

# **The Dynamics of University/City Government Relationships: It's Personal**

Joanne E. Curry

## **Abstract**

The rich potential of university/city government relationships is often overwhelmed by day-to-day conflicts over everything from planning and land use to transportation and noise. Such disputes—even a single, unresolved incident—can create an enduring narrative of antagonism that undermines the relationship ongoing. Leveraging recent doctoral research contrasting two case studies, this paper discusses the importance of history and context and describes management processes that can build trust and lead to a mutual strategic purpose.

## **Introduction**

Universities and their host city governments share a love of place and both are increasingly interested in the potential for universities to serve as crucial anchor institutions in urban and metropolitan areas. Universities can assume a variety of roles in economic, social and cultural development and collaborations with city governments and community organizations can be mutually fulfilling. However, many researchers warn of the perils in collaborations. Huxham (2003, 420–421) comments that “making collaboration work effectively is highly resource-consuming and often painful. . . . Don’t do it unless you have to.” Harkavy (2000, 3) reflects that “to make the case for university/community partnerships is easy to do. The hard thing is to figure out how to do it. The hardest part of all, of course, is to actually get it done.” These statements resonate with those of us who have been involved in creating and sustaining partnerships. Their conclusions are also supported in the management literature on inter-organizational alliances, the public sector literature on collaboration, and the higher-education literature on university-community engagement.

In this paper, I will use the results of recent doctoral research involving a comparative case study of a Canadian university, Simon Fraser University, and two of its three host city governments.

I will explain how the context of the university and each city, the record of historical incidents, and the created story of the university/community relationships can continue to influence the relationship between a university and a city government. The paper also identifies the management and communication processes that are important. Two factors, the impact of the relationship between the university president and city mayor and the importance placed by city representatives on less formal interactions, will be highlighted as being among the greatest surprises from the research. The paper concludes with a list of the practical implications for city governments and universities.

The characteristics of the two case study cities is summarized in Table 1 (Curry, 2015, 50). This research included a literature review, extensive archival research, and twenty-six in-person interviews with university and city representatives at various organizational levels as well as with leaders of third-party organizations. The findings from the literature as well as the perspectives and voices of those interviewed are used throughout this paper.

Table 1

*Profile of SFU's Host Cities*

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>City One</b>	<b>City Two</b>
Population (2011)	223,218	468,251
Avg. annual growth rate (2006–2011)	10.1 percent	18.6 percent
Percent of population age 20 and below (2011)	19.8 percent	26 percent
Avg. family income (2011)	\$61,023	\$60,168
Jobs per resident worker (2006)	1.30	0.69
Foreign-born residents (2011)	50 percent	41 percent
Business tax base (% of overall base) (2010)	\$98,202,458 (52.2 percent)	\$65,779,849 (31.5 percent)
Population 20 years & over with university degree (2006)	29.5 percent	16.4 percent
SFU student population resident in city (2013)	6,387 (21.3 percent of total)	4,373 (14.6% percent total)
SFU faculty & staff resident in city (2013)	1,705 (25.3 percent of total)	478 (7.1 percent of total)

**City Governments and Universities: An Unusual Relationship**

The relationship between a university and its host city is substantially different from other inter-organizational alliances commonly explored in the literature. University/city relationships can span centuries and university campuses are uniquely permanent elements in the urban fabric. Even over a short period of time, key participants in those relationships can change with great frequency, given election cycles and fixed-term positions for many university senior administrators. Universities are also highly decentralized. The interaction between universities and external entities can occur at various levels of the institution, including at the level of the president's office, through departments and research centers and also at the level of individual faculty and staff members. The stance of city governments towards its dealings with external organizations and the dynamic of the working relationship between elected city officials and staff can also affect the relationship.

Another impact of the long-term nature of the university/city relationship is that changes in the strategic purpose that can occur over time (Koza & Lewin, 2000). This is in contrast with private-sector inter-organizational alliances in which the strategic purpose may be known from the outset and usually is the impetus for entering into the alliance. Thus, with university/city

relationships, both organizations need to develop processes to adjust to changes and to take advantage of emergent opportunities and strategies.

