TOWN-GOWN RELATIONS

Recommendations for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Town of Chapel Hill to Advance Along the Community Engagement Continuum

ULEAD PROJECT

Universities and the towns in which they reside have an interdependent relationship. However, despite promoting work with local communities as part of their strategic plans, universities decision-making processes in community-based programs are often one-sided. What considerations should the university programs take to cultivate true partnerships with its community?

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INTRODUCTION

As specified by North Carolina General Statute 116, Article 1, the purpose of the University of North Carolina is to be dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people. This extends beyond just the students, faculty, and staff of the institution to include the public. The statute specifies public service as part of the mission of the university and clarifies this to be that which “contributes to the solution of societal problems and enriches the quality of life in the State.” This mandate provides the legal basis for public universities in North Carolina to maintain close partnerships with their local communities, but there are practical reasons as well.

Universities and the towns in which they are located are dependent on each other as a means to draw residents, faculty, staff, and students (Gavazzi, 2018). More specifically, a university relies on having a nice town to grow tuition revenue and attract high-caliber employees, and the town relies on the university to increase tax revenue and provide high-quality employment opportunities for its residents. In addition, sharing of services and infrastructure costs can save money for both entities (Celis, 1992). However, the physical presence of a university within a town can also create challenges, particularly a strain on things like transportation, housing, and parking (Crawford, 2014).

These important but often complicated relationships are aptly dubbed town-gown relations. The health of these relationships are the result of actions taken by leaders in both the university and the community and must be made a high priority (Gavazzi, 2018). This is not only demonstrated in the literature, but also as part of the legislative mandate for the University of North Carolina.

Due to the complexity, understanding these relationships and what makes them work can be difficult, in particular when the university has more social and economic power relative to their community (Ellis, 2019). The approach undertaken to understand the current relationship between the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Town of Chapel Hill was based on a review of practices at model universities, research on current initiatives and involvement between the university and town, a survey of leadership at UNC-Chapel Hill and in the Town of Chapel Hill, as well as conversations with key individuals tasked with community engagement.

An assessment tool, shown on the next page, was used throughout the analysis to assist in conceptualizing the town-gown relationships. This tool is a continuum of community engagement that describes varying levels of community involvement, and was useful in providing a measurement-oriented assessment that could be used as the basis for the recommendations (McCloskey, 2015).

Our findings concluded that the current relationship between UNC Chapel Hill and the Town of Chapel Hill is a positive one, characterized by cooperation, sharing of information, and university participation within the community. This report includes recommendations for consideration intended to move the relationship towards forming bidirectional communication channels and strong community partnerships.
## Community Engagement Continuum

### Increasing Level of Community Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outreach</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Shared Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some community involvement</td>
<td>More community involvement</td>
<td>Better community involvement</td>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>Strong bidirectional relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication flows from one to the other</td>
<td>Communication flows to the community and then back, answer seeking</td>
<td>Communication flows both ways, participatory form of communication</td>
<td>Communication flow is bidirectional</td>
<td>Final decision making is at community level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides community with information</td>
<td>Gets information or feedback from the community</td>
<td>Involves more participation with community on issues</td>
<td>Forms partnerships with community on each aspect of project from development to solution</td>
<td>Entities have formed strong partnership structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entities coexist</td>
<td>Entities share information</td>
<td>Entities cooperate with each other</td>
<td>Entities form bidirectional communication channels</td>
<td>Entities have formed strong partnership structures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Framework adapted from Community Engagement Definition and Concepts which was modified from the International Association for Public Participation
COMPARISON UNIVERSITIES

Two universities were selected to serve as comparison models. This approach allowed for a deeper dive into understanding what makes a town-gown relationship successful and why. While a literature review helps to recognize overarching principles, a specific look into individual universities allows for discovery of more detailed practices that could be easily implemented at other institutions. Selected comparisons were both research institutions and stood out as having notable town-gown relations.

