

# The Community Impact Statement: A Prenuptial Agreement for Community-Campus Partnerships

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## Abstract

The Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative learned valuable lessons through its work on two community-based participatory research projects in which it established a principled model of shared power and identifiable, mutual community-university benefits. A community impact statement (CIS) has evolved from this work. Like an environmental impact statement for a real estate development or a prenuptial agreement between two marriage partners with a large amount of resources to learn to share, an agreement must be developed before the work of the community-university partnership can begin. However, as in an EIS and the prenuptial agreement, the strength and the success of the partnership is dependent not only on the partners involved, their relationship, and the reasons for their union, but on the process by which the relationship and its benefits or assets are clearly defined. The CIS provides that process for community-university partnerships.

## Introduction

**P**icture yourself contemplating a home improvement project. You may have developed the idea with your spouse or partner or simply sought his or her input. It seems like a relatively small project, one that you think you have the experience to undertake, and you anticipate that it will be relatively quick and inexpensive. You head for the hardware store, perhaps alone or with your partner to offer companionship or decision-making help. You return from the errand exhausted by the choices and the decisions to be made. Maybe the products were not in stock, causing a simple weekend endeavor to become a longer-term project than expected. Or perhaps you lost your enthusiasm for the project because your partner had a different idea of the project's goals, the timeline, or the materials to be used. You may even have discovered that your partner had a different idea for solving the problem in the first place. At this point, the benefit of the project seems lost in the myriad of decisions to be made and the potential conflicts.

Community-university partnerships, at least those intended to be sustained for a period of time, are not unlike other collaborative projects in our lives, whether a home renovation or a family trip. They work best when they are approached with careful planning. We must take the time to develop a process to enter into the partnership, design the project and its implementation, identify the mutual benefits, build the infrastructure, sustain the relationship, and celebrate the accomplishments. This article reviews the development of the community impact statement (CIS), a recently conceived process that provides a road map for embarking on a partnership with mutual agreement about key issues identified at the beginning of the project. The agreement resulting from the CIS process can guide the partnership throughout its course and serve as a benchmark against which to measure the partnership's progress. Though the CIS process may be more effectively used in preparation for longer-term relationships, it may be a useful tool in developing time-limited relationships as well. The CIS was developed through retrospective analysis of the shared experiences of the authors (a community activist and an academic researcher) in the Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative (PNHHC). The PNHHC anticipated the obstacles in building a model of shared power, struggled openly and honestly with those barriers, and consciously developed strategies through which participants could identify mutual benefits and hold each other accountable for achieving them. By chronicling this work of the PNHHC and continuing to learn from it, a process has emerged that we hope will be beneficial to other community-university partnerships. The CIS as a process, however, has yet to be tried and evaluated by a community-university partnership.

### **Background of the Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative**

The PNHHC was founded in April of 1993 and “sunseted” in May of 2003. The origins of the PNHHC lay in a planned “confrontation” in 1991 with a University of Minnesota clinic located in the Phillips Community. Phillips Community is the most ethnically diverse community in Minnesota and one of the poorest economically. Its collective distrust of the University of Minnesota was founded in perceptions that its demographics, cultural diversity, economic and social challenges, and proximity to the campus positioned its residents as desirable “research subjects.” The community also saw the university as a symbol of the power differentials existing between communities and institutions.

Like many inner-city communities, Phillips Community faces much environmental degradation: industry and its subsequent air and soil pollution; housing stock in poor repair; noise, dust, and toxins from the two federal freeways and two state highways that form its borders; and an undue burden of childhood lead poisoning. In the late 1980s, several volunteer community activists, in partnership with the community's citizen participation organization, utilized one of these environmental issues to organize the community and call residents to action for unity and self-governance. As a result, the community prevented Hennepin County from constructing a garbage transfer station close to the nation's first urban, Indian-owned housing project. Community residents learned valuable lessons about organizing across their differences by identifying a common interest—the health and well-being of the children. Most adults, even those in despair and facing incredible hardships, will confront adverse conditions for the sake of protecting their children. After the garbage transfer station success, residents maintained their focus on environmental issues and children's health, leveraged their new-found sense of power, and directed their activist and organizing efforts toward the prevention of childhood lead poisoning. The University of Minnesota, in the form of a University clinic located in Phillips, was slated to become the community's next target because of the university's size, its stature as a public institution, and the community's distrust of it.

A community resident (the first author), a staff representative of the community's citizen participation organization, and a member of a local Indian community newspaper approached the community clinic director to demand that the clinic address the community's well-being in addition to the health concerns of individual patients. The director, in a move that surprised and pleased the community residents, agreed to bring additional faculty and university resources to the table if community members would identify a specific issue and invite additional community members to join the dialogue. The community members identified childhood lead poisoning, and the focus of the soon-to-be-christened "Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative" was decided.

