiences of CNOs participating in service-learning projects as part of a graduate nonprofit management course taught in 2000, 2001, and 2003. Because the projects were undertaken at three different time periods, it provides the opportunity to assess the CNO's experience beyond the immediate post-semester timeframe. For the projects completed in May 2000, three years had passed since project completion. For the projects completed in May 2001, two years had passed since the project completion. For the projects completed in May 2003, liaisons were interviewed in October to allow five months between completion of the post-semester evaluation and the interview. This research design allows for assessment of not only whether the students' projects were reviewed but also to what extent they have continued to be utilized by the CNO.

The Nonprofit Management course is designed to provide a close connection between theory and practice by combining substantive material, reflective journals, and service-learning projects. As presented in Figure 2, while the projects are all related to management, there is a wide array of projects students undertake. Some are focused on human resources (board governance, staff turnover, employee recognition, management structure, organization structure) whereas others are focused on program issues (program expansion, program evaluation, mission development, needs assessment, information technology and fundraising management, strategic planning). The service-learning projects are completely integrated into the class and used as dynamic case studies to explore the course topics.

The projects were solicited through a Request for Proposal process (for a full discussion of the RFP process and project design see Bushouse & Morrison, 2001). CNOs submitted proposals for projects, the instructor reviewed the proposals for applicability and scope, and presented a short-list of projects to the students. Students ranked their preferences for projects and the instructor used these preferences to assign teams of 2-4 students to each project. With this approach, CNOs determine the project they want to accomplish and students are able to select the project that best meets their interests.

Students were the primary contact with the CNO during the semester. After being assigned to teams, the student teams contacted the CNO and arranged a meeting, with the instructor attending as her schedule permitted. After negotiating the project scope, students and the CNO's liaison drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) describing the project and expected activities. This served as a contract between the students and the CNO that each could draw on, if necessary, to assure that the project was meeting expectations. During the semester the students were entirely responsible for working with the liaison. The instructor monitored the projects through student journals and reviewing project drafts as well as a midterm and end-of-the-semester evaluation completed by the CNO liaison. If needed, the instructor would meet with the liaison and students as a group during the semester, but this was rare.

While the sample size is small ($N = 14$), the participating CNOs represent an array of types, sizes, and specialties (see Figure 2). Two of the CNOs are

arts organizations, one is a community development corporation with programs ranging from housing construction to after school programs and one is an intermediate funder, meaning that it raises funds to distribute to other CNOs. The largest proportion of CNOs provide human services (n = 10). Human service CNOs in the study provide a wide array of services including programming for autistic youth, youth recreation, adult education, HIV/AIDS support services, programming for Jewish college students, legal aid for victims of housing discrimination, elder care, and child care.

The sample also includes an array of sizes of paid staff (see Figure 2). The variation on this variable is important for understanding if the constraints to university/community relationships vary depending on size of staff. For the purposes of this study, micro CNOs (n = 3) are defined as having 1-2 paid staff, small CNOs (n = 6) have between 3 and 10 paid staff, medium CNOs (n = 3) have between 11 and 25 paid staff, and large CNOs (n = 2) have greater than 25 paid staff.

The project-based service-learning activities assessed in this study received positive evaluations from participating CNOs immediately following the project completion. Given these positive evaluations, the CNO liaisons were asked to what extent the projects have continued to be utilized and their preferred interaction in the future. The hypothesis in this research is that if the service-learning experiences were beneficial and continued to provide benefits, then CNOs should be amenable to future participation. However, if the organizations that had experienced positive benefits from service-learning were not amenable to future participation or did not want to increase the complexity and depth of the relationship over time, then we need to carefully consider the reasons for the CNOs preferences and assess whether there are impediments that can be overcome.