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

Clemson is a research university with over 20,000 students located in the small town of Clemson, South Carolina, and has been rated number one in “Town/Gown Relationship” by Princeton Review for six consecutive years (Clemson, 2014). The similarities in size to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, small-medium town location, and town-gown ranking made it an ideal choice for a comparison university.

The primary driver for the highly ranked relationship appears to have stemmed from a personal relationship between the former mayor, Larry Abernathy, who served in that role for 28 years, and his former classmate James Barker, who was the university president from 1999 to 2013 (Simon, 2019). The two met regularly, and Abernathy went on to found the International Town and Gown Association, which serves as a resource for best practices to strengthen town-gown partnerships.

However, now that the university has brought in a new president, James Clements, the relationship has changed. The Board of Trustees have directed the new president to be more focused on fundraising and nationally-facing, which leaves less time to focus on the town (Simon, 2019). The new mayor, JC Cook characterized the relationship as: “Now it is more like two businesses than a marriage...two businesses can get along and make things work, but it doesn’t work with the same harmony.” While the relationship between the former president and mayor was strong, the lack of formality let to a breakdown when new leaders assumed the roles.

Recent frustrations between the town of Clemson and the university have stemmed around infrastructure, student housing, business, and communication. This has been intensifies by growth in the student population as well as the dramatic differences in the resources; the university’s budget is 52 times the size of the city’s (Simon, 2019).

The relationship does still retain some of its positive aspects, including a Joint City/University Advisory Board that is made up of an equal number of city employees and university representatives (Clemson, 2014). Johnson Link, who has served on the advisory board and was both the chief of police for the city and university in the past suggests that the committee works best when they have a project to focus on (Simon, 2019). The City of Clemson Comprehensive Plan outlines that in an environment of rising costs and budget cuts, cities and universities are still looking for ways to achieve greater economies of scale and to share costs (Clemson, 2014), providing some insight into ways that the town-gown relationship can still add value even when communication and relationships are suffering.

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

One of the ways the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill measures its success and progress towards its mission and strategic framework goals is to monitor trends and performance as compared to peer institutions. The University of Utah in Salt Lake City is a peer institution that has a Carnegie
Classification for being one of the research universities with the highest levels of externally funded research activity. Much like UNC Chapel Hill, it is the flagship institution of its state and carries a legacy of innovation, collaboration, community engagement, and service, echoing the values and priorities here at UNC. Research of models and best practices in community engagement yielded several innovative and successful examples at the University of Utah that reflect their intentionality and commitment to community engagement. According to the Field Guide for Urban University-Community Partnerships released by the Thriving Cities Lab at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, the University of Utah is paving the way as a “frontier of the movement” in the areas of community-driven partnerships and community-based research (Yates & Acardi, 2019).

The President of the University of Utah appointed a special position tasked with campus-community outreach and engagement. The impetus for this was based on a desire to reduce barriers to higher education for the local residents, especially in the West Side community, in order to keep up with changing demographics, needs, and trends that were not currently represented in the student body. After nine months of listening sessions, 300 interviews of key community stakeholders including residents, leaders, and organizations, priorities were formed based on community-identified needs. A major result of this undertaking was the establishment of a place-based center intended to serve as a convener of university and community partnerships that address the identified needs of residents in the community. University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) Hartland Partnership Center was formed and housed directly in the West Side community of Salt Lake City, a community chosen for its assets, growth potential, and mutual interest in engaging with the University. Since its inception in 2001, over 100 community partners and 40 University departments have formed 60 formal partnerships involving 40% of members of the West Side community (Byrne & Diener, 2018).