My recent thesis (Curry, 2015) contrasted two case studies to illuminate how university/city relationships can go beyond being a transactional or operational focus and evolve to a partnership that is strategic and “transformational” (Goddard & Kempton, 2011; Petter, *et al.*, 2015). Transactional activities and low-level disputes, such as a challenging zoning submission, can create stresses that discourage the development of a higher-level partnership. On the other hand, a more strategic partnership can help resolve transactional activities, as small issues are more likely to be dealt with positively if the partnership is viewed as strategic and long-term. The increasing interest by both city governments and universities in expanding roles and activities in regional economic development (Benneworth, 2010) can create the opening to redefine a university/city relationship.

The goal of my thesis was to understand the “doing of collaboration” and the specific management processes that are important for developing and maintaining (or re-establishing) trust and for building confidence in the university/city collaboration. In related research, Wagstaff (2013, 9) had distinguished between the structure and process of collaboration – the “way things are done.” He identified the importance of paying attention to “the more subtle and nuanced aspects of the partnership that ultimately contribute to the quality of the relationship. There is a requirement for relationship building, flexibility and creativity, cross-cultural skill, patience and perseverance. . . . It is in the less clearly differentiated, more ambiguous relational aspects of the partnership that the seeds of success or failure are sown.” Thomson and Perry (2006) have also identified this area of activity as a gap in the literature, calling for further research to make sense of “the black box of collaboration.”

### **The Influence of History and Key Incidents**

And when he comes, you see . . . he’s stepping [on] to some ice that he’s never seen before, but underneath it is the legacy of this relationship. . . . It’s right there, and he has to find out. . . what was underneath the ice in a place where [he’s] never been.  
(Faculty member)

Within the bureaucracy of the city, I think there were long memories; [that] would be my guess. And maybe there were blow-ups over some of the things we did up here . . . there was somebody there who wanted to drag the anchor for quite a while. (Former university president)

As the literature suggests (Davies, 1998), and as these two case studies support, when it comes to the potential for collaborative success between a university and its community, context is everything. The history of the university/city relationship is especially relevant in affecting the success (or failure) of joint economic development activities and even the willingness to pursue a deeper collaboration.

The case studies in question were with two different cities. In the first (City One), the relationship dated from the founding of the university in 1965, whereas the second (City Two) concerned a campus that was just over a decade old at the time of the research. These two cities had vastly different local economic contexts. City One was completely confident of its ability to attract economic activity, irrespective of its relationship with the university (“We got a guy with a big stick, and he beats off the businesses we don’t want. . . . I mean, it sounds a

bit cocky, but it's a bit true. . . . This place attracts business, and you really can be a little bit picky and choosy as to which businesses you facilitate" [City staff member]). City Two, on the other hand, was managing a negative public perception, primarily due to safety concerns, and a corresponding challenge in attracting businesses. This—and the absence of any historic grievances with the university—meant that the city government quickly recognized the initial benefit of the university's presence in rebranding the city and attracting investment.

In the case of City One, the fifty-year history featured long periods of peaceful co-existence and lack of appreciation for one another interspersed with a few episodes of significant conflict. The history was carefully documented in the thesis using archival research, internal and external correspondence from the office of the president and newspaper articles of announcements and controversies. The documentation revealed ups and downs—and “ins and outs”—as one or both partners made efforts to nurture the relationship. Periods of inactivity would be followed by the arrival of a new president or mayor who would reach out to correct past irritations or advance initiatives that had stalled due to a poor relationship. These efforts often resulted in a resolution, after which a long period of peaceful co-existence was the norm.

The correspondence, and interviews with those involved during the past several decades, revealed several themes. First, in the university's early years, there was a constant struggle and resistance to municipal governance authority. University officials believed they should be able to build or make use of their campus lands without interference from the city government, whereas the city government was unsure of how to manage their new resident university:

The view of the university was that we could do whatever the hell we liked. And there was kind of arrogance on the part of the university. . . . [When we started to deal with them in a more kind of equal way and respected that they [the City] basically had the authority . . . when we finally kind of accepted that then worked on that, I think our relationships were really quite good. (Former university president)

Another theme was the belief among university representatives that the city government did not understand the role of a university and lacked appreciation of the university's contributions of time and funding and its potential role in economic development:

They have absolutely no appreciation whatsoever of the significance of the university to the municipality. (William G. Saywell [university president], to Bob Anderson [director of community economic development centre, personal communication, August 10, 1989].)