Participating CNOs were contacted for interviews to assess the extent to which service-learning projects were beneficial to the CNOs and gauge their interest in future service-learning courses. Interviews with the project liaison from the participating CNOs were completed between June and October 2003. Of the 14 CNOs that have participated in the service-learning projects, 11 were interviewed (10 phone interviews and 1 email). Of the three organizations not participating in the study, one had gone through a complete change in leadership and was not aware that a project was completed. A second organization had experienced large budget reductions and just hired a new executive director. The new executive director was aware of the project and planned to discuss it with the board but was not in a position to participate in the interview because of her short tenure. In the third organization, the liaison was no longer employed by the organization and declined our request for an interview. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format including questions about the liaison's experiences such as: review and utilization of the students' projects, willingness to participate in future service-learning activities, type of interaction preferred in the future, and involvement with other institutions of higher education. Following is a discussion of each of these question areas.

Findings

The findings described below relate to the utility of the projects from the CNO's perspective, their willingness to participate in future service-learning activities, and their willingness to build future partnerships with colleges and universities. There are several limitations to the data: for example, the participating CNOs self-selected to participate in project-based activities and therefore may be predisposed to this kind of transactional service-learning activity. All of these organizations have participated in one service-learning project for the course; however, some are involved in other service-learning activities. While the self selection bias is a concern, the range of CNOs participating allows for some variation in the sample on other important variables such as size of paid staff and type of service provided. A second limitation is that the number of participating organizations is quite small (n = 11) compared to the population of CNOs in the area. While the organizations vary in size, type and specialty, they may not be representative of all CNOs. Despite these limitations, the consistency of results across three years of projects in nonprofits of varying sizes, types, and specialties suggest several important findings.

Utilization of Student Reports

Questions about utilization of the reports focused on 1) whether the students' report was reviewed at the appropriate level to have exposure to decision makers and 2) how the organization made use of the students' projects (see Figure 3). The interviews indicated that all of the projects were reviewed by the appropriate level of the organization. For *umbrella* CNOs, student reports were reviewed by the executive director and/or staff. For *independent* CNOs, student reports were presented to the governing board. The distinction between umbrella and independent is based on the governance structure of the CNO. Umbrella organizations have multiple, administratively-separate organizations under the umbrella of one governing board (and typically under one 501(c)3 Internal Revenue Service designation). For example, Between Family and Friends (BFF) provides HIV/AIDS services but is part of the River Valley Counseling Services umbrella. River

Figure 3
Utilization of Student Reports

Community Nonprofit Organization	Governance[1]	Reviewed by Board or Staff	Recommendations Implemented	Reason	Areas for Improvement with the Student Projects
Micro Arts	Independent	Board	All	3 implemented as is; 1 adapted, then implemented	None
Micro Human Services	Umbrella	Board	All		None
Micro Arts	Independent	Board Committee	All		None: Students asked questions that stimulated thinking
Small Human Services	Independent	Board	Half	1 implemented as is; 1 rejected by upper level management for reasons outside of the student report	Organizational: CRPA needed to prepare students better for data collection
Small Human Services	Independent	Staff	Half	Organizational constraints precluded implementing programmatic changes	University: Would like students to continue beyond semester
Small Human Services	Independent	Board	None	Used the report to inform decision-making on both recommended issues	Student: Report was below expectations
Medium Human Services	Independent	Staff	All		None: "model project"
Medium Community Development Corporation	Independent	Board	All	Two adopted as written; one slightly altered to reflect a programmatic change	None
Large Human Service	Umbrella	Senior Management and Human Resources Council Currently reviewing again	Most	Students were idealistic which meant that some recommendations were impractical; however, this was seen as a positive because it got them to think "outside the box."	None
Medium Intermediate Funder	Umbrella	Executive Director and staff	All All		Organizational: Liaison change at beginning of project led to inexperienced contact working with students.
Small Human Services	Independent	State Dept. of Ed. and strategic planning collaborators			None: "Perfect match"

[1]Governance key: Independent = nonprofit organizations with direct board governance. Umbrella = nonprofit organizations with indirect board governance because the program/branch/chapter is part of a larger organization.

