Original Paper

The Pathway of University-Community Collaboration for Preventing Youth Violence

Caleb Kim[1*]

[1] School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

[*] Caleb Kim, School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

Abstract

University-community collaboration has grown in popularity due to mutual benefits-university has an opportunity to attempt evidence-based programs while community resolves its emerging needs and problems. However, collaboration is a complex and challenging process because coalitions bring two different organizations and personnel to work together. Using the BRAVE youth violence prevention program as a case study, this study describes the pathway of developing university-community collaborative youth violence prevention program in poor and disadvantaged urban communities. In addition, this study explores significant facilitators and barriers that influence the collaboration process from its initiation to completion. Identified facilitators are agreed mutual benefits, trust relationship, mutual respect, shared power in decision-making, flexibility, and cultural competence while barriers are higher staff turnover, scarce agency space for program, and lack of adequate funding. Building on the lessons from this experience, this study provides core factors enhancing effective university-community collaboration.

Keywords

university-community collaboration, youth violence prevention, collaboration process, minority youth

1. Introduction

University and community collaborations have grown in popularity by working together for mutual benefits. Partnering with the community, a university can enhance the mission of teaching and research because it brings field experiences to the classroom and gives insights to new research areas. In addition, community collaborations help a university in carrying out its social responsibility by serving the community which may promote its reputation in the community. A local community also benefits from the coalition with a university because higher education institutions bring intellectual, technical,

and professional supports and implement evidence-based programs to resolve a community's emerging needs and problems.

University-community collaboration is known as an effective and promising community-based youth violence prevention program in higher risk communities (Brown et al., 2016; Fagan et al., 2009; Nation et al., 2011; Umemoto et al., 2009). Collaborating with diverse community organizations and stakeholders (e.g., family, youth, schools, religious organizations, police department, and social service agencies), a community-based prevention program is beneficial for identifying multifaceted risk factors that prevail in the community, and as a result, it has more opportunities to serve a large portion of at-risk youth and to enhance a community's social capital for prevention (Morrel-Samuels et al., 2016; Sugimoto-Matsuda et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2003).

Despite the enormous benefits and effectiveness of community-based youth violence prevention programs, less attention has been paid to the pathway of the collaboration process and unique factors associated with a successful collaboration for violence prevention program. Majority of previous studies exploring university-community collaboration have addressed the evaluation of community-based programs or a general process of developing community engaged research (Dooner et al., 2008; Rubin, 2000; Sargent & Waters, 2004; Umermoto et al., 2009; Viswanathan et al. 2004). Hence, using the Loyola University Chicago's BRAVE (Building Resilience Against Violence Engagement) project as a case example, this study describes how university-community collaboration develops a community-based youth violence prevention program from its initiation to completion and addresses identified facilitators and barriers that impact the collaboration process.

2. Literature Review

Traditional mission of a university is to carry out teaching, research, and service to communities. Recently, however, there is a growing demand for a university to shift its focus from scholarly activities to community engagement that addresses pressing social, political and economic problems; strengthens a community's social capital; and searches for available funding opportunities through collaborative grant submissions (Thompson et al., 2003; Steinmo & Rasmussen, 2018). With challenging social and economic conditions, communities pay more attention to a university's interest in community engagement because university-community collaboration can offer an opportunity to enhance their social capital and resolve emerging problems. While university-community collaboration can ensure mutual benefits, the collaboration process is complex and challenging because it brings together diverse staff, different organizational structures, and unique climates that lead to conflicts and tensions among collaborators. Because of this inevitable inter-group tensions, collaborators often feel overwhelmed and frustrated in developing a partnership. To guide universities and communities to work together successfully, it is essential to identify a pathway that directs certain steps for collaborators to follow through for mutually beneficial outcomes (Reilly, 2001).