Community engagement initiatives and opportunities are extensive and communicated broadly to the University of Utah campus and greater community. For example, there’s a direct link to Community on the Utah homepage that takes you to many Community Outreach opportunities relevant to both University and community residents, including UNP. On the UNP page there are annual reports, priorities, and values that are easily accessible providing transparency regarding impact and progress towards goals for anyone interested. Additionally, UNP established one of the largest community-based research grants ($20,000), as compared to peers, available to fund cross-disciplinary campus and community collaborative research and channeled it through their Office of the Vice President for Research for maximum clout, accessibility, and sustainability (Yates & Acardi, 2019). This level of transparency and prioritization of community-driven outcomes stand out as an ideal model.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM COMPARISON SCHOOLS**

From our peers, valuable lessons have emerged that can inform UNC and Chapel Hill’s context for community engagement. Clemson University and the relationship between the president and mayor demonstrated the importance of formalizing the relationship between town and gown. While organic relationships can form effective partnerships that last years, structure needs to be in place to maintain the relationship throughout major transitions and turnover. Part of forming this intentional relationship relies on keeping an open flow of communication between entities. Even when communication is effective, friction can lead to a breakdown of effective partnerships. Clemson revealed that in these times it is important to focus on projects that are both time and cost efficient, mutually beneficial, and that meet the priorities of both entities. Similarly Utah demonstrated the importance of determining a university’s level of commitment as well as the level of interest the community has in engaging with a university. In both cases, the university should focus on community-identified needs and priorities to
sustain a high level of community engagement. Partnerships, initiatives, opportunities, and impact should be shared and communicated broadly to ensure accessibility, accountability, and engagement of key stakeholders.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was the first public university in the United States. It was chartered in 1789 and the cornerstone of the first building was laid in 1793. The first students arrived in 1795 (UNC Chapel Hill, 2019). The University is located within the Town of Chapel Hill was founded in 1793. The Town includes, Orange, Chatham, and Durham counties. Over the years, the University continued to grow by adding additional buildings and majors (UNC Executive Development, 2014).

In recent history, specifically, 1990 to the 2007 recession, the University and the Town of Chapel Hill experienced relationship challenges and were at odds on many issues. This was due to ongoing major university construction projects and the town population growing rapidly. From 1990 to 2015, the Town’s population grew from approximately 39,000 to over 65,000 people. Most of the growth was attributed to increased student body and faculty. The Town was very concerned that The University would request that the legislature intercede and prohibit the Town from regulating University property expansion. In contrast, the University felt the Town was being shortsighted and not considering the long-term benefits to the growth.

During The Great Recession (2007 – 2009), both the University and Town experienced financial challenges. The University felt the effects because the per student higher education funding had been reduced by 20%. The Town was experiencing increased business closures on Franklin Street. These financial struggles along with other challenges during the recession encouraged collaboration between the University and the Town. They both realized partnering and leveraging each other made them both stronger. Both parties were moving toward alignment with each other to better serve the student and town population (Foulkes, 2015).

“WE CAN’T THINK OF OURSELVES AS SEPARATE FROM THE TOWN. OUR UNIVERSITY IS ONLY AS HEALTHY AND STRONG AS THE COMMUNITY THAT SURrounds US. THEY DEPEND ON Us, AND WE DEPEND ON THEM.”
– FORMER CHANCELLOR, CAROL FOLT

“The Town benefits from a strong University, and the University benefits from a strong School.”
– FORMER TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL MAYOR, MAYOR MARK KLEINSCHMIDT
DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis consisted of interviews and a survey developed and administered by our team. The goal was to obtain information regarding personal opinions of the current relationship between the university and town. We also wanted to learn about some of the current shared initiatives. The survey was disseminated to over 40 members of the university and town community. We received a total of 14 respondents.

Survey Findings (UNC Respondents, n=6)

Data was collected from various groups throughout the University, representing Operations, Communications, Athletics, and Community Relations. At least half of UNC respondents agreed that the current strengths of the town-gown relationship include communication (67%), engagement of team members (67%) and respect and trust (50%) (Chart 1). Communication has increased between the university and town to keep each respective entity informed of various shared and independent initiatives. As a result, members of both sides feel more engaged and experience mutual respect and trust.

