

## Town and Gown: Engagement and Collaboration Between Local Municipalities and Institutions of Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

The role of the local government within the context of engagement and collaboration with universities has largely been understudied. Employing a cross-sectional design, this study of 67 universities and 78 municipalities from 29 states examines how collaborative capacity impacts university and local government perceptions of engagement and collaboration with each other. The findings indicate that local government trust is the primary catalyst for both engagement and collaboration between the parties.

*Keywords:* leadership, local government, organizational theory

### TOWN AND GOWN: ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As early as 1963, Kerr argued that the modern university is central to society because it has “some form of contact with nearly every industry, nearly every level of government, nearly every person in its region” (Kerr, 1963, p. 6). This idea of the far-reaching contact of universities heralded a new understanding of how universities interact with challenges outside their borders. Ernest Boyer (1996) would later challenge universities to use their resources to benefit the cities around them. Answering Boyer’s (1996) clarion call for engagement, almost all universities today participate in some type of community engagement. However, researchers are still considering if local governments and universities truly leveraged their engagement (Paltiel, 2021), or if both entities responded without considering the assets and opportunities of working together. This need

for true collaboration between local governments and universities harkens back to Boyer’s (1996) vision of an active university that serves in the needs of their community.

While scholarly works delve into the relationship between universities and their communities, most scholars frame their research as the university’s relation with the community. As a result, the role of the local government in the engagement process has largely been understudied. Most studies regarding town-gown relationships are case studies or limited to a small regional context. While a host of studies on local government collaboration exist, few have examined local government collaboration with universities alone, without the input of industry. This paper aims to contribute to the academic literature by examining the perceptions of engagement and collaboration between local governments and universities nationwide. Examining town and gown engagement and collaboration in this manner produces generalizable findings that add to the body of literature on both local

government collaboration and town-gown engagement.

Both engagement and collaboration are ambiguous terms. Although there are several definitions for community engagement, this study uses the one put forth by the Carnegie Foundation, which defines community engagement as “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (American Council on Education, 2023). This definition acknowledges the various ways in which universities and communities engage with one another. The study sample includes only universities that have been awarded the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement classification and matches them with the municipalities in which they are located.

### Local Government Collaboration

There have been several studies on local government collaboration with industry (Abbas et al., 2018), nonprofit organizations (Cheng, 2018), and interlocal collaboration (Shen & Feiock, 2017). These studies have analyzed various topics of collaboration with the local governments, largely through case studies, qualitative interviews (Hendriks et al., 2015), and quantitative methods. Among them are public service delivery (Tomkinson, 2017), sustainability (Swann, 2017), K-12 education (Hadfield & Ainscow, 2018), and disaster management (Sitas et al., 2016). Studies have also examined how local governments work with both industry and universities, in what is referred to as the Triple Helix Model (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017). The theoretical aspects of local government collaboration have also been of seminal importance to scholars for some time (Warm, 2011).

Financial considerations spur local collaboration for several reasons, not least of which is the challenge of fiscal constraints brought about by ever-decreasing levels of state support (Hanson, 2018). From “wicked

problems,” or problems that are extremely difficult to solve, (Head & Alford, 2015) to traffic problems, municipalities are simply not able to face all their problems alone. Hence, financial considerations have motivated local governments toward partnerships across key sectors of society (Cigler, 2019). In fact, nearly every municipality within the United States has a formalized agreement with another organization (Warm, 2011).

Despite the wealth of literature on local government collaboration, few studies examine their relationship with institutions of higher education within their jurisdiction. One reason why local government involvement in “town and gown” relations has been overlooked by the extant literature, and perhaps by the municipalities themselves, is that universities are generally the ones that initiate engagement with the local government. The terms “town” and “gown” originated in medieval Europe, with “town” representing the local community and “gown” signifying the university. It is crucial to understand the link between town and gown engagement if the two parties are to enter a partnership. Partnerships imply two or more parties working toward a common goal. Thus, identifying the strategies used by universities to understand local government needs is necessary to paint the full picture of university engagement.

