

Pushing the Boundaries of Collaboration: What Consortia Can Accomplish

Chapter 8 Winter 2016 by Association for Collaborative Leadership

This chapter describes a community connection for the six colleges and universities in Raleigh, North Carolina detailing projects that link the colleges to the city and county through collaborative efforts with government and other community organizations.

A Consortium Approach: Connecting to the Local Community

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The Cooperating Raleigh Colleges (CRC) started in 1968 with an emphasis on connecting students, staff and faculty within the colleges and universities. All six members of the CRC are located in the City of Raleigh, and were mainly looking inward with programs such as cross-registration, library sharing and administrative cohort collaboration. Those programs are still strong, but in recent years CRC has made a major effort on looking outward into the community for important connections and collaborations.

All CRC's institutions share and serve the same community, city and county, where the colleges and universities have a significant impact on the life of the community. The CRC believes it is important to get that message out and to find ways to serve the community collectively beyond the obvious ways. The six institutions of CRC vary as types, the largest state research university and the largest community college in the state plus two historically black private colleges, a private woman's college and a private college that has recently evolved from all women to coed. The members serve the community in many similar ways, but they also cover a wide range of populations and educational emphases, from certificate programs to Ph.D. programs and from all-women's classes to majority African-Americans classes.

Television Programming for Public Access Television

The oldest of CRC's community-serving projects is the contract with the City of Raleigh to provide the content and administration of the public access education television channel. Since 1994, CRC has provided programming for that channel 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. CRC solicit programs from all of the member institutions, and they vary from guest speakers to short informational videos about specific college programs. Some are produced by students and others from the marketing and communications departments or specific academic departments. Early on CRC had actual courses people could take for credit by watching television; those programs are now replaced by on-line courses and are no longer on the channel. Now, CRC has several programs that can be found on YouTube. The channel has been a great way to tell the colleges' "stories" to the community. One of our most popular series of programs has come from a divinity school and features a speaker series with ministers. Another popular program is a documentary from North Carolina State's Language and Life Project which focuses on trying to keep the Cherokee language alive in this state. Other programs include two mystery novelists sharing their experiences with Meredith College's Friends of the Library banquet attendees. The Channel has student-produced public service announcements featuring community non-profits. The CRC director is responsible to seek out new programming and oversee the channel every day to be sure things are operating smoothly. CRC hired a part-time person to handle the technical aspects and work closely with staff in the city that runs the other three public access channels. The CRC's channel is also available to the county for their County Commissioners' live meetings.

Emergency Management

One of CRC's newest programs focuses on emergency management and security. In the past year, CRC coordinated three emergency management workshops where it brought together a variety of people from the campuses, throughout the city, county and state. One workshop focused on infectious diseases and another created a table-top exercise connected to a tornado event. The Raleigh, North Carolina area had a tornado several years ago where one campus in particular was hard hit. That event made it clear how important it is to have other surrounding colleges help by providing temporary housing and other services. The CRC is cooperating with the community's emergency management system, which has been a

vital partnership. The city and county officers greatly appreciate getting to know the people on the campuses that they would need to connect with during an emergency. Campus personnel are grateful for having regular contact with the community people working in emergency management and security. Some of the campus participants in these workshops have been police and security, facilities managers, communications staff, student services personnel, IT staff, health center staff and more. One of the outcomes of the stronger connection with city and county Emergency Medical System (EMS) staffs was that CRC learned the county has a warehouse full of equipment which the colleges could utilize for free during emergencies and even non-emergency events, such as: tents, generators, and other similar emergency equipment.

The Education Pipeline

The CRC has two different projects connected to the public school system and others in the community who are most interested in the impact of serving school-aged youth. One project underway is to enrich the dialogue about preparing and retaining teachers in the public schools. CRC's Board and the leaders of the education schools and departments are planning an event for the fall to bring together education leaders, business people and teachers and student teachers to show what it takes to prepare and retain high quality teachers. For the last several years, CRC has been a major participant in the Raleigh College and Community Collaborative that concentrates on addressing the gaps in the pipeline from middle school to college graduation and then entering the job market. This project started with a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and is continuing as a locally funded collaboration. This partnership has strengthened CRC's connections with the county public schools and a number of non-profits focusing on youth education. In addition, our executive director serves on the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce's education committee.

City Planning and Zoning

Several years ago CRC formed a group to meet with the City Planning Department staff when they were revising the city's unified development code. College and university campuses are like little cities with needs different from those in residential and business districts. The city's planners were open to hearing about specific concerns from the campuses and incorporated those unique needs into the plan that was ultimately adopted. They addressed everything from parking requirements to heights of buildings.

Improving Public Transit

This year CRC has become involved with the county's plans to improve public transit in the area. The CRC has adult and student representatives serving on a community-wide advisory committee looking at adding bus services and possible rapid rail or rapid bus transit. Raleigh is the kind of city that has grown rapidly in the last decade but has not kept up with the kinds of public transit that would make it easier for students to do cross-registration and for faculty and staff to get back and forth to work. CRC would like key community leaders to know that we value improved transit for the community in general.