The research also revealed the fundamental and enduring impact of key negative incidents. Absent a formal mechanism to track the university/city relationship, critical information was “lost” in the university's institutional memory. For example, the city's original donation of over 1,000 acres of land on which the university was sited was forgotten over time. More than twenty years after the original donation, the city repurchased some of this land, at a cost of ten million Canadian dollars, in order to dedicate the land for park purposes. This resolution came after a very public and bitter battle, during which the university resisted reducing its land holding, given uncertainty about future needs. Only through this research has many of the current generation of University officials become aware of the original donation and the need to acknowledge the city's original—and significant—contribution.

The continual lack of acknowledgement of this donation, and likely other smaller incidents, contributed to the enduring story of a negative and unproductive relationship. And while the long-

serving mayor has come to terms with the cost of the land repurchase, the public battle appears to have left scars and reduced trust.

While the dispute in this case was a large one, discussions at practitioner conferences suggest that a series of smaller incidents can have a similar result. Memories, which can fail at critical times, can equally prevail over long periods when there are old wounds or even just vague recollections of mistrust or resentment. These can come to define the relationship in a way that is difficult to change.

### **The Importance of the Story of the Relationship**

Currall and Inkpen (2002) state that there is a socially constructed shared history between organizations that constitutes a collective orientation. In the City One case study, the dispute over the lands and subsequent indifference to the needs of the other organization engendered a shared impression of a poor relationship. This dominant narrative masked periodic small successes (“There is a history where we work together, but it doesn’t get a lot of play. It is more known in-house” [city mayor]). The legend of a poor relationship became a barrier in itself; staff in both organizations lost interest in identifying joint initiatives and there was no visible support from the leadership to take risks to pursue collaborative programs.

To move forward, it was suggested that the organizations needed to change the narrative:

Change the story. The hope is that the view [that the city wasn’t] fully compensated for the land has been overtaken by the fact that [there] is a successful community on the mountain [and] they benefit from the developing infrastructure and growing tax base. . . . We are not footloose. We are rooted here. We have to make it work. So even when it isn’t working, it’s working. (Third-party chief executive officer)

Stop thinking it’s adversarial. So, you know, how many meetings have you and I sat in and listened to the senior administrators at the university [complain about] [the city]. Stop it. As long as you do that, you perpetuate it and it’s them and us. So we are in this together, we don’t have to like the players to want to work together to an outcome that benefits everyone. . . . Break that cycle. (Unattributed)

Even in the City Two case study in which the city-university relationship was trumpeted as vital and successful, interviewees recognized the importance of a positive narrative: “It’s important to create that environment and to really demonstrate that there is a good working relationship. I think from that, people will realize that we have been working together, we are working together, and we’ll continue working together.” (City mayor)

### **The Cultural Divide**

Given the challenges and perils facing a university/city government relationship, it is easy to see how relationships falter so frequently. In addition to fissures resulting from historical conflicts, the cultural divide can hamper understanding between the parties. Senior leaders from cities and the university highlighted this divide:

I think a lot of politicians are uncomfortable in the presence of academics. . . . And so you’re seen as [a] bit of an exotic creature in the minds of people that you’re dealing with in city hall, even though many of them are more sophisticated and more talented than you are. But there [has] always been this distance. . . . (former university president)

Many universities are not the best partners. They are used running their own show. They are used to being a senior partner. . . . I think that can undermine or contaminate relationships with municipalities. On the other hand, municipalities may not fully appreciate or understand the needs of universities, and that can cause difficulties too. (University president)

They [city governments] manage themselves really well. They did not need a university or anybody else who felt kind of uppity to suggest to them what their relationship ought to be like. (Former university president)  
[It's] not easy for every peasant to be part of the Olympus [referencing mountaintop location of university and socioeconomic distance] (unattributed).

If you are naturally inclined to be academic, you tend to associate with people who come from that kind of background. If you are more inclined to be a people person . . . then you tend to be more interested and engaged in that kind of area. (City mayor)

This cultural divide needs to be bridged and a commitment to collaboration can help to create the appropriate level of expectations for the relationship.