### CONCEPTUAL MODEL: COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

Goodman et al. (1998) conceptualized collaborative capacity as the potential that communities have to solve a given problem. There are many dimensions to collaborative capacity. Gray (1989) posits that collaborative capacity has five general characteristics— (1) stakeholder interdependence, (2) partnerships handle their differences constructively, (3) decisions are made jointly, (4) responsibility is shared, and (5) all parties understand that collaborations are an “emergent process”—where the growth or contraction of the

endeavors can take place. McCann (1983) and Gray (1989) derived a three-step process to model collaborative capacity. The first step is problem setting, followed by direction setting, and concluding with implementation. Roussos and Fawcett (2000) argue that the collaborative process can include more diverse opinions and thus lead to conflict, and thus concluded that Gray (1989) and McCann's (1983) approaches are too simplistic.

This paper draws on the collaborative capacity framework (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001) and selects seven aspects that together form the collaborative capacity of municipalities and local governments. Their framework requires capacity at each level of partnership. The following section discusses community capacity, organizational capacity, relational capacity, and programmatic capacity.

### **Community Capacity**

Community capacity, sometimes referred to as member capacity, denotes skill sets that community members bring to a partnership. A study by Goodman et al. (1998) found that community capacity ought to include proactive leadership, participation, resources, skills, and social networks. Applied to the context of community engagement, this implies that a community must first have capable leadership that is willing to work with universities. A lack of community leadership may explain why universities initiate engagement more often than communities. However, leadership itself is not sufficient for community capacity; rather, the community or its appointed representatives must participate in the endeavor. Those that participate must be able to bring skills, resources, and/or social networks to the partnership. Universities have their own skills, resources, and networks, but rely on the community coalition for structural support and participation. Although this paper does not go as far as to explore the relationship between the local government, university, and the community, it is nonetheless important to note the aspects of community capacity,

notably leadership, which are vital to engagement and collaboration. Community capacity is an important point within the context of collaborative capacity, but one that does not necessarily apply to an examination of a dichotomous relationship, such as the one between the local government and the university. However, aspects of community capacity are still important to the analysis within this context. Proactive leadership, resources, and skills, for example, are crucial to the success of the collaboration for either party.

### **Organizational Capacity**

Similar to community capacity, organizational capacity refers to what the organization brings to a partnership. Wandersman et al. (1997) found that organizational capacity is necessary to direct members toward solving a goal and without it, the vision was not clear. Organizational capacity necessitates a strong leader and administration. It also requires formalized procedures, dedicated resources, quality assurance, and excellent communication both internally and externally (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Moreover, organizational capacity must provide a clear vision for the organization and for the partnership (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

University capacity can be examined through the lens of organizational capacity. Engagement and collaboration require buy-in and leadership from the administration. Universities have an advantage of being able to dedicate resources to the execution and evaluation of a project, but without strong leadership, a clear vision cannot be formulated. The fact that universities are often the ones that initiate engagement suggests that it is incumbent upon them to have a clear vision of the partnership.

Local government capacity is similar to both university and community capacity, but at the local government level. According to Wallis and Dollery (2002), local government capacity has four dimensions: institutional,

technical, administrative, and political. Institutional capacity permits local governments to set policies and laws to govern (Grindle, 1997). Local governments' technical capacity empowers them to set a clear economic policy. Their administrative capacity allows for the bookkeeping and paperwork that is necessary for economic activities. Political capacity refers to the extent to which local governments can mediate conflict to reach a common goal (Grindle, 1997). In terms of university engagement, economic policies brought forth by local governments can facilitate or perhaps necessitate community engagement. Institutional capacity often sets the rules for development or expansion of both communities and universities, and it often sets up restrictions and policies for interacting with citizens, particularly minors. When conflict arises, the political capacity can help mediate between community leaders and university administration.

