Seattle University Youth Initiative

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Providing meaningful service through community engagement is a cornerstone of many mission-based higher education institutions. The Seattle University Youth Initiative (SUYI) is a nationally recognized, university place-based initiative that seeks to improve educational and life opportunities for students and families in a two square mile neighborhood in urban Seattle. The SUYI is housed in the Center for Community Engagement (CCE), the university’s central hub for community partnerships. The SUYI serves as a mission-central initiative by intentionally collaborating with a variety of on-campus (faculty, staff, and students) and off-campus stakeholders (community-based organizations, local and state offices, schools, and residents).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this tool kit is to share emerging practices and lessons learned from the SUYI, in particular with other institutions who seek to engage in new initiatives or enhance existing university-wide place-based community engagement efforts. This tool kit serves as a primary resource for the 2nd convening of the Placed-Based Community Initiatives Institute (PBCII) at the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, California.

**Methodology**

This tool kit builds upon a 2014 White Paper to continue to document emerging practices and findings. In order to determine what tools would be of most interest to others, a survey was
sent to 12 representatives from universities engaged in or interested in place-based community initiatives. The three primary topics that respondents most frequently highlighted include: (1) the use of data to inform strategy and decision-making, (2) the role of the university in place-based initiatives, and (3) the pursuit and acquisition of funding to support place-based work.

This tool kit draws upon four purposefully selected focus groups and two individual interviews which included a variety of stakeholders who are engaged in the SUYI. Participants were asked about their role in the SUYI, what has worked and what areas can use improvement (with a particular emphasis on the issues noted previously), and thoughts for future consideration as the Initiative moves forward in the next 5 years.

Tools
Three specific areas are highlighted in this tool kit: (1) Data, (2) Role of the University, and (3) Funding. Each tool kit area identifies emerging practices, key challenges (and how they were overcome), and questions for consideration for universities and partners engaging in this type of partnership work.
Introduction

Using data to make informed decisions and measure impact has been critical to the SUYI’s success. For this tool kit, data is defined as the systematic documentation, collection, analysis, and dissemination of information to inform decision-making.

At universities, there is a plethora of institutional data related to student learning and development (e.g. course evaluations, NSSE, CIRP, etc.) and compliance (IPEDS, state reporting, etc.). Community partners also collect and/or use data to improve their own work and report to various stakeholders.

For partnership work, especially engaging with non-university partners, understanding existing data sources and how to gain access and share data is more complex. In addition, innovative partnership work may require new data sources/uses that are not a part of an institution or partners’ current data portfolio.
DATA: Seattle University Emerging Practices

- **Collaboration**
  - Built institutional data capacity and literacy: forming infrastructure for data collection, collaboration, and resource development
    - *Examples*: Hired staff member to oversee data management
    - *Examples*: Distributed leadership model: staff member as point of contact based on areas they oversee (EX: K-12 director, point of contact for K-12 data needs)
  - Talked about data needs, use, and ways to share
    - *Examples*: Shared data with partners: formative and summative data, and to enhance partnership

- **Use**
  - Formed trends data: now that the SUYI is many years into implementation, SU staff captured this over multiple years (moved beyond baseline data)
  - Fine tuned use of data for accountability and reporting
  - Expanded use of data in resource development (grants, engaging funders, etc.)
    - *Examples*: Brought data together to contribute to grant proposal
  - Systematically used data for program development and improvement
    - *Examples*: Reviewed data with partner to determine what program(s) or programmatic elements to keep or change (not engage in a historical programming model)

- **Impact**
  - Developed stronger understanding of what works and what does not
  - Created more predictable cycles of data collection and analysis with partners
  - Enhanced flexibility: ability to be more nimble when new partners come on board and/or systems or leadership shifts

- **Theory of Change**
  - Data helped guide the development and use of a theory of change
    - *Examples*: What does a social justice learning outcome look like?
  - Currently working on ways to share non-instrumental but significant data more systematically with partners
    - *Examples*: Seattle Housing Authority would like to see how the SUYI partnership impacts their family relations
  - Working on translating analysis and impact into effective resources for (1) resource and fund development and (2) communicating progress to stakeholders
    - *Examples*: Developing a data dashboard or score card
Data capacity and literacy are important components of the SUYI. A key challenge was identifying this need and then working to address it. The process of understanding what types of data were (and were not available) was helpful, which required consulting with a variety of stakeholders (on-campus administrators, institutional research and faculty with expertise, etc.). In addition, realizing that the existing staff did not have this area of expertise and subsequently channeling resources to fill this gap was another important step. Once a staff member was identified, hiring (and keeping the job staffed) was an unanticipated challenge. Revisiting existing senior staff members roles to serve some of the key liaison positions with data management, has helped to meet this challenge. As the Initiative continues to develop into the next phase, data capacity and literacy will be important for purposes of accountability and telling the story of the SUYI to a variety of existing and new stakeholders, in particular for key partners and funders/funders-to-be.
**DATA: Questions/Areas to Consider**