All collaborations between a university and a community are unique and different. However, they

51

follow predictable stages of the collaboration process from initiation to completion. Several studies have illustrated the systemic and predictable university-community collaboration process in developing community-engaged research partnership and service-learning development (Bosma et al., 2010; Sargent & Waters, 2004; Thomson et al, 2003; Viswanathan et al, 2004; Williamson et al., 2016). However, there has been a literature gap in understanding how a university and a community initiates and progresses their partnership to develop a community-based violence prevention program. While previous literature has identified strategies of university-community collaboration (Buys & Bursnall 2007; Fagan et al, 2009) and facilitators and barriers influencing collaboration (Nation et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2003; Strier, 2011), the systemic collaboration process for implementing a community-based violence prevention program has not been described to date.

To address this gap in understanding of the collaboration process for building a community-based violence prevention program, this study adopts Sargent and Waters' (2004) four-phase of the collaboration process. Sargent and Waters (2004) conceptualized the four phases of the collaboration process as follows: 1) initiation phase which begins with prospective collaborator's strong motivation and interest; 2) clarification phase that determines mutual goals, scope of collaboration, and issues associated with collaboration; 3) implementation phase that identifies roles and activities of each collaborator; and 4) completion phase that evaluates the outcomes of collaboration. These four stages are not linear, but cyclical because each collaborator may revisit mutual goals and activities as they evolve through a collaboration process. While the four phases of the collaboration process were originally framed to conceptualize the process of community-engaged research partnership, these phases can be utilized as a general guideline to establish the collaboration process of a community-based violence prevention program. Thus, using Sargent and Waters' four phases of the collaboration process, this study describes how the community-based BRAVE youth violence prevention program has been initiated, developed, and maintained.

To successfully build university-community collaboration, both a university and community agencies should be more attentive to numerous facilitators and barriers that influence the pathway of the collaboration process. Moreover, these factors impact each phase of the collaboration process differently and should be considered in building a partnership. Several studies identified core facilitating factors that influence a successful collaboration such as trust relationship, clear and open communication, reciprocal respect, mutual benefits, flexibility, supportive institutional leadership, shared equal power in decision-making, and adequate funding (Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Fisher et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2007; Kezar, 2005; Miller & Hafner 2008; Perrault et al., 2011; Sargent & Waters, 2004; Strier, 2011). In addition, contextual factors such as cultural, social, economic, political, and environmental elements are identified as significant elements affecting the accomplishment of collaboration (Ostrander & Cahpin-Hogue, 2011).

3. Case Study Methodology

This study employs a case study methodology because it is a useful research tool to systematically identify a unique phenomenon and then generate findings beyond the individual exemplary case. Particularly, given the fact that there is little knowledge about university-community collaboration process, a case study is suitable to identify commonalities across different collaborators, while distinguishing unique factors of a collaborator that affects a successful collaboration process. The case study methodology is also appropriate for directly investigating complex organizational structures and their interactional relationships that cannot be examined through other research methods (Boblin et al., 2013; Stake, 2006; Yin, 1994). Using a case study methodology, this study investigates 1) how university-community collaboration begins, develops, and terminates in accordance with the Sargent and Waters' four phases of the collaboration process, and 2) what kinds of facilitators and barriers interact and influence each phase of the collaboration process in implementing a youth violence prevention program. The findings of this study may be applicable to a variety of universities and communities when they are considering the implementation of a community-based youth violence prevention program.

4. Background of the BRAVE Project

The BRAVE (Building Resilience Against Violence Engagement) program is a community-based youth violence prevention program offered in poor and disadvantaged urban communities in Chicago. The Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work, collaborating with three community agencies, commenced the BRAVE project in 2017 with a funding from the Minority Youth Violence Prevention II grant from the Office of Minority Health of the US Department of Health and Human Services. The partnering community agencies are Vietnamese Association of Illinois, Centro Romero, and By the Hand that are specialized for serving Asian, Latino, and African American population in Edgewater, Rogers Park, and Englewood neighborhood, respectively. All three agencies are located in poor and disadvantaged communities where federal poverty level is high (i.e., 18.3% in Edgewater, 26.3% in Rogers Park, and 46.3% in Englewood); have a high crime rate (i.e., 40.3, 55.0, and 188.4 per 100,000, respectively); and are ethnically concentrated or segregated (i.e., 45%, 58%, and 95% of the community members are minority, respectively) (Chicago Crime Map, 2019; Farooqui, 2017). Despite a higher risk embedded in these communities, youth are less likely to receive quality violence prevention services due to an agency's scarce resources such as funding and professional staff. In addition, there are notable deficits in culturally appropriate and evidence-based minority youth violence prevention programs in these communities.