Participants on the PNHHC included parents and residents of Phillips, University of Minnesota researchers from five departments, a corporate foundation representative, a community-based nonprofit, a state representative, and the local and state departments of health. In the early meetings of the PNHHC, the community hoped to coerce faculty researchers to share information the community could use to design and implement intervention projects

with more trusted organizations existing within the community. Community resident members of the PNHHC were chagrined when faculty researchers could not produce such information and suggested that additional research would be necessary to determine better interventions for lead-poisoning prevention. However, through a series of contentious conversations with the faculty researchers, residents learned how research could contribute factual information and good science to the design of higher quality intervention projects. This would also give the community greater credibility. The researchers learned that community residents had real skills to offer to a research project, including the ability to identify potential confounding variables that might threaten the validity of the project's results.

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The PNHHC's community members reluctantly agreed to pursue research if they could also assist in the research design and take the leadership in creating the governance model that would oversee the research projects. The information gained from the research was to be shared with the community before being submitted to academic audiences so that it could contribute to the design of additional intervention projects that would be initiated by the community and be put to immediate use as a means for doing advocacy and public policy work.

The research questions were straightforward. The Lead Project asked, “Is a culturally specific peer education model effective for the primary prevention of lead overburden?” The DREAMS (Developmental Research on Early Attention and Memory Skills) Project asked, “What is the contribution of lead overburden to the development of attention, memory, and behavior regulation in at-risk inner-city children?” Grants to fund these projects were received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

We didn't know at the time that we were traveling a newly discovered community-based participatory research path in parallel with several other communities across the United States. The motivation of Phillips residents was more homegrown—to use the distrust of the University of Minnesota to ensure that the community was

not participating in something that would benefit only the university. Therefore, the PNHHC worked very systematically in developing the model it established. That model had parallel goals of building capacity, cultivating leadership, and sharing power while conducting two rigorous research projects. It required that benefits to the community be identified, acknowledged, and honored and that risks be anticipated and mitigated when possible. The benefits and risks to the University of Minnesota were also to be clearly delineated and scrutinized.

The PNHHC believed that the outcomes of the governance model of community-university partnership were as important as what we learned from our research projects. Building models of shared power is not easy work in a world that offers few examples from which to learn or to emulate. We attempted to infuse our work with the democratic value that we are all created equal, while recognizing very real differences between PNHHC members: privilege, education, geography, race, class, sexual preferences, and cultural values, to name a few. Reconciling these differences with our principles often caused strife—personal and professional, individual and institutional. In the end, however, the value of building sustainable relationships with mutual trust and respect became the ultimate benefit of our work and contributed to restoring community health.

### **CIS Predecessors: The Environmental Impact Statement and the Community Benefit Agreement**

When the Phillips Community worked to prevent the garbage transfer station from being built in the community, their tactics included a demand that the city of Minneapolis commission an environmental impact statement (EIS). An EIS is used to evaluate the impact of a land development or construction project on the area, including impact on neighboring facilities, transportation systems, schools, public safety systems, endangered species, and aesthetics. An EIS must consider not only the impact of the final product but how the project may affect the immediate surrounding community during the process of construction. The Phillips resident members wanted to evaluate the impact of the designated garbage packer truck routes, the number of truck trips to and from the transfer station, and the type of materials to be processed. The citizen members of the review panel asked about the number of workers that would be needed to work in this facility, where those workers would come from, and the terms of their employment.

The careful scrutiny residents gave the social and environmental impact of the garbage transfer station was later applied to the consideration of the social and economic impacts of the PNHHC's research projects.

Such citizen scrutiny may seem like standard procedure in preparing an EIS, but it is not always the case. An EIS is an evaluation tool used by the government before granting approval of many publicly funded projects. Because the EIS is most often coordinated between the developer and a public entity, there is little grassroots or citizen involvement. When citizens or environmentalists do insist on being part of the EIS review, this almost always ensures that there will be a certain level of conflict caused, in part, by involving the citizen stakeholders too late to assist in defining the process. However, greater citizen involvement has been called for recently. In evaluating the outcomes of greater stakeholder involvement in the Interstate Highway 35E Corridor Alternative Urban Areawide Review in Lino Lakes, Minnesota, Carissa Schively (2006) concludes that it is important to identify the concerns of the stakeholders from the very beginning and to define a process for doing so accordingly.