### **Committing to Collaboration and Setting Expectations**

Holland (2005) summarizes the principles and characteristics of effective university/community partnerships published by several organizations. The common elements include attention to communication patterns and relationships of mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment. My research supported the importance of these principles and characteristics in the two case study relationships.

It takes commitment to overcome historical conflicts and bridge the cultural divide. Given the barriers, universities and cities need to ensure that someone is advocating for the collaboration. This is especially the case when excessively low or high expectations are pointedly counterproductive:

Really, maybe the relationships don't have to be great. Maybe it's enough that the kids get their education, they get their degree; they chug off to a job whether it is in Burnaby or Vancouver or Timbuktu and maybe that's enough. (Former university senior staff member)

The level of expectation about the benefits of a collaboration is important. Abodor (2005) found that trust-building can be a self-fulfilling prophecy in which initial expectations affect behavior and trust. There is an optimal level of expectations. Expectations that are too low, or too high, can be counterproductive. This vicious circle can also be expressed differently: the lack of commitment and limited interaction block familiarity, preventing the university from understanding the needs of the cities and discouraging cities from harnessing the university's intellectual and physical resources and its worldwide network. Lacking a track record of success, neither party is inclined to aim higher or take risks.

Well we have this center for community economic development, can it be useful?  
(Faculty member)

Representatives need to be assigned to nurture the relationship, especially in the early days ("There needs to be someone else who chooses [the city].") [Third-party chief executive

officer]). The commitment to assign personnel needs to be long-term. Given the tendency for a dominant narrative to undermine the impact of intermittent small successes, the level of interest and involvement has to be sustained. The worst starting point is to interact only when a decision is needed on a planning issue.

City and university representatives highlighted the importance of visibility and frequency of contact:

When I came on board, I guess that I was shocked [about] how bad the relationship was. . . . I remember the councillor was telling me, “Jeez, you know, the only time we ever [see] the university is when they come down off the mountain and want something from us, and once they [get] it, they go up and don’t come back.” And that was a pretty standard comment that I heard. (Former university senior staff member)

And in all fairness, I mean, a lot of people commute. . . . Their world revolves around getting off the mountain at 4:30. . . . I mean, if we’re a university that wants to be part of the community, engaged as [current president] has talked about, you have to have boots on the ground. You can’t really do it online or from 9:00 to 5:00. (Former university senior staff member)

You have to work at it; it’s like any relationship. I mean, the city is very sensitive when you disappear for a while. . . . I wouldn’t say it’s insecurity—that’s too strong of a word—but if [you] go away for a while, there’s a tendency of them to think . . . they don’t really need us anymore. (Former university senior staff member)

Mutuality—the two-way nature of the collaboration—was a theme that arose in the interviews. Often the starting point is for one organization to assist the other in an area that is not in their immediate self-interest. Enos and Morton (2003, pp. 20-41) outline a “self-to-shared interest” continuum that moves from a transactional partnership with discrete objectives to a transformational relationship, in which partners are able to empathize and accurately represent each other’s interests. As you move closer to transformational along the continuum, interpersonal relationships are deepened and significant risks are taken as institutional relationships are tested, resulting in mutual learning.

### **The Importance of Trust-Building**

Trust in a university/city government relationship must be built over time and the process is never permanent or complete. Huxham and Vangen’s (2005) trust-building loop was useful in explaining the unique situation of each case study relationship. There must be adequate trust for parties to be willing to take a risk and initiate a collaboration. As expectations are based on past behavior, Huxham and Vangen suggest beginning with modest and realistic immediate-term goals to reinforce trusting attitudes and build the foundation for more ambitious collaborations.

In situations where lack of trust might frustrate an ambitious collaboration, my research identified the need for an on-ramp to the trust-building loop. The on-ramp or transitional phase is necessary to resolve past conflicts, demonstrate commitment and support taking risks.

A key feature of the on-ramp is encouraging responsiveness to the needs of a collaborator. A record of responsiveness, especially when not based on self-interest, demonstrates the institution’s commitment to the collaboration. In the City Two case-study (featuring the newer,

more productive relationship), senior leadership helped to create an environment in which staff at all organizational levels were encouraged to be open, responsive and approachable – reaching out to individuals in the other organization for their expertise and support.