Considering severity and prevalence of youth violence in these communities, the Loyola University Chicago and above mentioned three community agencies have collaborated to design and implement an evidence-based and community-based youth violence prevention program that is tailored to each partnering community's unique context. The BRAVE program offers a comprehensive violence

53

prevention service including individualized case management, group work, after-school tutoring, weekend field trips, summer camps, recreational and cultural activities, individual and family counseling, as well as communitywide changes.

5. A Pathway of the Collaboration Process in Developing the BRAVE Program

5.1 Initiation Phase

In this phase, both collaborators need to identify each other's needs, motivation, and interest in collaboration for preventing youth violence. Prior to initiating community collaboration, however, a university needs to assess its "collaboration readiness" because community partnership requires multifaceted supports from the entire university and higher-level leadership (Curwood et al., 2011). If the university leadership does not value community collaboration, it is important to persuade them of the need to engage with the community. As a Jesuit institute in Chicago, the Loyola University Chicago has acknowledged for a long time the severity of youth violence in higher risk communities as well as their pressing need for a community-based youth violence prevention program. Recognizing the issues of youth violence in Chicago, a group of faculty, staff, and students in the university organized the BRAVE project team and began to assess the university's motivation and interest in community collaboration. The university's BRAVE team contacted diverse university members and departments (e.g., higher level leadership, counseling center, experiential learning center, social work internship department, facility department) and established a campus supporting network which agreed to participate in community coalition. Acknowledging the university's strong interest in community engagement, the university's BRAVE team contacted as many community stakeholders (e.g., CEOs and directors of youth program organizations, pastors of local churches, police officers, teachers, and parents) as possible to explore their motivation and interest in implementing a collaborative violence prevention program. Across all meetings, most participants agreed that youth violence is the most serious community problem that requires immediate and professional intervention. However, most community members expressed a lack of funding to carry out a new program and were not familiar with evidence-based prevention programs that fit their community contexts. After a series of community meetings, the Loyola University Chicago and the three community agencies agreed to collaborate and to search for possible additional funding as a critical task.

In this phase, trust relationship and mutual respect among collaborators are crucial facilitators for a successful coalition. The university may view community members as research objects or service recipients rather than equal partners or community experts. Reciprocally, community members may perceive university collaboration as beneficial only to the university, not to their community because the university may have a hidden agenda for its own benefit (Strier, 2011). In a meeting with community stakeholders, some agencies expressed they felt honored by the university's approach to their organizations. However, most agencies expressed negative perceptions toward university-initiated programs. They viewed the university as a white privileged organization that only comes to the

54

community to collect research data, to test a new program, or to take advantage of community problems for securing project funding for the university's own interest and then leaves the community without returning any benefits to them nor maintaining a sustainable relationship. Some immigrant community members shared their concerns that their immigration status would be exposed to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) if the university collects personal data. Such misperceptions and skepticism about university collaboration are significant barriers impacting a successful collaboration process, particularly in the initiation phase.

In order to minimize any misperceptions and disparate interests between the university and community agencies, the university's BRAVE team has frequently met partner agencies individually and as a group and shared each other's organizational backgrounds, mission, culture, and expectations from the collaboration. In addition, the university's BRAVE team often attended an agency's events in the community and reciprocally invited agency staff to university events or academic seminars. Building trust relationship through mutual respect and transparent communication produces and strengthens a community partner's motivation and interest in potential future collaboration. Moreover, trust relationship formed in the initiation phase may further motivate community agencies to learn new intervention programs that serve their community better.