Chart 1: Strengths in the Community

Although the university and town agree on relationship strengths, they also agreed on areas for development. More than half of UNC respondents agreed areas of development include different mindsets (67%), no goal alignment (67%), and persisting organizational silos (50%) (See Chart 2).
When asked to rate the relationship between the university and town, the average rating among UNC respondents was 7 out of 10. Most UNC respondents feel that while much work has been done to communicate, partner and collaborate with the town, more can be done to maximize the strength of the relationship. Some feel additional stakeholders should be included across the university community that are not currently involved.

**STRUCTURE**

The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill is a large university. As of 2018, it contains 12,652 employees and 30,011 students. As a result, it can be challenging to centralize operations and support. According to interviews conducted, UNC departments organize and lead their own community engagement. Departments have autonomy and determine what, who, when, and how they will engage with the surrounding town. However, there are key roles within the university that have responsibility of streamlining this massive effort at a university wide level. Those roles include:

- **Director of Community Relations** – tasked with serving as the liaison between the University and the Town. Also leads a University workgroup that includes key departments involved in community engagement efforts.
- **Director of Communications** – responsible for coordinating communications at a University level, including internal and external communications.
- **Director of the Carolina Center for Public Service** – facilitates the engagement and support of the faculty, students, and staff of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in meeting the community needs of North Carolina and beyond. The center serves as a central place for all within the university to determine how they want to serve the community (Young, 2019).
REPRESENTATION/SHARED INITIATIVES

As outlined previously, UNC respondents agreed that there is high engagement between the university and town. The university is very visible and active on many workgroups and committees with the town business community. UNC leadership is involved with the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Partnership, Visitors Bureau Board, Orange County Economic Development Board, and others. However, there is less university representation on the community/resident-level workgroups and committees. The university recognizes this opportunity and is working to develop plans to integrate within residential community boards and workgroups.

Despite less university representation on community/resident committees and workgroups, there are several shared initiatives between the university and the town that involve all levels of the university and town community. A few highlights are below:

LaUNCH Incubator

A shared initiative that was founded in 2013. It is a business accelerator and co-working space that provides resources for businesses in Orange County. It is a joint funding effort between Orange County, Town of Chapel Hill & Carrboro, and the University to allow businesses to participate in a 16-week program that occurs twice each year. The goal of the program is to increase the growth of high-impact start-up and early stage ventures in the community. While in the program, participating businesses receive mentorship, office space and amenities, learning opportunities, technical resources and networking opportunities. To date, over 75 companies have been successfully launched (Launch Chapel Hill, n.d.).

Good Neighbor Initiative

The Good Neighbor Initiative (GNI) is a partnership between the Town of Chapel Hill, UNC Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro, EmPowerment Inc., the Jackson Center, and other community partners. The goal is to promote positive living experiences in communities shared with students and existing community residents. The motto is “Be kind, be mindful, be a good neighbor.” The initiative began in 2004 with an effort by the Chapel Hill Police Department to make door-to-door visits to student-rental properties in the Northside and Pine Knolls neighborhoods that had been trouble spots for loud noise and disruptive behavior. More communities have been added over the years since the GNI inception. Today, neighborhoods include Northside, Pine Knolls, Cameron-McCauley, Lloyd-Broad in Carrboro, North Street, Davie Circle, and the Dawes Street/Coolidge St areas. Under the GNI umbrella are several initiatives that countless community volunteers and University representatives collaborate to achieve. These include a door-to-door walk, community cookout, neighborhood education and advocacy team, Tar Heel Citizen Times newsletter, and party registration (Town of Chapel Hill, 2019).
**Three Zeros Initiative**

In 2006, the University and the Town became the first town-gown partners to commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2050. In 2016, the university launched an integrated approach to reducing its environmental footprint through three sustainability goals: net zero water usage; zero waste to landfills; and net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

**Net zero water usage** – use less potable water than falls on campus annually as precipitation.

The University has participated in innovative sustainable water management practices and conservation efforts. These practices have reduced potable water consumption by 46%, or more than 300 million gallons annually, since 2000, all while the campus population continues to grow. The University is recognized internationally for its water management practices and progress.