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*“This involvement by community residents in identifying their own needs and developing the subsequent enforcement measures... ensures greater benefit for the community.”*

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The EIS was intended to be a sound, proactive planning procedure, but citizens are questioning the breadth of the EIS and the process by which these statements are created. For example, where the goals of economic growth and environmental protection conflict, the environment tends to lose out, because it has not been easy to put a monetary value on environmental impact (Beder 1997). The EIS process is also being challenged because citizens distrust the motives of the authors of these documents. Frequently, an EIS is performed after the developer has already invested considerable financial resources. It is often conducted under the authority of the developer or their consultants. Citizens become suspicious that both the producers and those that review the EIS predetermine the outcomes of the EIS process. Two EIS performed for the Sydney Harbour Tunnel in Australia (Beder 1997) illustrate this point. One was commissioned by proponents of the tunnel and showed that benefits outweighed costs. The EIS commissioned by tunnel opponents

demonstrated the opposite. Obviously, one or both entities sought to advance their own interests in producing these studies.

The diminished role that everyday citizens play in EIS production, and the lack of thorough positive and negative impact analysis has, in part, caused social justice activists across the nation and proponents of the “smart growth” movement to develop community benefit agreements (CBAs; see the Center on Policy Initiatives Web site for background). Unlike an EIS, the CBA is negotiated between the community groups and the developer before the development agreement is executed by the developer and the government. The community plays a strategic role from the beginning, and issues of environmental, social, and economic justice are given the same weight as the benefit of economic development. These new initiatives began in California and have spread to cities across the country using strategies called the “Three E’s”: the economy, the environment, and equity. A CBA addresses a range of specific community needs identified by community residents themselves. This involvement by community residents in identifying their own needs and developing the subsequent enforcement measures for the developer ensures greater benefit for the community. For example, in the CBA developed for the modernization of the LAX airport, a wide range of benefits were agreed to, including: preference given to local residents for jobs at the airport; funds set aside for researching the health effects of the airport’s operations on the surrounding communities; and beginning an airport and aviation-related job training program for low-income residents (*Gross, LeRoy, and Janis-Aparicio 2005*). CBAs are negotiated between the community and the developer first and then are submitted jointly by the community and developer to the city for approval.

In another large, complex development project in the Harrison Neighborhood of Minneapolis, residents working with their citizen participation group first developed a set of guiding principles to ensure that the community benefits would be given the highest priority in the development project. These principles provided the framework for the CBA. The essence of these principles was to “improve the lives of the people who currently live and work in the Harrison Neighborhood” (*Khoury 2006*). Therein lies one of the essential differences between an EIS and a CBA: the EIS is a *product* produced by high-ranking public and private agencies that assesses the impact of a project *on* a community; a CBA is a *process* that is designed and performed in collaboration *with* the members of the community to create positive impact.

## Community Impact Statement

Although CBAs had not yet been created when the PNHHC was emerging, there is a striking similarity between the issues the PNHHC identified as key to establishing trust and the concerns that most often need to be addressed as part of a Community Benefit Agreement in a development project. These key components include: entering into a collaborative working agreement at the beginning of the project; the importance of the community defining the needs or the questions to be addressed; and the establishment of clearly delineated and agreed-upon community benefits. There are some important differences, however.

The CIS is a tool to assist community-university partnerships in identifying both the positive and the negative impact a project may have during the process of implementation, as well as when completed. This allows both the community and the university to articulate their needs, to uncover the barriers to doing the work before the project begins, to resolve those problems, to anticipate the mutual benefits as well as the risks of the project to each party, and to come to a collaborative agreement as to how to work effectively to achieve the benefits and minimize the risks. The CIS process establishes a healthy working relationship by identifying commonalities and differences, setting ground rules, developing mechanisms to share power and money, defining processes for conflict resolution, and planning for the end of the work. CIS development is an interactive and collaborative process that not only *specifies* but also *exemplifies* the norms of successful collaborative work of the partnership. Therefore, the CIS is a process that is less about defining methods to hold institutions accountable and identifying benefits solely for the community (although community benefits are given special status because benefits to institutional partners occur more automatically) and more about building an equal partnership through laying a solid foundation for working together.

The CIS process is just that—a process. Although a partnership may decide to create a document delineating the partners' mutual understanding, the CIS process emphasizes the interaction between partners as they cooperate to answer a series of key questions. Questions partners could explore together as part of their CIS process are outlined in table 1. In the remainder of this section we discuss the development of the CIS process as it unfolded throughout the history of the PNHHC. Although components of the CIS are presented as linked to certain stages, events, or processes of the PNHHC, it should be noted that the CIS was developed



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**Table 1. Discussion points of a community impact statement**

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**I. Preparing the Ground**

- What is our history?
- What are our commonalities and differences? Have each of us identified an asset that can effectively be used in this partnership?
- Have meeting logistics been considered that will benefit us in learning to work together? Have ground rules for meetings been established?