5.2 Clarification Phase

Once collaboration is initiated through mutual respect and trust relationship, a university and community agencies need to clarify the scope of collaboration in general and the components of community-based BRAVE violence prevention program in particular. The scope of collaboration includes numbers of participating agencies, selection of leading agency among partner agencies, roles of each collaborators, duration and work plan of the collaborative project, chain of command and reporting system between and among collaborators, funding allocation, and budget management. Clarifying these items not only prevents collaborators from possible conflict of interest, but also helps each collaborator recognize its roles, duties, and accountability. To clarify the scope of collaboration, the university needs to understand each partner agency's organizational structure, capacity, and atmosphere (e.g., internal decision-making process, expertise of staff, resources, and reputation in the community) as well as cultural and social norms within the community (e.g., norms of allowing violence) because this information represents an agency's unique perspective in dealing with university collaboration. Moreover, this information gives an insight about an agency's readiness and feasibility of collaboration. If a partner agency does not have sufficient resources to carry out the collaborative violence prevention program, the university needs to share the university's resources with that agency, rather than prematurely terminating community collaboration. For example, when one partner agency addressed the difficulty of recruiting college student tutors and mentors from its own community, the university's BRAVE team cooperated with the university's Experiential Learning Center and Social Work Internship Department and recruited volunteers and intern students. Furthermore, the university's BRAVE team regularly trained, monitored, and supervised all recruited students while they were placed

55

in each partner agency. Sharing the university's resources with a deprived partner agency helps the community ensure that university collaboration is beneficial to its community. In addition, community collaboration benefits the university because the university can expand a student's opportunity to participate at experiential learning and field practice education as well as accomplishing the university's mission of serving a community.

The specific components of the BRAVE program also need to be clarified in this phase. They include mutually agreed goals of the BRAVE program, target populations, selection of evidence-based program fitting to agency capacity and community contexts, types of activities and programming, and qualification of service providers. In clarifying and designing the components of a collaborative program, the university tried to include an agency's existing violence prevention program, the community's unique perspective toward youth violence, and an agency's previous efforts in resolving this problem while keeping the key components of the program across all agencies. For example, one agency was reluctant to use the term "violence" in naming the BRAVE program because it may remind the participants of the trauma they experienced in the community and generate the stereotype of participating youth as perpetrators. Considering this unique perception in the community, the university's BRAVE team allowed an agency to use a different program title (e.g., BRAVE for Leadership) that is suitable to its cultural and community context. Regarding activities and programming, one agency was interested in adding more field site programs during the weekend because their participants did not have an opportunity to travel or visit other parts of Chicago, including the downtown, because they were enclave in an ethnically segregated community with a limited public transportation service. In addition, a partner agency notes that escaping from the community during the weekend may help participants avoid any violence engaged activities.

Clarifying the scope of collaboration and the program's specific contents is further beneficial in preparing a grant proposal for securing an adequate funding. In general, the nature of funding (e.g., purpose, requirement, constriction, and duration) affects the scope of collaboration and the particular contents of program. Hence, ensuring an adequate funding that meets the purpose and scope of the project is an essential facilitator for successful collaboration. Another facilitator in this phase is sharing power equally in clarifying issues and designing program contents. Previous studies indicate that institutions of higher education tend to have more power than other community organizations and lead agenda in collaborating with them (Cherry & Shefner, 2004; Strier, 2011). However, the egalitarian relationship between collaborators encourages an agency's staff to freely express their knowledge and skills because the university values community experts and university scholars equally—generating more effective prevention programs that fit their community contexts. On the contrary, experiencing an unequal power relationship due to disparity in formal education status, knowledge of technology, and socioeconomic status (i.e., gender, sexuality, social class and race) creates tensions over control, competition of resources, and distrust in relationships that impede a successful collaboration process (Altman, 2005; Maginn, 2007). Clarifying the scope of collaboration and program components is an

56

on-going task because there will be new issues to clarify as the collaboration process evolves. Thus, it is apparent that the clarification and implementation phases move back and forth during a collaboration process.