**Zero waste to landfills** – minimizing waste on campus and recovering reusable resources.

University actions to reuse and recycle campus waste have significantly reduced the total amount of waste UNC sends to the landfill. In 2017, the University diverted 5,814 tons from the landfill.

**Net zero greenhouse gas emissions** – reducing emissions through improving efficiency on campus, reducing coal use, increasing on-campus renewable energy and by working toward a strategy to purchase renewable energy.

Finding innovative renewable energy solutions, streamlining operations, individual choices to save energy, and new high-performance buildings have all contributed to reducing energy and greenhouse gas emissions.

The University is very active with the Town of Chapel Hill and surrounding community. Departments have organized numerous activities to engage with the community. As the university continues to streamline and leverage internal departments, increased community engagement will continue (UNC Chapel Hill, 2019).

**TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL**

In order to recommend improvements to the town-gown relationship between the Town of Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, it is important to also look at that relationship from the perspective of the town. However, defining failures, successes, and opportunities relies on the definition of “community”. For the purposes of our work, we have focused on the official town government as a source of information, but we recognize there are communities throughout the town that, although they are officially represented by the town government, may not be fully represented in our assessment as it relates to the needs, impacts, and values of various initiatives described herein.

“THIS STRUCTURE SHOULD EMBRACE A BROADER DEFINITION OF NEIGHBORHOODS TO INCLUDE COMMUNITIES WITHOUT A GEOGRAPHIC BORDER, SUCH AS THE “COMMUNITY OF APARTMENT DWELLERS,” WHO LIVE IN MANY GEOGRAPHIC AREAS. OTHER SUCH EXAMPLES OF “COMMUNITY” EXIST IN THE GREATER CHAPEL HILL COMMUNITY.” – 2020 TOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
The Town of Chapel Hill’s relationship with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is a complex and deeply interwoven symbiosis of impacts, initiatives, and values that are easy to enumerate but difficult to encapsulate.

DATA ANALYSIS

The primary source of information used in the analysis of the town is the website, townofchapelhill.org. A cursory look at the website yields little insight into this relationship with only one reference that trends toward education and, possibly, the university, in a heading titled “Students”:

Following this link, there is another link to “UNC Chapel Hill” that redirects to the homepage of the University. The first internal reference related to the university is, “College Students”, which leads to an informative webpage for students who live off-campus. This includes a reference to The Good Neighbor Initiative.

However, this information does not grant insight into the actual inner workings of the relationship between the town and university. Specifically, information that attends to highly valuable points of interest in the relationship between the university and the town such as economic development, education, housing, public transportation, public safety, etc. These points of interest are attended by individuals operating within an official capacity and organizational structure in the Town of Chapel Hill. To assess the relationship, we must find information about the combined work that is being done.

A deeper look into the town website yielded a stark contrast between two valuable documents. The most recent “Community Survey” from April 2018 has no questions about the university or impacts of the University on the community (ETC Institute, 2018). At the same time, the “Chapel Hill 2020 Comprehensive Plan” mentions the university on average every other page (Town of Chapel Hill, 2012). Clearly there is an understanding of the value of the relationship, although there is no data-driven source from which to derive a baseline for future improvements. This is summed up succinctly in the “Big Ideas” section of the 2020 plan with the simple bullet “Grow Town and Gown Collaboration”. This is an aspirational statement with no details on how to go about such a process. The lack of specific structure coupled with a minimal prevalence on the official website highlights a clear gap that can be filled. To begin the process, we submitted a survey to members of the town government to get a sense of strengths and weaknesses in the relationship.

SURVEY RESULTS

Since there was no existing source of data whereby to measure the relationship, they survey that was sent to members of the university leadership was also sent to the Town of Chapel Hill. When asked to
rate the relationship on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “non-existent” and 10 meaning there was no room for improvement, respondents from the town scored the relationship at an average of 6.

