The 6 TENETS of
Community-Institutional Collaborations

[These 6 tenets are used for the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) class taught at the University of MN. We believe these tenets are useful in developing collaborative relationships, not just those involved in research.]

by Susan Gust and Cathy Jordan

TRUST – the foundation from which all else flows. Usually it's about trust that the work done together places the community's needs and benefits first. This might translate into trust that the community will be included in all stages, that *researchers will share findings and not do "helicopter research", or that researchers won't put their own needs for career advancement ahead of the community's needs.

MUTUAL RESPECT – respect for the expertise that all partners bring to the table. Respect for diverse ways of knowing, such as cultural viewpoints and beliefs about how we know what we know.

MUTUAL BENEFIT – each stakeholder should be able to define that benefit they (or their organization or their sector) needs, or received. One partner should not define for the other what the benefits will be or what benefits the others received.

SHARED POWER – true reciprocity. Sharing power requires and facilitates the full participation of all partners in decision-making and governance. This might also include sharing the money because sometimes money represents power, or provides access to power. However, money is not the only way that power manifests itself. There is a power differential in all groups, all situations. It is important to lift up this differential and to understand its possible implications within the partnership.

SHARED KNOWLEDGE – this has several connotations. 1) There are different 'ways of knowing' or different knowledge systems, all to be equitably valued 2) the idea that partners are co-generating knowledge, and 3) that the knowledge that comes out of the collaboration is co-owned by the partnership. Issues of "who owns the data" need to be addressed. Perhaps thinking of it this way can help – for certain research ethics or regulatory reasons, the raw data may need to be in the possession of the institution, but the knowledge and wisdom that is gained through making sense of the data together is a product of, and jointly held, within the collaboration.

REFLECTION – Co-learning or co-creating new knowledge is a reflective process and those who engage with it need to be reflective practitioners. A stance of co-learning, examining missteps, making iterative improvements, are all examples of reflective practice.

* The word "researchers" can be substituted for "institutional partners". The idea is that community and institutional people often come to the table for different reasons that need to be understood and transparent.

Susan Ann Gust, consultant   susananngust@gmail.com
Cathy Jordan   jorda003@umn.edu