### **Relational Capacity**

Relational capacity is similar to social capital, but it relies not only on relationships, but also on a shared vision. In order to have collaborative capacity, the partnership must have internal and external relationships that help create cohesion and meld diverse opinions into one that can be championed. Diversity is prized in relational capacity for its ability to bring multiple perspectives to the table, thereby creating a collective vision. It is relational capacity that keeps community members engaged in the partnership and prevents it from falling apart. (Chavis, 1995). In terms of university-community partnerships, universities and local governments can work together to identify strong community leaders and organizations that can help bring partnerships to fruition that will not dissipate if conflicts arise within the group.

### **Programmatic Capacity**

Finally, programmatic capacity relates to the ability to implement a project and assures that it has a legitimate impact within the community (Wallis & Dollery, 2002). Programmatic capacity applies to both the university and the community. It requires shared resources, initiative, and mobilization. Here again, a clear mission is crucial for the success of a partnership because it is important to know exactly how and where resources are being spent (Barton et al., 1997).

Local government capacity refers to a municipality's time, monetary resources, technical capacity, and willingness to include the university as an economic and social stakeholder in local issues such as unemployment or educational improvement. Moreover, local government capacity is a function of having leadership that wants to collaborate with the university. Such leadership would be considered proactive in university and municipal engagement. Lastly, local government capacity includes the willingness to entertain different points of view that may lead to a shared vision after all viewpoints are debated.

University capacity is similar to local government capacity in that it considers the university's time, monetary resources and technical capacity, as well as formalized procedures for creating partnerships with universities. University capacity also includes proactive leadership willing to engage with the local government and valuing a diversity of opinions.

The last element that comprises the framework is trust and decision making. Trust is perhaps the most important element for collaborative capacity. For this study, trust is defined as the credibility and reliability of the other party. It is manifested in a given party's reliability to deliver on previously agreed terms and solve conflicts that arise during a particular collaboration or more generally as town-gown relations ebb and flow. There are aspects of trust that are unique to town-gown engagement.

## METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on three research questions to examine the association between collaborative capacity and either engagement or collaboration.

### Research Questions

- *RQ1: How does the collaborative capacity of the university and the local government affect the level of engagement?*
  - *RQ1a: Does the effect vary depending on the type of engagement?*
- *RQ2: How does the collaborative capacity of the university and the local government affect the perception that collaboration is a priority?*
- *RQ3: What factors of collaborative capacity between a university and the local government affect perceptions that collaborations are mutually beneficial?*

### Data Collection and Study Sample

To examine the research questions, a 55-question survey was distributed to 95 universities and their corresponding municipal governments. The survey was previously piloted with 50 universities and their respective municipalities. The findings of the pilot informed the construction of the final survey used in this study. Surveys were sent to a university representative at the community engagement office. For the corresponding municipality, surveys were sent to the mayor, city council, and city manager (if applicable). Of the 95 surveys, 67 universities (71%) and at least one representative from 78 municipalities (82%) responded. Of 114 municipal responses, 67 (59%) were from city council members, 15 (13%) were from city managers, 14 (12%) were from mayors and 18 (16%) did not disclose their office. Data were collected from 29 states. This study was approved by the institutional review board at Florida International University.

All universities included were designated by the Carnegie Foundation as

“Community Engaged.” This is an important note because it serves to highlight these concepts at work under the best of circumstances, that is, when the university itself purports to be engaged. The Carnegie list also provides a good mixture of public and private colleges and universities, as well as a variety of types of research institutions. Survey data were collected using Qualtrics and were based on a 1-4 Likert scale, with 1 corresponding to *Strongly disagree* and 4 corresponding to *Strongly agree*. Additional data was collected from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and United States Census. For all universities, IPEDS data provided demographic, enrollment, and financial information. IPEDS also helped to standardize the size of the municipality where the university resides. Further, IPEDS provided information that standardized the classification of the university, as defined by the Carnegie Foundation.