Economic Impact Studies

In the last seven years, CRC commissioned two economic impact studies to showcase the combined effect of our institutions on the economic success of this area. Raleigh is not the kind of city people usually associate as being a "college town" where a university or college is a dominate part of its identity as is the case with a neighboring institution, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Because the colleges are mixed in with state government and a number of high tech companies, CRC's impact needs to be regularly stressed. The numbers were quite dramatic. For the 2013 results, it revealed that twenty-four percent of all wage and salary income in the local economy and forty-three percent of all Wake County jobs were related to our six institutions. That included students, faculty and staff and alumni living in the area. CRC used the release of the information as a way to invite the governor, other government leaders and the business community to a special event detailing the economic impact.

How the Projects Emerge

CRC's projects begin in a variety of different ways and often begin from a conversation in a meeting of regular cohort groups such as the chief academic officers, student affairs officers or finance directors. The emergency management project was initiated when both the student affairs officers and finance directors talked about their challenges related to such emergencies as weather events, infectious diseases or threatened campus shooter incidents. It became obvious to CRC that emergency management affects a wide variety of campus departments; therefore, several committees reached out to police and security, facilities, marketing and communications, residence directors, health center staff and more. Some of CRC's projects are initiated from the top down emerging from the Board of Directors. This year the CRC Board chair spoke with some community leaders concerned about the retention of public school teachers, then this topic was brought up for discussion with the Board. Many projects, like the current one came about through conversations about how the college and universities prepare and help retain teachers. Some project ideas have also come from students.

There were CRC students in a public relations course this year who started a project using social media to communicate with students on all of the campuses, sharing information about what is going on off the campuses (beyond the clubs and bars). The CRC student are using social media to check out restaurants, parks, festivals, museums, community service projects and more and spread the word through Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and SnapChat.

How the Projects are Organized

Subcommittees are the key to how projects are organized. Sometimes one of the members of a major committee, such as the student affairs officers, is a part of a subcommittee, but they always involve other staff members who may not have been very involved with the consortium in the past. For example, the emergency management subcommittee has the Director of Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery from the large state university, the Finance Director of one of a small private college and the Dean of Students from the women's college. The community-wide education pipeline and teacher preparation projects have involved staff members working closely on student retention, community relations, admissions and education training. The teacher preparation project has brought together leaders of those programs for the first time. Sometimes CRC has representatives from all six institutions on the subcommittees, but not all members are required to be involved in the planning. Like most consortia, CRC recognizes that some types of institutions have stronger interests in projects than others. CRC involves all six institutions once the project begins. CRC looks internally at personnel for expertise. Most of these projects and workshops are not about bringing in experts from the outside but tapping into all of the amazing expertise within the institutions.

Lessons Learned

Connections and collaboration take constant vigilance. As many know well, connecting people across campuses, when people are often too busy to connect on their own, can be a challenge. Consortial leaders must take the initiative and carry the momentum. The reason the CRC Board did not know they could rent emergency management supplies from the county, was the fact that the right people had not been brought together on the campuses to talk about all kinds of common interests and resources. Another major observation is that these kinds of projects not only broaden CRC's reach into the community but they provide ways to get personnel from a wide variety of campus areas together, groups which have not traditionally met with in CRC. With CRC's traditional programs in place, the consortium has extended the invitation to connect staff and faculty by function, such as: librarians, registrars, chief academic officers, and more. It is very important, to meet and share ideas and among the security officers along with IT leaders and residence hall directors. It is surprising to report, that as varied as CRC campuses are in size and type, they interact very well with one another. The large schools do not dominate and the smaller schools do not feel intimidated. Faculty and staff from a team of specialists at North Carolina State add value and commonalities with small college leaders who are juggling three different administrative hats. The CRC is searching to find ways in which they can expand the emphasis on community connections and find ways to communicate about opportunities for the future. This is encouraging to CRC, realizing they will need to do more with public relations to spread the word. CRC will participate in more community-wide events and make contact with all forms of media from internal and external groups. CRC must monitor not only issues in higher education but issues and concerns in our community.

Moving Forward

The CRC is adopting a two-pronged approach to our consortium, both inside and outside agendas. CRC has been creative in our way of thinking about how to get people across our colleges and universities to connect and collaborate. To cultivate appropriate community partners is equally important to make our community appreciate and benefit from our institutions. The CRC is a support system to the government leaders, public schools, business leaders and community non-profits by tapping into its resources and expertise and vice versa. CRC can better serve its students, faculty and staff because they are more integrated into the broader community. It is always about collaboration, finding the scope of services within the consortium, and being prepared to meet the changes of the surrounding environment.

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*For details about the economic impact studies go to http://crcraleighcolleges.org/serving/economic_impact/