5.3 Implementation Phase

The implementation phase emphasizes the roles and activities that each collaborator undertakes to execute the community-based BRAVE violence prevention program as it was designed in the clarification phase. To begin implementation, the university and each partner agency equally shared a decision-making power in hiring a site coordinator who is placed in each partner agency. A site coordinator oversees the BRAVE program, directly provides a variety of prevention services to youth participants, manages a program budget and required reports, coordinates college volunteers and intern students, and attends all project meetings for supervision and collaboration. A site coordinator carries out a variety of roles as a counselor, case manager, teacher, and mentor. In addition, a site coordinator plays the role of a gateway to the community in promoting the BRAVE program, identifying at-risk target youths, and gaining access to other community resources. Throughout this phase, all site coordinators receive diverse trainings and education to obtain new skills and knowledge as their duties and roles evolve over emerging problems and environmental changes. For example, when partner agencies and schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, site coordinators were trained to learn virtual violence prevention programs, to employ an online case management software program, and to comply with the university's requirement for electronically storing the collected data. Partner agencies and site coordinators appreciated all the training because it enriched their quality of services and enhanced the feeling of collaboration.

The important facilitator identified in this phase is the university's flexibility that allows a partner agency to adjust the components of the BRAVE program to its cultural contexts and to employ agency's preferable intervention method. Prior to implementing the BRAVE program, each partner agency had already provided somewhat unique youth violence prevention. Without distorting the key components of the BRAVE violence prevention program, it was important to decide when and how to integrate the new program into their existing youth programs because the BRAVE program is designed with the premise that risk and protective factors of youth violence differ based on ethnic cultures, youth developmental stages, and the community's socio-economic contexts. Thus, the BRAVE program is flexible in adjusting its program to these differences, which is helpful in ensuring a partner agency's shared ownership when an agency modifies the BRAVE program to accommodate an agency's mission, ethnic-cultural values, and community contexts. For example, one partner agency was a Christian-based organization well-known for its Bible study class as an agency-specific violence prevention program within the community. Respecting the agency's mission and its preferable intervention method in preventing youth violence, the university's BRAVE team and the agency's site coordinator included a biblical approach such as peace-making and conflict resolution in a group work program. The partner agency appreciated the university's flexibility and respect for the agency's

57

preferable approach, which made the collaboration more successful.

In this phase, a noticeable barrier arose regarding a site coordinator's roles and accountability. A site coordinator was hired to devote his time and efforts fully to the BRAVE program because he was solely funded by the BRAVE project grant. Despite the job description, which was agreed upon by the partner agencies, some site coordinators' roles were vague because they were often asked to perform non-BRAVE related duties in the partner agencies. These vague roles created tensions with the university because the university's BRAVE team was concerned about his accountability. Moreover, additional duties often requested by the partner agency caused a high turnover rate of site coordinators and delayed the collaboration process. In most cases, ambiguous and overlapping roles of a site coordinator and their high turnover rate were closely related to a scarcity of personnel in a partner agency. Thus, the university's BRAVE team alleviated some of the tensions around accountability by placing more student volunteers and intern students at the agency, clarifying the site coordinator's non-negotiable roles and accountability, and revisiting a site coordinator's job description.

5.4 Completion and Sustainability Phase

Completion phase is a process of evaluating success of both the project's outcomes and the collaboration process. Unlike Sargent and Waters' final phase, however, this study views that university-community collaboration needs to sustain a partner relationship even if both collaborators have achieved the agreed goals and the project has ended. As obtained in the initiation phase, many community stakeholders expressed negative perspective toward university collaboration if a university left the community without maintaining a sustainable relationship. It is apparent that communities, especially poor and disadvantaged ones, struggle with a variety of community problems and need continuous university collaboration because a university-community partnership creates a synergistic effect in addressing their problems. In the event the university ignores the community's need for sustainability after completing a project, a future opportunity for other university faculty to collaborate with the community may be impeded. Thus, to continuously maintain a partnership with the community, the university needs to build a capacity that may require the comprehensive efforts such as restructuring the university's organizational systems, integrating community engagement as an essential component of academic curriculum, and promoting student and faculty volunteers to multiple levels in the university (Kezar, 2005). While building a university capacity, the university may help partner agencies enhance their capacity to sustain the implemented program in case the university collaboration is no longer available. For example, the university can help partner agency prepare a grant proposal for securing additional funding, connect other universities who might be interested in community collaboration, and advocate the community issues by allying with diverse community organizations.