**EXISTING SOURCES**

**Existing Sources:** Tapping into existing sources of data has been important for the SUYI. Yet the initial process of understanding what data exists, how to access it, and how best to use it was lengthy. In addition, as the SUYI moves into new areas (e.g. middle school, high school, and new community partnerships) its data needs shift. Above are some questions to consider when developing a data plan for a university place-based initiative.
**New Sources:** As a place-based partnership develops, there will likely be a need to explore new sources of data. There are many types of new data:

1. **In-house specialty data:** that is collected and used in house for unique needs (e.g. current source does not exist or is too cost prohibitive)
2. **External specialty data:** that is collected outside of your organization and external to your partners and is used for your unique needs

   *EX: Developing metrics and conducting robust analysis on a unique K-12 afterschool program that focuses on developing non-academic skills*

In the diagram above, questions when developing a plan for data are offered to consider when engaging in a university place-based partnership.
Introduction

Universities are clearly centered on college student learning. Engaging in a place-based initiative, while complimentary to student learning and faculty research, can make the role of the university less clear. There is also potential for the university’s role to shift as universities operate within the context of ever-changing leadership, resources, and other external factors. At times, place-based work challenges universities to focus more on community impact which can lead to questions of the value of providing direct service, convening partners, and directly funding projects.

For mission-based institutions, community engagement work often has roots in social justice and service which presents both opportunities and challenges. For example:

**Opportunity:** Many college students who engage in the SUYI enhance their cross-cultural skillset working with non-native English speakers, low income students, and communities of color (who are underrepresented in the college setting).

**Challenge:** This cross-cultural work requires extensive training and supports that faculty and community engagement offices are traditionally less equipped to lead.

The SUYI experience suggests that (1) the role of the university must be clearly defined and (2) the initiative must work within this context in order to be successful. In addition, the traditional 80/20 model of focusing on college students’ learning vs. community impact may need to shift closer to 50/50 for optimal engagement of all stakeholders.
ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY: Seattle University Emerging Practices

**Mission**

- Prioritized student engagement: “Service is the heart of the mission”
  - EX: Students noted SU’s community engagement as the reason for attending SU
- Social justice: created sustained opportunities for student engagement
  - EX: Paid summer leadership opportunities, leadership course, peer mentoring/leadership, and requiring a 2-term commitment to work with youth
- Office re-organized to meet the needs of the evolving nature of the initiative
  - EX: Established role of deputy director and changed the office name

**Sustained Engagement of Stakeholders**

- Student engagement: strengthened pipeline of engagement
  - EX: Working with orientation and admissions to communicate with students before they begin their college classes
- Clarified roles and continued to build relationships with partners
  - EX: Developing a culture of invitation to learn more about the SUYI and possibilities for partnering (e.g. many times, multiple opportunities, without pressure)
  - EX: Types of partners identified: thought partner (brainstorming and conceptual work) vs. placement partner (where students are placed)
- Assessed senior administrators understanding of the SUYI as it progressed
  - EX: Importance of messaging changes/shifts to stakeholders, especially at the campus level
- Created advisory board(s) to test ideas, receive feedback, and build shared ownership
  - EX: SUYI has multiple advisory boards

**New Engagement of Stakeholders**

- Student engagement: collaborated with new offices (orientation and admissions) to get the word out sooner
  - EX: Incoming freshman already working at the CCE in the summer
- Enhanced faculty engagement
  - EX: New project with faculty member in criminal justice program
- Laid foundation for regional inter-partner engagement
  - EX: Yesler Community Collaborative (YCC): SU serves as key educational partner in local community development collaborative
- Increased quality and quantity of K-12 partners' parent engagement
  - EX: Strong parent engagement at the target elementary school led to parental advocacy at the district level
- Strengthened visibility enhanced legitimacy of work and campus reputation
  - EX: National recognition opened the door for more opportunities to collaborate and provided institutional credibility for doing so successfully
Early on, there was a focus on increasing the number of students, faculty, and staff participating in the SUYI—to build a strong foundation of on-campus engagement and support. After hitting a couple of significant engagement milestones and in conjunction with an external consultant, a need to attend to the quality of engagement along with quantity was identified. There was not always agreement on what direction to take—however, the focus on establishing quality of engagement was prioritized and has begun to be operationalized.