### Measures

The survey measured local government capacity, university capacity, trust, and decision-making on university and municipal engagement and collaboration. A factor analysis was conducted on the variables, which were subsequently converted into index variables for analysis. The factor analysis revealed seven domains pertaining to collaborative capacity: (1) Local Government Capacity, (2) Local Government Leadership, (3) Local Government Trust, (4) Local Government Perceptions of the University as a Stakeholder, (5) University Capacity, (6) University Trust, and (7) Shared Vision. Table 1 lists the variables used to construct each index variable, as well as the Cronbach alpha coefficient corresponding to the factor analysis. The main explanatory variables used in the analysis are described below the table.

**Table 1**  
*Index Variables*

<b>Index Variable</b>	<b>Variables Within Index</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha Coefficient</b>
Local Government (LG) Capacity	LG-Time, LG-Money, LG-Technical Capacity	0.79
LG Stakeholder	LG-Uni Economic Stakeholder, LG-Uni Social Policy Stakeholder	0.80
LG Leadership	LG-Strong Leadership, LG-Leadership Wants to Collaborate	0.75
University (Uni) Capacity	Uni-Formalized Process, Uni-Time, Uni-Money, Uni-Technical Capacity	0.78
LG Trusts University	Uni-Leadership, Uni-Values Diversity of Opinion, LG-Trusts Uni to Deliver, LG-Trusts Uni to Solve Issues, Relationship Is Built on Trust	0.88
Uni Trusts LG	Uni-Trusts LG to Deliver, Uni-Trusts LG to Solve Issues, LG-Values Diversity of Opinion, Relationship Has Clear Programmatic Objectives	0.82
Shared Vision	Shared Social Vision, Shared Econ Vision, Shared Decision-making Power	0.82

### ***Local Government Capacity***

Local government capacity measures a municipality's time, monetary resources, and technical capacity to form mutually beneficial partnerships.

### ***Local Government Leadership***

Local Government Leadership measures the extent to which municipal leaders proactively engaged with the university.

### ***University Capacity***

University Capacity measures the university's time, monetary resources, and technical capacity to form mutually beneficial partnerships.

### ***Local Government Trust***

Local Government Trust measures the local government's trust in the university to deliver on previously agreed upon terms and solve issues that might arise during the partnership. Additionally, it measures the

extent to which the university's leadership is effective and values a diversity of opinions. Finally, it measures whether the relationship is built on trust.

### ***University Trust***

University Trust measures the university's trust in the local government to deliver on previously agreed upon terms and solve issues that might arise during the partnership. Additionally, it measures the extent to which the local government values a diversity of opinions. Finally, this metric gauges if the partnership has clear programmatic objectives.

### ***Shared Vision***

Shared Vision measures if the university and local government share a

common vision on economic issues and social issues, and whether they share decision-making during partnerships.

### **Modeling the Effect of Capacity on Engagement and Collaboration**

Six models were created to explore the effects of collaborative capacity on universities and local governments, as well as different modes of engagement and collaboration. Hypotheses were generated for each research question to probe the issues at hand. Table 2 displays the research questions, hypotheses, and the associated analytical model. For each model, a stepwise backward logistic regression was run using all index variables and control variables.

**Table 2**  
*Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Analytical Model*

Research Question	Hypothesis	Analytic Model
RQ1: How does the collaborative capacity of the university and the local government affect the level of engagement?	Hypothesis 1: The higher the collaborative capacity of university and local government, the higher the level of overall engagement.	1
RQ1a: Does the effect vary depending on the type of engagement?	Hypothesis 2: The higher the collaborative capacity of university and local government, the higher the level of <b>economic</b> engagement.  Hypothesis 3: The higher the collaborative capacity of university and local government, the higher the level of <b>social</b> engagement.	2, 3
RQ 2: How does the collaborative capacity of the university and the local government affect the perception that collaboration is a priority?	Hypothesis 4: The higher collaborative capacity of university and local government, the more likely collaboration is considered to be a priority for the <b>University</b> .  Hypothesis 5: The higher collaborative capacity of university and local government, the more likely collaboration is considered to be a priority for the <b>Local Government</b> .	4, 5
RQ 3: What factors of collaborative capacity between a university and the local government affect perceptions that collaborations are mutually beneficial?	Hypothesis 6: The higher the perceptions of shared vision and trust, the more likely collaboration is perceived as mutually beneficial.	6