Valley provides a wide array of human services through multiple, administratively-separate organizations. In this structure, budget allocations are set by River Valley but BFF has considerable administrative authority for day-to-day decision-making. In umbrella organizations, the governing board is typically focused on setting overall policy, monitoring the fiscal health of the organization, and strategic planning. For the three umbrella organizations participating in the course, all three student projects were reviewed by staff and/or executive leadership, which is the appropriate level of review for the projects. In the BFF example, the student project involved helping the director to develop an effective advisory board. Because the advisory board was only for BFF and had no budgetary authority (all budgetary authority resides with the governing board of River Valley), the appropriate level of presentation was to the BFF director and the advisory board, rather than the board for River Valley.

For the independent CNOs, seven were reviewed by the governing boards and one was reviewed by the Executive Director. Independent CNOs have one administrative unit with fiscal oversight by a governing board. Rather than governing multiple, separate administrative units, independent nonprofit boards focus more narrowly. For example, Amherst Ballet focuses only on the provision of ballet lessons and student performances. While all nonprofit governing boards are responsible for fiscal oversight, some governing boards of independent CNOs are involved in the day-to-day running of the organization and others focus more on fundraising, policy, and planning. Depending on the role of the board, student reports were presented to the staff and executive director and/or the board. For the Amherst Ballet project, the students researched alternative models of board governance to help the organization transition through the retirement of its founder. Given the scope of the project, the appropriate review level was by the board. For the Dunbar Community Center, the students developed a process for program evaluation and presented it to the Executive Director. Once the program evaluation is completed, then it would be appropriate for the Executive Director to present the evaluation to the board. The key issue is that the projects were reviewed by the appropriate decision-making level for each organization. This is important because although there was one designated liaison for each project, the review of the project was not limited to that one person. In this way, students' projects gained exposure to the appropriate level of decision makers in the organization.

As presented in Figure 3, when asked about the implementation of recommendations in the students' reports, seven organizations had implemented all of the students' recommendations; three had implemented half or most of the recommendations. For the one not implementing the recommendations, the report was used to inform decision-making. These findings indicate that the students were able to complete projects useful for the CNO.

When asked about areas of improvement for the student projects, seven CNO liaisons replied that there were no areas for improvement. One liaison indicated that it was a "model project" and another that it was a "perfect match." One CNO liaison indicated that the constraints of the semester timeframe were problematic. For this organization the students had designed a program evaluation and the organization wanted the students to undertake the evaluation, which was beyond the scope of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Two other organizations indicated that difficult parts of the partnership were due to a need for improvement within their own organizations. One had not prepared sufficiently for the students and the other experienced a change in liaison shortly before the project started. Only one of the respondents indicated that the students' performance needed to improve.

From the interviewees' perspective, the RFP process allowed them to anticipate the opportunity cost of participation. Since the CNO defined the project it wanted accomplished, it had the power to decide the scope of the project and could make the evaluation regarding the allocation of staff time. Interviewees reported that the RFP process allowed them to focus staff time resources on something that they wanted completed but that would not have received attention due to other pressing day-to-day demands or lack of expertise. The RFP prompted them to clearly specify a project, allocate resources for finite period, and to determine the level of interaction with the students (i.e., thereby placing boundaries on staff time). By providing CNOs with a clear voice in the service-learning project and giving them the power to define the interaction, the service-learning experience successfully avoided the "community as laboratory" approach.

Student evaluations of the course indicate several aspects of the service-learning experience that were important for the quality of their experience. First, because the students were able to choose projects that matched their interests, it created motivation and interest in the projects. Some students chose the project to build their knowledge and skills in that area (e.g., program evaluation). Others wanted to work with a particular type of CNO (e.g., an arts organization). Student evaluations consistently indicated that having a choice of projects was important in developing their commitment to the projects.

Second, students indicated that the MOU process allowed them to clearly specify the project and start off with everyone "on the same page." This clarity in expectations prevented time-consuming negotiations

between students and CNOs to define projects, and renegotiate projects throughout the semester, and decreased the potential for mismatched expectations when the project was finished. In addition to the MOU, students and liaisons jointly determined the frequency and substance of contact. Some student teams worked very closely with their liaisons providing weekly updates and/or frequent meetings, while others were able to work more independently after the MOU was completed. The key point is that the students and liaison worked together to come up with a process that worked well for them. If difficulties arose, the instructor was available to intervene. But as mentioned above, it was rare that any intervention was needed.

