

Northside Achievement Zone Out of School Time Network (NOST) Partnership University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Case Study developed by Lara Westerhof, Carley Ward, and Geoffrey Maruyama This case study focuses on the development of community-university partnerships, and how that process can work. It provides a smaller scale illustration of how those relationships can be built respectfully as well as challenges developing and sustaining them over time.

I. The Students - Who are the students in this program? What do they do in the program? Why? What do you hope will change for students as a result of the program? (This is your theory of change.)

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) is a collection of organizations and schools working in partnership with North Minneapolis families within a geographically bounded region of North Minneapolis. NAZ aims to support students “from cradle to career,” helping them graduate high school and prepare for college (<http://northsideachievement.org/about>). NAZ sponsors a variety of out of school time (OST) programs across North Minneapolis, and has formed the Expanded Learning Action Team (NAZ ExL) to guide NAZ OST programs and ensure they are meeting students’ needs.

The partnership between the University of Minnesota (particularly Dr. Geoffrey Maruyama and the Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center, or UROC) and the pre-NAZ Out of School Time group began with the FIPSE-UROC project in 2007. That project, largely funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement for Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), provided support for three years to help increase the University of Minnesota’s level of urban engagement (detailed below). As a part of the FIPSE-UROC work, the University was able to support the development of the “Northside Out of School Time (NOST) work group,” which created a professional network of youth programs providing professional development for youth workers, and developing a directory of youth programs.

A retreat convened by one of the partners brought together most of the after school providers of services in the community and the UM FIPSE-UROC project staff. Although there had been a loose network of providers in the past, there had been no recent community of providers. During the retreat the providers articulated their needs, where they might work together, and where they felt there were appropriate places for the university to work with them. They ended the retreat with a sense of opportunity and purpose plus a name, the Northside Out-of-School Time Network, or NOST. In 2008, NOST joined NAZ to align with the larger community effort to support students’ academic and social development, keeping their acronym but changing to the Northside Achievement Zone Out of School Time network. Although the FIPSE-UROC grant ended in 2010 and the federal promise community grant supporting the work of NAZ did not start until then, NOST remained intact due to the sustainable structures developed with the University partnership and leadership from a couple key individuals in one of the partners. The partnership work between NOST and the University of Minnesota produced a strong, trusting

relationship, and today they continue to work together, developing theory-driven models of social-emotional programming as well as program evaluation. It worked to connect several faculty and staff with the NOST group, and resulted in some professional development opportunities for NOST workers.

Looking forward, there are several ways in which the NOST programs are beginning to partner with the University of Minnesota for the First in the World grant. At present, there is engagement of graduate students from the University in the evaluation work. As the undergraduate service learning and community engagement work rolls out, the partnership will involve three types of participants: university undergraduate students, after-school program staff, and after-school program participants. Underrepresented students from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities would be placed at one of these programs to complete their community service requirements from one of their classes. These students will be recruited from either the Community Engagement Scholars Program (CESP; see CESP Case Study for more information) or the President's Emerging Scholars Program (PES; see PES Case Study for more information). After-school program staff, such as youth workers or management team members, would be responsible for overseeing the university students during their time in the after school programs. This may include allocating tasks to them and evaluating their performance. Lastly, after-school program participants (referred to in NAZ as scholars) would likely interact with the college students attending programs. NAZ scholars include K-12 students who live within North Minneapolis; these students are largely from groups underrepresented in post-secondary education, namely, low-income, racial/ethnic minorities, and immigrants. Interactions between scholars and volunteers may include academic tutoring or mentoring, completing shared tasks, other assistance, or social support.