Sustaining trust is crucial – and difficult – as incidents occur, the environment changes, and primary representatives are replaced. The challenge is to sustain the trust-building loop by attending to the dynamics of collaboration and making constant adjustments in response to changes. Huxham and Vangen (2005) identify the management processes used to sustain the loop, including: managing dynamics; managing power imbalances; nurturing the collaborative relationships by paying attention to the management of communication; credit recognition; joint ownership; varying levels of commitment; and resolving conflicting views on aims and agendas.

### **The Relationship between the University President and City Mayor**

Establishing a good relationship between the university president and the mayor (or in some cases, the city manager) is often believed to be crucial to the relationship between a city government and university.

The relationship therefore has to be with the president [as] the symbolic ranking counterpart. So if that relationship . . . is kind of like the Chinese saying, you know it's the mandate of heaven, [if] that relationship is blessed, then other good things could follow. . . . Everything else is a reflection of how good the mayor and the president get along. Do they play golf together? (Faculty member).

Establishing a sense of personal connection and trust was actually very important to greasing the wheels. I mean, at the end of the day, things were going to be treated very professionally and very technically and very openly in terms of the zoning approvals and all the rest of it. But the establishment of the direct personal relationship and then of that liaison committee that met regularly was a very good thing. (Former university president)

However, in the two case studies, a good mayor/president relationship did not always advance or deepen the organizational relationship. In one case, a very close and collegial relationship did not translate into more support for joint projects or create a greater desire to pursue opportunities. In another case, a tense relationship between the mayor and president was mitigated as other senior administrators assumed primary liaison roles. However, in both cases, periodic involvement of the president or mayor was helpful and their lack of presence was noted:

They always sent a flunky, they always held back. . . . You need senior people involved—the president/vice-presidents and mayor/deputy mayor if this is a priority item. (unattributed).

In the City Two relationship, multiple layers of interaction were established during the first decade to pursue joint research projects and a variety of social and economic initiatives. These relationships emerged between and among a city manager, a campus administrator, a faculty dean and department head, as well as between individual faculty and staff members. In all cases, there was frequent contact and mutual support. Despite this layering of fruitful relationships, leadership from the mayor and president was still felt to be important to encourage interaction, acknowledge the relationships as a priority, and publically celebrate successes. It was, therefore, a significant benefit for the mayor and president to be visible at key points in the process and seen as supportive.

## Personal Relationships and the Importance of Informal Interaction

In both case studies, interviewees stressed the importance of personal relationships and of the relatability of the respective organizations' representatives. This "soft tissue" of the relationship acted as an additional connector across and between more formal structures and interactions.

[We] had become friends over the years, and we spent an hour bullshitting every time we get together, talking about various perspectives on . . . our kids and all of those things. . . . There are people who are more inclined to hang out. (City mayor).

Is there somebody across the table that you can phone up outside of the structure and say, "What about this?" . . . If you have the relationship, then you can make things happen. Now you may have to have a structure which formalizes the relationship. But you hopefully build the relationship inside of that structure. . . . The structure is a tool . . . but it doesn't make the thing work. (Former senior staff).

Who do you schmooze [with]? Who do you actually have a regard for on the other side of the table who's going to be straight with you? Even if it's off record—outside of . . . a formal setting—but can you phone them and say, "This is what we're thinking about. Before we float this, what's the deal?" (Former senior staff).

That organizational structure doesn't matter a damn. Has nothing to do with outcome. The only thing that matters is connections. . . . But you can't get people to talk; you can't get people to even negotiate, which was the history of failed non-negotiations with [the city] largely on the [the city] side, because you didn't have the personal connections. . . . You couldn't create an organizational structure that could do what [a well-connected university senior administrator] could do as a person walking in the door, having a martini with somebody. That's the way it works. (Former senior staff)

That's the truth in all areas of life and in business. It's true too that you get relationships where a couple of people hit it off, they like each other's company, they tend to be more willing to talk candidly, they get past issues quicker, you know, where you've got to more stand off this relationship and where you're not so engaged . . . you don't get as much done. . . . You tend to be more willing to listen or more willing to be able to work with. (City mayor)

My study supported the need for liaison people—boundary spanners with the appropriate skills and mandates. Boundary spanners or knowledge brokers are frequently cited in the literature as important to the success of collaborations (Atkins et al., 1999; Meyer, 2010; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008; Reichert, 2006; Williams, 2002). For example, it is invaluable for the University to have people who can recognize the city's needs (and ability) to utilize the university's research capacity. The relatability of individuals should also be considered when assigning the liaison role. In addition to being able to identify opportunities, liaison people should also be adept at reaching back into the university or city and, in some cases, at convincing people to participate.