**Table 1: Town Survey Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Three Strengths</th>
<th>Top Three Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Organizational Silos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Team Members</td>
<td>Knowledge Gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect and Trust</td>
<td>Lack of Goal Alignment</td>
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These findings lined up very closely with the responses to the survey from members of the university. A regular survey with more qualitative responses would be a helpful assessment for university and town stakeholders to better understand trends in the relationship. This could inform decisions related to the relationship, so efforts are made to specifically address the weaknesses and gauge any changes to better understand the successes and failures of the numerous shared initiatives and efforts.

We also asked respondents to list out any current initiatives they are aware of that provide shared value between the University and Town. The results are summarized by topic:

**Table 2: Shared Initiatives Reported by Town Survey Responses**

- Housing
- Community Outreach
- Community Relations
- Game-Day Operations
- “Arts Everywhere”
- Entrepreneurship
- Public Transit
- Infrastructure
- Downtown
- Waste Management
- Parking
- Environmental Initiatives
- Events and Facilities
- Tourism
- Leadership Development

**CONVERSATION WITH THE MAYOR**

Based on the research into Clemson University cited previously, there is clear value in the relationship between the leadership of the university and the leadership of the town. To understand some of these insights, we sat down with the Mayor of Chapel Hill, Pam Hemminger, to talk through the relationship (Hemminger, 2019).

**Takeaways from the Conversation with the Mayor:**

1. The town and university are intertwined; people live and work together, so there is big value in the transit system and downtown businesses.
2. The town’s relationship with the university is often bridged in an organic way and there are no mechanisms in place to structure the relationship.
3. The Mayor has asked to receive all official university communications, but she only receives what is chosen to be sent directly to her.
4. It would be beneficial to the town if the university placed a specific priority on local community projects. For example, if the university were to dictate that 20% of all community-based projects take place in the town of Chapel Hill.
5. The university stakeholders who the Mayor interacts with all maintain a great working relationship with her.
6. Dealing with UNC is complex. The town has to work with the Board of Governors and UNC Hospitals in distinct ways that create challenges in the relationship.

7. The town is not involved in the search for a new chancellor and would welcome the opportunity to participate.

8. Lack of involvement leads to lost opportunities. For example, the university told the town that they wanted the town to participate in master planning for the university, but the next time it came up was when the university gave the town the master plan.

9. The university provides an orientation packet to town council members each year to inform them about the University and particular stakeholders of interest.

10. The town would like to have more representation on relevant university committees and workgroups.

11. High turnover at the university puts a strain on the relationship.

12. The Mayor is invited to and involved in numerous campus events, particularly alumni events.

13. Parking is a point of interest as it hasn’t been fully coordinated between the university and town. For example, when the University started requiring permits to park on campus after-hours, the town was not informed, and there was a big impact on parking downtown that was unplanned for.

14. There is a great deal of effort and collaboration around public safety, technology, and entrepreneurship.

15. The Mayor believes the current interim chancellor, Kevin Guskiewicz, is a great partner as he has been a part of the Chapel Hill community for many years.

16. Student housing is a big point of emphasis that should be an ongoing discussion between the university and town.

SUMMARY

The Town of Chapel Hill, much in the same way as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is aware of the intrinsic shared value gained from a positive town-gown relationship. Overall, the belief of the stakeholders is that the relationship is positive but has room for improvement. There is no clear, formalized, structured emphasis on this relationship. Instead, the relationship is developed in a decentralized, organic manner. The relationship relies on the efforts of individuals to ensure that the town and university are consulted on a regular basis for any and all relevant efforts being undertaken by one or the other. This results in a relationship that is difficult to quantify, and therefore, difficult to assess or make recommendations for improvement upon. Due to the current nature of the relationship, there is no single point of entry to gather data to assess the relationship in an ongoing manner. Our recommendations will provide guidance to assist in formalizing the relationship to capture data on the various initiatives and impacts, leading to a relationship that can be tracked and assessed to contribute to a process of continual improvement in the future.
ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT RELATIONSHIP