Another challenging area was the growth of staff while the Initiative was in its first few years of implementation. As partnerships grew and solidified, there was a need to quickly increase staff. The SUYI was fortunate to have a strong funding base to meet this need. At the same time, existing staff roles within the organization were re-examined—this was contentious at times. Assistance from an external consultant coupled with strategic planning, led to shifts in roles--in some cases the responsibilities of staff members pivoted in new directions. This led some staff to choose to leave the office/the Initiative while others moved into their new roles.
**Leadership:** The SUYI has been fortunate to have consistent leadership at all levels above. However, this is less likely in most contexts where leadership transitions take place on a regular basis due to multiple push/pull factors that cannot always be anticipated. In the diagram above, questions about leadership are offered to consider when engaging in a university place-based partnership.
**Core Services:** As an initiative grows, a polarity may emerge: is the initiative’s mission (and the office it’s housed in) to provide direct service opportunities for college students (via service learning, service placement, etc.) or community building opportunities (e.g. convening partners to align goals, supporting mobilization of community residents) which may not entail direct college student service. In conjunction with the diagram above, some questions to consider include:

- What percent of the initiative is direct college student service vs. community building opportunities?
- What does the delivery and support model look like for engaging various stakeholders in student service vs. community building activities?
- What’s the quantity vs. quality investment and output as it relates to both areas?
FUND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Resources are critical to the start-up and development of university place-based partnership work. For the SUYI, an extended planning period was instrumental in setting up the Initiative’s success. Yet securing funders to resource this stage of an initiative is difficult, but not insurmountable. In addition, once an initiative begins there are many resource needs and, at times, wants.

Cultivating relationships for resource development is critical. From forging trusting relationships with community partners to building a clear message, to partnering with funders in order to secure resources, there is an on-going need for strong relationships. This work takes time and patience—it is a relatively long and continuous process of trust and relationship-building to attain the appropriate resources for an initiative.
FUND DEVELOPMENT: Seattle University Emerging Practices

**Infrastructure Development**
- Diffused 'cult of the personality' funding: the director cannot be the only fund seeker
  - *EX: SU allocated a university advancement officer to partner with staff*
- University capital campaign: advocated and included in comprehensive university campaign
- Donors' needs highlighted: sought out data/information to tell the story of the Initiative (especially quantitative)
  - *EX: A donor wanted 'dashboard' like data to understand recent successes*

**Relationship Building**
- Identified and strengthened relationships with a range of donors: lead investor and others
- Connected to regional 'high flying initiative'
  - *EX: Yesler Terrace Redevelopment (Economic/Housing redevelopment)*

**Attaining Resources**
- Fundraising is a process: it takes time to build a relationship (trust is needed to develop a significant gift)
- Identified intermediate outcomes for fundraising
  - *EX: Understanding donor/funder desires and areas of funding*
- Recognizing and having a track record of receiving funding from reputable sources led to additional (unsolicited) funding
  - *EX: Invitations to apply for funding*
A need emerged early on for an on-site staff member at the K-12 elementary school site to build a strong relationship with SU’s primary educational partner. Yet, cultivating the political capital to convince a higher education institution to fund a full-time staff member at another educational site was a challenge. Through a deliberate process of campus clarification which included navigating SU’s structures and then a negotiation with K-12 partners including navigation of public K-12 structures, a school-site SU staff member was hired. The benefits of this on-site staff member are significant, especially with developing strong relationships with teachers and families who now had a ‘go-to’ person. This school intensive strategy also has provided a place to “showcase” SUYI’s work to current and prospective funders.
Fund Development: Attaining funds is critical for SUYI, and for most place-based initiatives. Building strong relationships for successful funding is a process. As the SUYI illustrates, understanding and tapping into institutional resources is a key starting point for a successful funding plan. In addition, developing a strong team and plan for fundraising is also helpful. Lastly, as an initiative develops having a well-thought out plan for data, messaging, and collaboration with other stakeholders in securing funding are important for success. In the diagram above, questions about fund the development process are offered to consider when engaging in a university place-based partnership.
In summary, the SUYI has developed significantly in the last several years strengthening its understanding and use of data, clarifying the multiple roles of the university, and developing a more nuanced approach to fund development. There are many important lessons that the Initiative staff has learned along the way, including: managing data capacity and literacy, developing appropriate institutional and staffing structures, and building bridges across territorial boundaries with respect to funding. As the SUYI continues to move forward in the coming years, its community engagement strategy will likely become more complex as new partners come on board and existing relationships evolve. However, the Initiative will have a solid set of experiences to draw from to further connect the campus and community for the betterment of both.