This partnership would likely impact all three levels of participants. Undergraduate student volunteers may feel a stronger connection to the university by completing university-sponsored engagement that makes a difference in the lives of youth from communities like those in which they grew up. In addition, the partnership may help program staff by easing their workload and creating a reliable pool of volunteers that can support program staff and scholars over the course of three years. Further, this partnership may impact scholars' academic and social development by creating additional trusting, supportive, and stable relationships between scholars and adults, particularly among adults from similar racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

II. Institutional Supports and Issues

Institutional support for the formation of this partnership was provided by funding from FIPSE. This grant (held from 2007-2011) funded research to intentionally engage universities in addressing urban issues and challenges in their communities. The University of Minnesota established a community-based urban research and outreach/engagement center (UROC) in North Minneapolis, providing training experiences for graduate and professional students and service learning opportunities for undergraduate students. Several community-university partnerships and projects have developed from UROC, focusing on areas of need identified by

the community such as education, economic development, and health. For example, NOST (described above) was developed as a result of the UROC-North Minneapolis partnership, and created a network of programs that provide out-of-school-time youth services to students. The funding from the FIPSE grant allowed these separate community organizations to organize and join together to better provide services to youth within the community.

Though external funding was the trigger for the development of this partnership, funding is not necessary for such partnerships to form. Having a strong shared purpose can act as a driver for the development of effective partnerships. For example, the need to expand or develop service learning programs for undergraduate students may facilitate the formation of many effective community-university partnerships.

III. Community Issues

In 2008, NOST joined NAZ as the Out-of-School-Time Action Team, and in 2011, NAZ was declared a 501(c)3 federal Promise Neighborhood by the U.S. Department of Education (detailed in section 4 below). While the FIPSE-UROC project was funded from 2007-2011, our partnership with NAZ has continued despite a lack of funding.

Although this partnership has experienced much success, maintaining the relationship is challenging. Common issues that arise among University-community partnerships include those such as communication, turnover, and establishing priorities among partners. First, while new technologies allow for more frequent communication, communication via email can be inefficient and allows for misinterpretations of important conversations. In addition, high turnover among community personnel may impact a partnership when a community contact leaves the organization. For instance, the present partnership recently went through a period of rebuilding trust when the closest community partner left her roles within her organization and NOST to return to graduate school.

With respect to our current FITW project, university involvement with NAZ is limited and many NAZ programs do not accept student volunteers. Undergraduate students are often unreliable; for example, they may only volunteer for one semester or have to skip days to study for or attend exams. In addition, high quality youth work depends on developing relationships with the youth, and requires training and professional development, which does not pay off when volunteers are only going to be working with an organization for a semester. Children and youth require consistency and strong youth-adult relationships. In language from research done by our 4H Youth Development workers, youth work is about *caring adults* providing *constructive options* and imposing *challenging expectations*. Given the nature of the challenges in providing effective programming, many youth programs feel that undergraduate volunteers often do not make effective youth workers.

IV. The History/Evolution of the Program – How did it get to where it is?

North Minneapolis is an impoverished neighborhood that has historically struggled with challenges of high mobility, high crime rates, and multi-generational poverty. Many families

within North Minneapolis are homeless or highly mobile, and many students come to school both academically and socially unprepared to learn. This results in a cyclical pattern of poverty in which social mobility is unlikely.

Although the University of Minnesota is a land grant university, its engagement with North Minneapolis has been limited and episodic, and its attempts at involvement have not always been well-received. In the past, there have been instances in which the community has felt that the university has attempted to “fix” the community, addressing problems *for* instead of *with* them, and not engaging the community as partners in the work.

The FIPSE-UROC project was developed in 2007 to increase and alter the university’s involvement with the community. “FIPSE-UROC is a short-hand way of referring to several projects that the community and the university have been doing in North Minneapolis with support from a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). The work has attempted to adapt the successful land grant Research and Outreach Center model from rural communities to provide a strategic and intentional way to engage universities in addressing complex urban issues and challenges, linking our vision of being an effectively engaged urban university to specific urban community-based work. In our particular case, the University of Minnesota established a community-based physical location in a federal empowerment zone in North Minneapolis, including multi-disciplinary collaborative research and outreach programs; training experiences for graduate and professional students; and service learning experiences for undergraduates. Programs have focused on areas of need identified by the community, specifically, education, economic development, and nutrition/health. Teams of University and community people have been working together to develop collaborative efforts in education (use of out-of-school time); economic development (internships/entrepreneur experiences); and health (nutrition/obesity/healthy foods)” (The FIPSE-UROC Project, n.d.).