In order to make recommendations for improvement, we must establish a baseline assessment of the level of involvement that best describes the relationship within the Community Engagement Continuum. Based on the data available to us, our findings and an assessment of the nature of collaboration, communication, and equity of involvement between the town and university, the current relationship is best understood to be in the range of “Consult” and “Involve”. The volume of shared initiatives coupled with the participatory nature of communications clearly speaks to the “Involve” level of community engagement. Our findings did, however, identify enough instances of “sharing” of information rather than “cooperation”, as well as a lack of gathering of information or feedback from the community” that would speak directly to the “Consult” level of community engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the assessment of programs, initiatives, and practices found at Clemson, Utah, UNC Chapel Hill, and the Town of Chapel Hill, we ask that UNC and the Town of Chapel Hill take the following recommendations under consideration.

In thinking about the importance of relationships at the individual, group, and partnership levels, as well as the tangible projects and initiatives shared currently between UNC and the town, communication is the main tool that flows between and determines the strength of these. In order to move towards “Collaborate”, the next level in the Community Engagement Framework, communication is key.

When functioning under the “Collaborate” level of engagement, we should find that a university and town have community involvement, bidirectional communication flow and channels, and partnerships formed from inception to implementation stages of development (McCloskey, 2015).
In order for our town and university to do this, it is recommended that UNC Chapel Hill and the Town of Chapel Hill should consider:

1. **Ways to centralize efforts and visibility.** Based on takeaways from Utah, Town of Chapel Hill leadership, and perusing the websites embedded in our local town and university sites, we recommend the creation of a centralized website dedicated solely to the relationship between UNC and the Town of Chapel Hill. This would serve as a place to gather and assess what is currently underway, as well as further promote opportunities for local projects and engagement. Along these lines, we would recommend moving towards establishing a formal entity that coordinates efforts of the initiatives themselves on behalf of priorities on both sides.

2. **Forming more intentional and relying less on organic relationships and initiatives.** From Clemson and Utah, we learned the valuable lessons of structure and intentional engagement. From our UNC and town interviews and survey data we learned the importance of representation on both sides. We recommend taking tangible steps in this area by increasing and diversifying community membership on relevant campus boards & committees; including not only town leaders but also inviting community residents, community leaders, and organizations to serve as representatives on relevant boards; and including input from the beginning stages of project development throughout, in order to encourage a consultation rather than informing role of involvement and representation.

3. **Encouraging the bidirectional flow of official communications.** UNC should consider opening access to official UNC messaging to members of the town leadership, and other community leaders and residents as appropriate.

While the above recommendations are intended to be tangible action items the university and town can begin to take towards fostering Collaboration, we have also developed a process-orientated recommendation plan. Based on the evaluation of model practices and our local context, we recommend the implementation of the “4As” to strengthen the town-gown relationship:

1. **Assess** – The ongoing assessment of the Town and Gown relationship and initiatives will provide information and awareness about current levels of engagement.

2. **Align** – Aligning the goals of both the town and university will serve to leverage campus and community stakeholders as well as resources.
3. **Act** – Involve stakeholders at all levels of the community and maintain bidirectional communication to develop credibility, uplift voices, and outline clear structure for participation.

4. **Advocate** – Provide proactive and informed support through intentional and authentic relationships.

## CONCLUSION

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Town of Chapel Hill have a tremendous amount of synergy, creativity, and resources, perhaps unparalleled by other "college towns." This is evidenced by the data we collected from both town and university stakeholders that drew almost identical conclusions about where we are, and where we can grow, as well as the many initiatives that are already on the ground and running. Let's work strategically, and intentionally to centralize our data, goals, efforts, and communication to move towards the next level of engagement, ensuring our greater community's success and future.
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Young, K. S. (2019, October 8). UNC Town-Gown Interview. (N. Roberston, Interviewer)