Sustainability of collaboration needs to be prepared through all phases of the collaboration process by regularly evaluating the effectiveness of partnerships and identifying barriers that impede the continuous relationship with the community. Both formative and summative evaluation, using either qualitative (e.g., focus group interview) or quantitative methods (e.g., questionnaire survey), may

include a progress evaluation to monitor emerging issues during a collaboration process, an outcome evaluation by measuring changes in target youth's behaviors, youth satisfaction to services, performance of each individual, and all collaborators' capacity and commitment to future collaboration (Williamson et al., 2016).

6. Discussion

Given the fact that little is known about a systemic collaboration process of community-based youth violence prevention programs, this case study illustrates the pathway of university-community collaboration and significant factors that impact a successful partnership. Upon participating at the BRAVE project, both university and community agencies learned about not only a sequence of four phases in a collaboration process but also the effectiveness of community-based violence prevention program when a collaboration process was successfully progressed. Throughout four phases of a collaboration process, building trust relationship and mutual respect is the first and foremost crucial factor for developing a successful partnership. As in the interpersonal relationship, the university is recommended to put persistent and consistent efforts in building trust relationship with the partner community. Especially when the university is not present in a poor and disadvantaged minority community, the university needs to put more endeavors because community members may perceive the university as a white privileged institute that pursues its own benefits through collaboration. Without becoming defensive, the university needs to listen to the community stakeholders' perceptions and stories and respectfully communicate the mutual benefits of collaboration. However, if university-community collaboration is led by an individual faculty without the university's systemic support, community collaboration could be extemporary, insincere, and unstable. Therefore, in order to move beyond the verbal gestures of collaboration and to sustain community partnership even if the university achieved mutually agreed project's goals, the university is recommended to value community collaboration; to recognize community experts; to encourage community-engaged teaching, research, and services; and to share its resources with local communities.

Other important facilitators identified from this case study are shared power in decision-making and flexibility of the program to accommodate an agency's preferable intervention methods and ethnic cultural contexts. Sharing opportunity to design the scope of collaboration and particular program contents and to hire a project staff not only contributes to a sense of shared power but also provided ownership of the BRAVE program to partner agencies. Considering ethnic and cultural diversity among partner agencies, the BRAVE program incorporates diverse ethnic groups' cultures and languages in developing documents and materials (e.g., educational brochures for preventing youth violence, flyers for recruiting and promoting program in school and community, etc.) and offers language assistance services (e.g., interpreter and translator) to youth participants and parents who have limited English proficiency at no additional cost. The challenges that occurred during the collaboration process are the frequent turnovers of the agency staff and a lack of resources to refer to within a community. Thus, it is

59

apparent that some disadvantaged communities may benefit from university-community collaboration because it offers great promise for the stretching of limited community resources to serve as many youth participants as possible. Although the specific natures of this case study may be idiosyncratic to this particular collaboration process, learnings from this study may more generally apply to the pathway of university-community partnership in developing a community-based prevention program. Despite its usefulness, this study illustrates university-community collaboration process from university's perspective though it tries to keep a balance in including partner agencies' unique perspectives and their lived experiences. Thus, this study suggests that future research needs to explore community stakeholders' own perception toward university-initiated community collaboration from the beginning of university's approach to the completion and sustainability phase.

7. Conclusions

Every university-community collaboration is unique and different because of each collaborator's distinctive organizational and community contexts. However, the pathway of collaboration process along with facilitators and barriers described in this case study is expected to be applicable to a wide range of university-community collaborative programs. Moreover, recognition of facilitators and barriers played in each phase of collaboration process provides an insight for prospective collaborators to prepare future university-community collaborations.

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