There was some disagreement in research findings on the importance of less formal, social interactions. While university officials were inclined to see informal get-togethers as time-wasters or as occasions to avoid, lest they get caught having to manage sticky issues, city

representatives valued these occasions as good opportunities to get to know one another and to raise issues and opportunities at an informal level. City staff also preferred this approach in that it sometimes saved them from including an untested issue as an agenda item in a formal meeting and/or raising it before the mayor and council:

It's the conversations—that liaison committee of groups of two and three standing around chatting before we sat down to dinner. To me that's where the work gets done. . . . And if we have to endure either the president of the university or the mayor or me going on about how great we are and all the wonderful things we are doing. . . . That's a small price to pay for the opportunity to be in a room with people who are focused on the issues and projects that affect all three parties simultaneously. So skip the dinner. Meet, have cocktails, chat after, done! (unattributed)

My operating style is pick up the phone, wander down, drop in, show up, have conversations. Scheduling meetings—suddenly there's the need for an agenda, suddenly everybody is a little more sensitive in both what they reveal and what they don't. (Third-Party chief executive officer)

While formal liaison committees can be useful mechanisms to ensure that time is allocated for discussion, the two case studies provided evidence that such committees do not guarantee that fruitful discussion will take place and are not always an effective management mechanism. Short, informal interactions can be beneficial and are particularly highly valued by the city participants, supplemented by more formal meetings to fully discuss any issues that arise. Committees that involved other stakeholders from the city appeared to be more valued than bilateral committees.

## **Summary of Findings on Critical Management Processes**

My research delved into the “black box of collaboration” to understand the various factors that influence collaborations and the range of management processes that are useful in building and supporting relationships. The history and context along with informal interactions and the mayor-president relationship were highlighted in this paper. While the research produced a great deal of nuanced understanding, some of which is elaborated upon in this paper, this paper focused on four major findings:

1. **History Matters:** Like trust, the record of history builds slowly, but whether it turns into a foundational stone on which to build, or a millstone straining at the institutional neck, depends upon whether the details of history are recorded and remembered accurately and, even more, whether conflicts and injuries are resolved openly and in good faith. Stories—good or bad—endure and may define the relationship.
2. **Context Matters:** Although lessons can be universal, every relationship is unique and every city (and every university) has its own set of challenges and opportunities. Whether on the university or city side, the best way to advance goals and avoid problems is to make the effort to understand the context of your collaborator.
3. **Encouragement Cascades from the Top:** University presidents and city mayors possess great capacity to lead by example. The president/mayor relationship doesn't have to be warm, friendly or supremely close, but both parties should understand that they set the tone. If there is a commitment to put effort into the collaboration, the leaders can create

an environment of openness and responsiveness. Interaction should be encouraged at multiple levels of the organization through a combination of participation on existing committees and initiatives and special-purpose structures.

4. **Good Institutional Relationships Depend Upon Good Personal Relationships:** In organizations as complex and multilayered as universities (and cities), there are many potential points of contact. It is crucial to support the ability of key liaison people to span boundaries, solve problems and maintain goodwill. Success flows from frequent personal and informal contact and from attention to trust-building processes that seek mutuality, set expectations, attribute credit, and encourage adaptability.

### **Recommendations to Cities and Universities**

The following are the practical recommendations for universities and cities that wish to build successful collaborations:

*Take into account the history of the relationship.* Document and understand the history of the relationship and recognize that there are different interpretations of that history. Negative incidents should be identified and addressed to the best ability of both parties. This will allow each organization to be open to strategic opportunities and responsive to the other institution. Ensure that this history is communicated to new employees.