Future Interaction with the University

The success of the service-learning projects might lead one to conclude that we were on the way to moving from transactional relationships to more complex and deep relationships, perhaps even moving toward ongoing placements and a relationship of mutual dependence (Enos & Morton, 2003); however, interview results revealed strong preferences for transactional relationships. All of the community partners indicated that they would prefer to interact with the university in the future; however, as Figure 4 indicates, seven interviewees indicated that they only want project-specific relationships. The reasons for preferring transactional interaction were mainly due to internal constraints within the organization. The lack of staff resources to manage students or allocate to maintaining partnerships was the primary reason provided for limiting CNO's willingness to enter into more complex relationships with the university. As one interviewee said, "I like projects because I can concentrate on it for a set period of time. If I have to have a regular intern then it's just too much of a burden on my time." This constraint to building relationships was consistent across the different types of nonprofits, size of staff, and specialties. Even for a CNO with long-term relationships with university faculty, the Executive Director was very clear about his criteria: his organization has to benefit or it will not commit the resources. The CNOs place a premium on the opportunity cost of staff resources. As the sole paid employee of an arts organization said, "when I work with the students something else is going to fall through the cracks." She has to make sure the time invested with the students will pay off for the organization; otherwise she can't allocate her time.

Enos and Morton (2003) address the issue of risk in discussing their frameworks, but their interpretation is of the *political* risk of getting involved with social justice issues such as "investigating local patterns of land use, home ownership, absentee landlords, and economic discrimination" (2003, p. 33). The risk calculation for the CNOs participating in this study is *economic* risk, and this is a very different calculation. Quite clearly these CNOs place a premium on their staff time. Any reallocation of staff to relationships with universities necessarily entails shifting staff away from other important tasks. Given the high

Figure 4
Preferred Future Interaction with University

Nonprofit Organization	Future	Comment
Micro Arts	Project	Wants RFP process so as to get to define the project
Micro Human Services	Open	Extreme budget constraints have made this organization desperate for assistance; however, the administrative support for coordination is extremely limited.
Micro Arts	Project	Does not want interns or partnership because it would take up too much staff time
Small Human Services	Project	Would like similar type of project or undergraduate volunteers
Small Human Services	Partnership	To staff a fundraising event
Small Human Services	Open	Wants a routinized arrangement with faculty and student
Medium Human Services	Project	Not clear how a partnership would work but would like a relationship with UMass
Medium Community Development Corporation	Open	Wants RFP process so as to get to define the project Before getting more involved the Executive Director needs to be assured that the organization benefits and not just the students
Large Human Service	Project	Wants RFP process so that they get to define the project; no time to manage students regularly
Medium Intermediate Funder	Project	Prefer projects with graduate students because they perform higher end analysis (i.e., free consulting services)
Small Human Services	Project	Wants RFP process so as to get to define the project; no time to manage students regularly

opportunity costs of staff time expressed in the interviews, the risk calculation is such that CNOs prefer interactions with universities that provide low risk and high benefits. These criteria are much more likely to be found with transactional relationships because complex relationships of mutual dependence or interdependence require greater investments of staff resources to maintain the relationship, and thereby carry greater economic risk.

Even for the two organizations that expressed interest in having a "partnership" with the university, each expressed the criterion that the investment of staff resources must result in benefits. Echoing the findings of Leiderman et al. (2003), the calculus of benefits to costs must come out in the organization's favor in very tangible ways. Whereas service-learning advocates such as Enos and Morton see the transformative potential of deep, complex relationships with communities, the fiscal realities of CNOs are such that they need to experience tangible benefits that help them fulfill their missions.

The consistent message from the interviewees was that the student projects allowed the CNOs to complete projects that otherwise would not have been completed in that timeframe. While the projects provided tangible benefits to the organization, future interaction that would require reallocation of staff time, and thereby entail economic risk, would be carefully reviewed prior to resource investment to assess the potential for tangible benefits to the organization.