Model 1 tests hypothesis 1, namely that an increase in local government capacity and university capacity increases the likelihood of engagement between universities and municipalities. Model 2 tests the hypothesis pertaining to economic engagement, namely that greater local government capacity and university capacity increases the likelihood of economic engagement between universities and municipalities. Model 3 concerns social policy engagement and tests the hypothesis that a higher perception of local government capacity and university capacity is associated with a higher perception of social engagement between universities and municipalities; that is, the extent that the engagement between the local government and university concerns social problems.

Model 4 tests the hypothesis that a higher perception of local government capacity and university capacity is associated with a higher perception that collaboration is a priority for the local government. Respondents were asked if collaboration was a high priority for the local government.

Model 5 tests the hypothesis that a higher perception of local government capacity and university capacity is associated with a higher perception that collaboration is a priority for the university. In the survey, respondents were asked if collaboration was a high priority for the university.

Model 6 also concerns collaboration and tests the hypothesis that a higher perception of local government capacity and

university capacity, shared vision, and trust is associated with a higher perception of mutually beneficial collaboration between universities and municipalities. As previously discussed, the Carnegie Foundation defines engagement as a mutually beneficial collaboration. This highlights a subtle but important distinction between engagement as university and local administrators understand the concept, and collaboration that is *mutually beneficial*. The placement of this question within the survey was also different from the rest. The five previous models were in fact the first five questions of the survey, while this question was placed toward the middle of the survey.

## RESULTS

The analyses reveal that the most significant predictor of engagement and collaboration in most models is the variable capturing local government trust of universities. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, engagement variables (Models 1-3) are positively associated with local government interdependence and leadership. In the models with collaboration as the dependent variable (Models 4-6), the main determinants are university trust of the local government and shared vision. Table 3 presents estimation results for each of the six models. The table reports the odds ratios followed by t-statistics in parentheses. Each model is discussed in detail below.

**Table 3**  
*Factors Associated with Engagement and Collaboration*

	Engagement	Economic Engagement	Social Engagement	Collaboration High Priority for LG	Collaboration High Priority for the University	Collaborations are Mutually Beneficial
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
LG Capacity		1.795* (2.25)				
LG Stakeholder		1.713* (2.11)	2.323*** (3.46)	2.350** (2.93)		
LG Leadership	1.959** (2.72)			3.886*** (4.49)		
University Capacity				2.077* (2.02)		
Shared Vision					2.464** (2.68)	2.218* (2.18)
Uni Trusts LG					0.458* (-2.12)	3.729*** (3.36)
LG Trusts Uni	5.002*** (5.54)	3.619*** (4.55)	2.298** (3.17)		13.87*** (6.46)	5.593*** (4.74)
Poverty Rate	1.044** (2.79)					
Ed Level	0.978* (-2.46)					
In-State	0.980** (-2.90)					
Campus- City		5.498*** (4.97)	2.312** (2.65)		2.711* (2.11)	
24 and under		0.958**				

					(-2.79)	
Campus-Suburb					3.157*	
					(1.99)	
Median Income					.998***	
					(-3.74)	
Median Age					1.130**	
					(2.95)	
N	154	155	154	154	151	156
Pseudo R2	0.19	0.20	0.11	0.20	0.30	0.32

Exponentiated coefficient t statistics in parentheses \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.00

### Model 1: Engagement

Two index variables positively associated with Model 1. As Table 2 shows, respondents' perceptions of engagement are positively associated with local government leaderships and local government trust in the university. These results do not support the expectation that university capacity impacts perceptions of engagement. Overall, the odds of having a positive perception of engagement are 1.9 times higher when local government leadership is perceived to be strong. Strong leadership for the local government was relevant in a way that other aspects of collaborative capacity are not. Leadership that actively seeks to collaborate thereby seems to be more important than the money, time, or technical capacity of either side.