*At minimum, accept and maintain a positive and respectful relationship.* If the relationship's history has not allowed for trust to be developed or repaired and if a strategic project or strategy of mutual interest has not been identified, it is still desirable to achieve a respectful, peaceful co-existence. A range of communication mechanisms, including participation of both the university and the city in third-party organizations such as boards of trade, can help to identify common issues and possibilities for joint projects.

*Establish a culture of openness and responsiveness.* Demonstrating responsiveness to the needs of a collaborator is a major factor in building a successful relationship. Senior administrators in both organizations should strive to create an environment in which staff at all levels feel encouraged to be open and approachable to their counterpart to identify and respond to opportunities. Both organizations must be prepared to work at the collaboration and to build the necessary relationships and processes.

*Demonstrate relevance and identify a valued university role and shared purpose or vision.* Has the university established its relevance? What is the "why" of the relationship? Does the city understand the opportunities and areas in which the university can contribute? Building understanding can take time and many small demonstrations of relevance are needed, especially when attempting to harness the power and benefits of a research university. It is crucial to understand the context of the university and city and how this might assist the university in determining the optimal roles in economic, social, and cultural development.

*Build trust over time.* Set appropriate expectations, celebrate and attribute successes, take risks, and assist without the need to realize a short-term benefit (for example, in some areas of advocacy that assist the other organization). Repairing a relationship marred by conflicts and disputes is different from starting afresh. If both parties are committed to resetting a troubled relationship, start with small projects to gain confidence and build trust. It is likely that disputes will arise with greater contact. Some existing liaison structures and relationships may provide

relief but a dispute-resolution process (such as guidelines for the appointment of a joint or external mediator) should be discussed in advance.

*Communicate regularly using a number of approaches.* Make sure there are one or more designated liaison people or relationship managers who are relatable and have the appropriate skills. Make use of third-party organizations and venues in which the university and city are part of a larger group of business and community. Consider cross-committee appointments, liaison committees with a mandate appropriate to the goals of the relationship, and other mechanisms—but only when they have a purpose. Periodically reflect on the health of the collaboration and review formal liaison committees and management structures. An unnecessary committee or meetings that is seen as useless does not further the collaboration.

*Encourage and develop multilayer points of sustained contact.* Pursue roles and activities that deepen the reach and impact of a university's teaching, research, and community engagement missions. Student involvement is generally a safe starting point, but connecting to the research enterprise has great impact. A commitment to community engagement as an institutional mission or campus mandate is useful. It creates a positive environment to encourage this contact. It also can support the case for allocating people and resources to the collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

Collaboration and the processes that support it are resource-intensive but beneficial for cities and universities pursuing mutual strategic objectives. Joint initiatives in areas of importance to the city and its residents, whether in economic development or addressing environmental or social issues, can move a university/city relationship from transactional to transformative. Even in cases where a mutual strategic objective has not yet been identified, a peaceful, respectful relationship is beneficial for resolving transactional issues. Openness, responsiveness and demonstrated relevance on the part of both organizations builds trust and confidence. It is through this kind of communication and relationship-building that city governments and universities can best identify and respond to emergent opportunities and find a strategic mutual purpose. The result can be a virtuous and reinforcing cycle as early successes strengthen the commitment to collaboration and the willingness to dedicate resources. This, in turn, creates greater collaborative capacity, leading to more interest to cooperate and to take risks for the betterment of community and place.