One of the many projects developed as a result of the FIPSE-UROC project was the creation of NOST. As previously stated, NOST created a professional network of youth programs, provided professional development for youth workers, and developed a directory of youth programs. NOST was developed in 2007, and joined NAZ in 2008.

As previously described, NAZ is a collection of community organizations and schools working in partnership with North Minneapolis families within a particular geographically bounded area of North Minneapolis. NAZ aims to end multi-generational poverty within North Minneapolis by providing comprehensive support for families from cradle-to-career. Its work ranges from housing to health care to community development to education (prenatal to college) to career development. In 2011, NAZ received a \$28 million dollar Promise Neighborhood Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, furthering the NAZ and Promise Neighborhood mission of transforming distressed communities through high-quality education and comprehensive services for children, youth, and families (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

What began as NOST is now known as the NAZ Expanded Learning (ExL) Action Team. NAZ ExL programs are diverse in nature, and are housed in places ranging from schools to community centers to churches. Multiple after-school programs across North Minneapolis have committed to the NAZ mission and have fully partnered with NAZ ExL. Full partners must follow the NAZ ExL Action Plan, use specific curricula for mathematics and reading, and report specific data back to NAZ. However, other community programs work with NAZ ExL but have varying levels of commitment to the organization and their mission. For example, a program may follow the academic requirements of NAZ ExL programs but may not share their scholars' progress data with NAZ.

Although this network of youth workers has evolved since 2007, the relationship between the community and the University of Minnesota has remained strong. Despite a lack of funding, these two partners have continued to work together to solve practical problems on an as-needed basis. For example, over the past year, a faculty member and his advisees have been working with the NAZ ExL Action Team to develop and evaluate social-emotional programming, and to integrate social-emotional learning benchmarks into the ExL Action Plan.

V. A short anecdote that reveals how the program is embodied/enfleshed/enacted in relationship. It could be the story of a life, or a relationship, or a mistake, but just something to hold onto to give a sense of the program as lived in/not static.

When we began the work after NOST came together and developed their plan, we offered to write a proposal that would offer professional development opportunities for NOST youth workers. The group was excited about the possibility of organizing a set of workshops, but eventually the work "died" without doing the workshops because the program heads had not sufficiently checked with the directors of their organizations, and those individuals often were already seeking funds from the foundation to which we were planning on submitting our proposal for professional development. It turned out that UM people went ahead and provided some workshops, but without funds we were not able to provide a stipend and lunches to the youth workers attending. It also was the case that a year later, we did partner with NOST to develop youth programming. It points out the importance of building trust as well as linking back to existing structures.

VI. What makes the program sustainable? What makes the program vulnerable? What threats to the program's vitality exist? What dilemmas of practice is the program facing?

The partnership is sustainable due to the shared interests among researchers at the University of Minnesota and practitioners in NAZ, open lines of communication, identification of work that could be sustained without external funds, and friendly relationships among University and NAZ personnel. However, the partnership is vulnerable due to high turnover rates at NAZ and NAZ partners (particularly among youth workers but, more importantly for our project, among program leadership staff), varying commitment levels of NAZ partners, and uncertainty about future NAZ funding.

VII. The Edges of the Project – Where the project hopes to go, what is happening that might be beyond expectations (dangerous or exciting).

At the present time, the University and NAZ are still exploring future directions for our partnership. We seem to be settling into a role probably fairly typical of community-university partnerships in which we provide conceptual and methodological guidance, reviewing research and identifying instruments for assessment, and in which we become external evaluators for NAZ programming.

References:

U.S. Department of Education. (2013). Promise neighborhoods. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html#description>

The FIPSE-UROC Project. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2015, from <http://uroc.umn.edu/programs/archive/fipse/index.html>