### Model 2: Economic Engagement

Perceptions of economic engagement are positively associated with three of the seven index variables: local government capacity, stakeholders, and trust of the university. Within the adjusted model, the odds of having a positive perception of economic engagement are 1.8 times greater for municipalities that perceive they have the capacity to collaborate with the university. Further, the estimations show that local government stakeholders, or interdependence, also matters. That finding was expected, given the nature of the dependent variable, which

reflects economic engagement. Among the control variables, the most salient is *Campus-city*. Compared to rural campuses, campuses that are located within cities are five times more likely to have positive perceptions of economic engagement. Perhaps this reflects the larger issues facing higher education in rural America. Rural Americans are less likely than their urban counterparts to consider a college degree worth pursuing, and, therefore, less likely to attend college or encourage their children to attend college (Marcus & Krupnick, 2017).

### Model 3: Social Engagement

Social engagement is positively associated with two index variables. Similar to economic engagement, respondents' perceptions of social engagement are significantly associated with the interdependence of the local government on social issues, as well as local government trust in the university. Within the adjusted model, the odds of having a positive perception of social engagement are 2.3 times greater for municipalities that trust the university and perceive them to be a stakeholder. Also, like economic engagement, there appears to be an urban/rural divide. Campuses in cities are 2.3 times more likely than those in rural areas to have a positive perception of social engagement.

**Model 4: Collaboration Is a High Priority for the Local Government**

As Model 4 shows, perceptions that collaboration is a high priority for the local government are positively associated with three index variables. The odds of perceiving collaboration to be a high priority for the local government are 3.9 times greater when municipal leaders are perceived to be effective and want to collaborate. Furthermore, the odds of perceiving collaboration to be a high priority for the local government are 2.4 times greater when municipal leaders consider the university to be an important stakeholder. Similarly, the odds are two times greater when the university is perceived to have the capacity to form a partnership. This is the only model where university capacity is a significant factor. This finding supports the hypothesis that university capacity is positively associated with higher perceptions that local government collaboration is a priority, indicating that local government needs to believe the university can collaborate for them to invest the time.

**Model 5: Collaboration Is a High Priority for the University**

Model 5 is positively associated with three index variables and supports the hypothesis that shared vision is positively associated with collaboration being a high priority for the university. Shared vision is important in the collaborative capacity literature, and it is surprising that it impacts universities but not local governments. The odds of perceiving collaboration to be a high priority for the university are 2.5 times greater when the two parties share a common vision, and 13 times greater when the local government trusts the university.

The most unexpected finding of Model 5 is the inverse relationship between the university's trust of local government and the perceptions that collaboration is a high priority for universities. University trust in the local government decreases the odds of perceiving collaboration to be a high priority for the

university. This is a puzzling finding and may indicate that the relationship does not require much attention and is thus not a high priority for the university. However, it is also worth considering the challenge of consensus. When municipalities value too many opinions, it is hard to build a consensus and get anything done. Seeking consensus might dilute the shared vision for the university and the municipality, leading to fewer collaborations.

**Model 6: Mutually Beneficial Collaboration**

Three index variables are associated with collaborations being mutually beneficial. Model 6 supports the hypothesis that trust and shared vision are positively associated with collaboration. Overall, the odds of perceiving collaborations to be mutually beneficial increase 2.2 times when local government and the university have a shared vision. Furthermore, the odds increase by 3.7 times when the university trusts the local government to deliver on previously agreed terms and solve conflicts that might arise and are 5.6 times greater when the local government trusts the university to do the same.

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to address the impact of collaborative capacity on different types of engagement, and perceptions that collaboration is a priority and mutually beneficial. Overall, local government trust appears to be the dominant factor. Five of the six models show that the index variable Local Government Trusts the University has a significantly positive relationship with different types engagement and perceptions of collaboration. As trust builds upon past interactions, the data suggest that local government leaders require some assurance that university leaders will help execute goals and objectives.

