UKCPN Resource - Potential problems, pitfalls and what to watch out for!

Before the first Community Partner Summit in 2012, we asked community partners to reflect on their community–university partnership work to identify any major challenges that might be helpful to share with others as lessons learned. Their feedback was summarised into 6 general themes: negotiating different cultures, agreeing and managing expectations, power and equity, funding and capacity, communication, and terms of student-community engagement. Watch out for:

1. Bureaucracy – universities are large institutions and can be unwieldy to work with easily

2. Some academics can lack knowledge about their communities and community issues or may know about their communities but ignore them as potential partners

3. Incomplete information about what universities could potentially offer means community partners cannot trade in order to get the best out of the partnership and vice versa

4. Universities can sometimes fail to look beyond their own base, so peripheral areas and the activity outside this base can get ignored

5. Universities can sometimes think they don't need to offer anything in return, or offer too little

6. Universities don't always try hard enough to support community ideas, overcome obstacles or adapt agendas to better meet community interests

7. Expect barriers to securing funding - little or no funding for the community partner, problems with payments because there is no budget code and so on

8. Expertise can be valued differently - textbook knowledge vs. grassroots experience

9. University culture can promote complacency (some academics can think they are the sole source and validation of knowledge, and even well-intentioned academics who want to engage sometimes display this attitude)

10. University culture requires a different language from academics which may not be readily understood by lay people and can appear unnecessarily mystifying and excluding

11. It can be difficult to liaise with universities and make your way into the 'ivory towers' (for example, academics often do not have answer phones or 'out of office' emails and can be hard to reach)

12. Academics can appear threatened by non-academics knowing more than they do.

Holding some of these experiences in mind might help you to think about ways to avoid or manage them if and when they arrive.

UK Community Partner Network
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/current-projects/
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