Creating Connections: Interpreting and bridging disparate definitions of campus and community interactions

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Bemidji State University
Bemidji State University

- 5100 undergraduates
- 80 programs/majors
  - Science, Business, Nursing key majors
  - Liberal Arts - less enrollment
- Acceptance rate 94%
- Graduation rate 46%

**Bemidji**

- Geographically isolated
- Serve rural communities
- Situated in 6th poorest county in MN
BSU is new to Campus Compact

- Signed 2016
- Community Action Plan finalized April 2017
- Phase I
  - Faculty and staff survey
    - Spring 2018
  - Community member focus groups
    - Summer 2018
  - Student development interviews
    - Spring 2019
Community Focus Group Methodologies

48 Key Community Organizations Identified
GOVERNMENTAL
EDUCATION
FOR PROFIT
NON PROFIT
Three Focus Groups

- Focus groups held at local public venue
- Methodologies Institutional Research Board (IRB) certified
- 6 standardized questions
  - Audio taped
  - Transcribed
  - Open and focused coding
How do you define community engagement?

Does your organization have a partnership with BSU? What type?

What other opportunities exist, either through the affiliations that currently exist or others?

What do you see as your role in creating connections with BSU? What is BSU’s role in building these connections?

As you think about your organization and opportunities, would your organization, or other organizations be interested in partnership with BSU right now? If so, what type of partnership?

Is there anything else you would like to share that we haven’t discussed?
Results:

6 Themes Emerged

- Partnering/Collaborating
- Gratitude
- Sharing Expertise
- Creating Relationships that Bridge
- Communication Patterns
- Challenges

Overall take-away: Members were energetic, interested, encouraged, and seeking support from the university
Audience Discussion

1) How might learning about community perceptions enhance town-gown relationships?

2) How might campuses consider utilizing community partners to more fully engage in meaningful conversations?

3) What methodologies do you think can help identify connections between community partners and campus programs?
Sharing Thoughts and Ideas
Putting it all together

Lessons Learned
Future Work
Thank You For Your Time!