Three types of engagement were considered: overall, economic, and social. The collaborative capacity of local government

seems to drive positive perceptions of engagement. As previously mentioned, local government's trust in the university was positively associated with all three types of engagement. The only other factors positively associated with any of the engagement models were Local Government Leadership, their capacity, and considering the university a stakeholder. More research is necessary to explore the reasons why factors associated with local government drive perceptions of engagement. However, possible rationales that warrant consideration include understanding a municipal leader's understanding of their scope of work. That is to say, university engagement offices seek out engagement and collaboration with external stakeholders. That is part of the duty of their office. Municipal leaders, on the other hand, are tasked with serving their constituents. It would seem plausible that engaging with the local university only occurs when the municipal leaders perceive it to directly benefit for their constituency.

The second question considered whether collaborative capacity of the university and the local government affects the perception that collaboration is a priority. For local governments, the factors associated with considering collaboration a priority are similar to the factors associated with engagement. However, notable differences exist. For example, collaboration being a priority for local governments is positively associated with the university's capacity (i.e. time, money, and resources). Most interestingly, local government trust is not significantly correlated with the local government considering collaboration a priority. One possible explanation is that the perception that the university has the capacity to meaningfully collaborate galvanizes local government leaders to prioritize collaboration. For their part, universities are more apt to consider collaboration a priority when there is a shared vision and shared levels of trust between the two parties. Those same factors are also

associated with perceiving collaborations as mutually beneficial.

Finally, there is a clear distinction between the factors that are associated with engagement and the factors that are associated with mutually beneficial collaboration. The sheer lack of similarities is a noteworthy finding. Except for local government trust of the university, there does not seem to be any overlap between the models. This is perhaps the clearest evidence that engagement is not always considered to be a mutually beneficial collaboration between partners.

The findings suggest three main policy implications for collaboration. First, collaboration can only be accomplished with a shared vision. This finding indicates engagement can be one-sided, but collaboration requires a shared understanding of the metrics and goals of the partnership. It also suggests that local governments and universities that wish to collaborate must set aside their self interest in favor of a mutual goal that serves both parties in order to achieve more than either party could achieve on their own.

The second implication of this study stems from the findings of Model 4, collaboration as a priority for local governments. From the research findings, university capacity is important for the local government to want to collaborate. Local governments need to know that their partnerships will be fruitful and that their partners have the capacity to work together. The implication, thus, is that one-sided engagement for local governments is dependent on their capacity. However, for collaboration to occur, local governments must trust that the university has the time, technical capacity, and financial resources to make the collaboration successful. Short of that, collaboration is not a priority for the local government. This implication is important for universities to keep in mind when attempting to collaborate with their local government. Universities can, at the onset of collaboration, demonstrate the resources they plan on

bringing to the partnership (i.e. full-time staff, research expertise). This would give local governments an understanding of the resources available to make a given collaboration work.

The last implication of the study is that repeated interaction between the two parties may positively contribute to engagement and collaboration. Ultimately, the main drivers of engagement and collaboration are shared vision and trust, both of which are built over time. This suggests that repeated positive engagements lead both university and municipal leaders to consider collaboration mutually beneficial. It also suggests that universities must continually perform outreach initiatives to local government leaders, as there may be high levels of turnover due to elections, term limits, or other endogenous factors.

### CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted several salient findings and points of consideration for town-gown relations. The most compelling implication from this study is how overall engagement, engagement on economic issues, and engagement on social issues revolve around local government leadership and stakeholders. Conversely, it was notable that a shared vision is not associated with engagement itself but rather impacts the university's dependent variables of collaboration. Based on the literature, it was expected that shared vision would be associated in all six models. Finally, this study found that the primary driver of both engagement and collaboration is local government trust. Building trust is a notoriously slow process. However, it is vital to be able to fully utilize and leverage relationships to better serve the needs of both the local community and student body.

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