Interaction with Other Institutions of Higher Education

This study is based on service-learning experiences of CNOs interacting with a research university. To test whether the type of higher education institution affected the willingness of CNOs to develop relationships, participating CNOs were asked about their relationships with the wide array of higher education institutions in the area. There are many kinds of colleges locally including community colleges, technical colleges, and nearly ten liberal arts colleges. The responses indicate that while most of the CNOs had placed interns or volunteers from area colleges at various times, ongoing faculty relationships were infrequent (n = 1). Only one CNO had an institutionalized partnership (extending beyond one faculty member) to regularly provide undergraduate volunteers for tutoring programs. Given these findings, the type of higher education institution does not appear to be a factor in these CNOs' willingness to engage in service-learning relationships.

Conclusion

There is an assumption in the service-learning literature that progressing towards partnerships is the desired goal for universities, faculty, and community organizations. This is the case in Enos and Morton's (2003) five-stage typology of campus-community partnerships moving from transactional, one-time projects to transformational relationships characterized by complexity and depth of interaction. While transformational partnerships may be the goal, the CNOs participating in service-learning projects interviewed for this research were mostly inclined toward transactional partnerships. They expressly prefer experiences in which the results are direct and tangible and the cost-benefit calculation is clearly in their favor. While the sample size is small for this study, research on nonprofit capacity supports this finding. Due to political and economic shifts, CNOs are experiencing intense challenges in their revenue streams and, especially for human service providers, increased demands for services. These capacity constraints translate into little if any slack resources being available (Salamon, 2002). In literature focused on volunteer management in CNOs, the emphasis is on establishing a rationale for volunteer involvement so that organizational resources and volunteer resources are well matched (Brudney, 2005).

In this study, the service-learning projects were all completed by skilled graduate students and allowed the CNOs to achieve a goal that they would not have been able to achieve on their own, at least in the same timeframe. This approach to service-learning provided tangible benefits for the CNOs (as well as for the students). These projects fit the needs of the CNOs to enter into short-term relationships with discrete investments of resources (as opposed to open-ended arrangements) with a result coproduced between the students and the organization. The service-learning projects did not require the CNOs to reallocate scarce resources to partnerships that have uncertain payoffs. Over time, trust relationships may develop; however, the interviewees very clearly stated that they did not share a desire for more complex and deep relationships. Even for the two organizations in this study that were interested in developing relationships, the calculation of costs and benefits had to come out in the CNO's favor, or else there was no point in pursuing the relationship.

This study's limitation is that the sample may be biased toward CNOs that are predisposed to prefer transactional service-learning relationships. While this is a significant limitation, the consistency of responses across CNOs of varying types, specialties, sizes of staff, and governance structures raises issues that need to be considered as higher education institutions seek to build partnerships with communities. While CNOs are not synonymous with community, they are an integral part of any community. They are a heterogeneous group of organizations that are each pursuing missions that in some way are intended to

yield public benefits.

This study's findings are admittedly limited in the ability to provide generalizations; however, the results provide both a success story and cautionary tale. The success story is that transactional service-learning experiences have value. All the CNOs interviewed for this study utilized the projects to varying degrees. The experience for students and liaisons was positive and yielded benefits. The cautionary tale is that if the groundwork is to be laid for relationships to develop from transactional to transformational, higher education institutions must find ways to decrease the economic costs to CNOs. That decrease in economic costs can take the form of including the cost of staff time in funding strategies or addressing the need for tangible benefits at the outset of discussions; but, however it is done, the main point is that higher education institutions must realize that CNOs have to make difficult choices about how to allocate resources to fulfill missions. When making the decision to invest in a partnership with a university or college, or with a particular faculty member or student, the choice must be weighed against the opportunity cost of investing those resources elsewhere. If the CNO finds that it is a net loser in the partnership, then service-learning has not achieved its most basic aim of mutual benefits for students, universities, and community partners.

Notes

[1] One project was completed by a single student rather than a team.

[2] The term "partnership" was not defined by the interviewer. Respondents used the term and defined its meaning.

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