## References

- Abodor, H. (2005). Trust as sensemaking: The microdynamics of trust in interfirm alliances. *Journal of Business Research* 58 (3), 330–337. doi:10.1016/S0148-2963(03)00077-8.
- Atkins, M., Dersley, J., & Tomlin, R. (1999). The engagement of universities in regional economic regeneration and development: A case study of perspectives. *Higher Education Management and Policy* 11 (1), 97–115. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/highereducationmanagementandpolicyrecentandbackissues.htm#11>.
- Benneworth, P. (2010). University engagement and regional innovation. Brussels, BE: European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities. Retrieved from [http://www.eurashe.eu/library/modernising-phe/MODERN\\_University%20Engagement%20and%20Regional%20Innovation.pdf](http://www.eurashe.eu/library/modernising-phe/MODERN_University%20Engagement%20and%20Regional%20Innovation.pdf).
- Currall, S. C. & Inkpen, A. C. (2002). A multilevel approach to trust in joint ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies* 33 (3), 479–495. doi:10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8491027.
- Curry, J. (2015). Contrasting the cases of two cities in Canada: Understanding the factors in building confidence in university–city government collaborations. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Bath). Retrieved from <http://opus.bath.ac.uk/49308/>.
- Davies, J. L., (1998). *The dialogue of universities with their stakeholders: Comparisons between different regions of Europe. A Project of CRE (Association of European Universities), the European Commission and ERT (European Roundtable of Industrialists): Analysis of Case Studies*. Brussels: Association of European Universities.
- Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In Barbara Jacoby and Associates (Eds.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 20-41). New York: Jossey Bass.
- Goddard, J. & Kempton, L. (2011). *Connecting Universities to Regional Growth: A Practice Guide*. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2011/connecting-universities-to-regional-growth-a-practical-guide](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2011/connecting-universities-to-regional-growth-a-practical-guide).
- Harkavy, I. (2000). Historical evolution of university–community partnerships. *Community News* 12 (2), 1-3. Retrieved from Newsbank Access World News Research Collection Database.
- Holland, B. (2005). Reflections on community–campus collaborations: What has been learned? What are the next challenges? In Pasque, et al. (Eds.), *Higher education collaboratives for community engagement and improvement* (pp. 10-17). Ann Arbor, MI: National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good.
- Huxham, C. (2003). Theorizing collaboration practice. *Public Management Review* 5 (3), 410–423. doi:10.1080/1471903032000146964.
- Huxham, C. & Vangen, S. (2005). *Managing to collaborate*. London: Routledge.

Koza, M. and Lewin, A. (2000). Managing partnerships and strategic alliances: Raising the odds of success. *European Management Journal* 18 (2), 146-151. doi:10.1016/S0263-2373(99)00086-9.

Meyer, M. (2010). The rise of the knowledge broker. *Science Communication* 32 (1), 118-127. doi:10.1177/1075547009359797.

Petter, A., Littlemore, R. & Curry, J. (2015). From Burnaby's mountain top to Vancouver and Surrey: The making of an engaged university. In: A. Teo (Ed.) *Univer-Cities: Strategic view of the future From Berkeley and Cambridge to Singapore and Rising Asia* (pp. 119–138). Vol. II. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Ptd. Ltd.

Reichert, Sylvia. (2006). *The rise of knowledge regions: Emerging opportunities and challenges for universities*. Brussels: European University Association.

Thomson, A. M., & Perry, J. L. (2006 November). Collaboration processes: Inside the black box. *Public Administration Review* 58 (November Supplement), 20-32. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00663.x.

Wagstaff, D. (2013). *What do we know about: Collaborations and partnership in higher education?* London: The Leadership Foundation.

Weerts, D. J., & Sandmann, L. R. (2008). Building a two-way street: Challenges and opportunities for community engagement at research universities. *The Review of Higher Education* 32 (1), 73–106. doi:10.1353/rhe.0.0027.

Williams, Paul. 2002. The competent boundary spanner. *Public administration* 80 (1), 103-124. doi:10.1111/1467-9299.00296.

## Acknowledgements

The support of Simon Fraser University and the cities of Burnaby and Surrey in conducting this research is acknowledged. My thesis supervisors from the University of Bath, Drs. Ammon Salter and John Davies, have been instrumental in my research. I also thank Richard Littlemore for his editorial skills and acknowledge the early inspiration of Warren Gill in selecting my thesis topic.

## Author Information

Joanne's practice and research over the past two decades have focused on community engagement and university-local government partnerships. This is the first article based on her Doctor of Business Administration research at the University of Bath where she was awarded the Richard and Shirley Mawditt prize for outstanding dissertation.

Joanne Curry  
Dean (*pro-tem*), Lifelong Learning  
Vice-President, External Relations (Acting)  
Simon Fraser University  
515 W. Hastings St.  
Vancouver, BC V6B 5K3  
E-mail: [joannec@sfu.ca](mailto:joannec@sfu.ca)  
Telephone: 778-782-5138