**II. Making the Connections/Building the Relationships**

- What decision-making process will be used at the meetings?
- Who will regularly attend the meetings and who are they representing? Are there other stakeholders who are not participants in the meetings but are recognized by the partnership?
- Have participants attended undoing racism trainings? How will cultural differences be recognized?
- Has each partnership member identified their individual and institutional self-interest?
- Has the issue of "power" been discussed by the group? Have power differentials been identified and their impact on the relationship considered? Has the potential for those power differentials to affect the process of developing the CIS been discussed?

**III. Doing the Work**

- Have the community benefits been identified? Have the benefits to the academic institution been identified?
- What are the potential risks to the community? What are the potential risks to the academic institution?
- Have potential sources of funding been identified? Who will apply for the funds? How will the community be involved in receiving some of the grant dollars?
- Will the project be reviewed by an institutional review board? Is the institutional review board familiar with the workings of community-university partnerships?
- How often will other stakeholders receive progress reports? What is the report format?
- What is the project timeline? Is there an additional timeline for developing the partnership, and have those timelines been integrated?
- Remember to identify project hallmarks and celebrations of accomplishments!
- Has the group received training in conflict resolution?
- Has governance been delineated and accepted by all partnership members?

**IV. Evaluation/Dissemination/Policy Implications/Completion**

- How will evaluation of the project and the process occur?
  - To whom will the information be disseminated? In what formats?
  - Have potential public policy changes from this work been identified?
  - Final steps: wrapping up the details and celebration!
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retrospectively, after the collaboration had ended, by reviewing its history and reflecting on lessons learned.

From the beginning, economic impact was important to the PNHHC. The community wanted to share in the financial resources that research grant dollars would provide. Community economic benefits were carefully negotiated, including hiring project staff from the community and paying living wages and health care benefits through the university. Staff members were able to enroll in classes at the University of Minnesota on a tuition scholarship. Storefront offices for the research projects were leased from a local nonprofit organization. Resident members of the PNHHC were paid stipends to acknowledge the value of their attendance at monthly meetings, since professional PNHHC members were valued through various forms of acknowledgment by their employers. Money and financial resources are deeply interwoven with issues of power in our society. Such issues of power and money are addressed in a CIS when partners explore such questions as: Under whose name will the grant be submitted? What organizations will be paid to participate in the grant and in what amount? Will negotiation with the academic institution be necessary to allow such subcontracts? Who makes final project decisions?

Just as communities entering into CBAs ultimately want ongoing, sustainable development methodologies to be the primary outcome, the PNHHC wanted much more than short-term economic benefits from the research projects. The aim was for long-term, sustainable change in the relationships between the University of Minnesota and the Phillips Community. Trust and respect were eventually established in this collaboration by purposefully cultivating relationships. A key step in this relationship-building process was the cogeneration by residents and academic researchers of the research questions. Before questions can be identified, however, it is important to prepare the ground to hold these conversations. When initiating a CIS process, questions such as the following should be asked:

1. What are the common goals of coming together?
2. What attributes do the partners have in common (e.g., being parents, concern for well-being of children, wanting to prevent a certain disease)?
3. What differences exist between partners (e.g., level of education, where people live, employment status)?
4. What is at least one asset of each partnership member?

5. What is the racial, class, ethnic, and cultural makeup of the partners?
6. Who has and has not worked in that particular cultural group before?
7. Where will the meetings be held and why? What time of day?
8. Is there an individual, organization, or outside entity driving these logistical decisions? Are all partners comfortable with this arrangement?
9. Are meeting provisions available to facilitate the attendance of a broader spectrum of people at meetings (e.g., transportation, food, day care)?

The PNHHC had very few rules for membership, but one rule was that every member had to state their self-interest—what they wanted to get out of belonging to the PNHHC. If the member was representing an organization or institution, the organizational entity’s self-interest also had to be declared. It was the premise of the PNHHC that self-interest provides motivation to stay involved in the work. Self-interest becomes insidious when it is not declared. When it is articulated by individuals and accepted by the body of the whole, the group becomes accountable for helping each individual achieve their goals for participating. For example, one PNHHC academic researcher hoped that PNHHC participation would assist in their promotion and tenure process. The group accepted this stated goal and helped the individual achieve this benefit through writing letters of support. A PNHHC parent decided to pursue full-time employment after being jobless for a number of years. She stated to the PNHHC that she hoped her participation would improve her chances of obtaining a job. She enhanced her resume by including PNHHC membership and was able to use academic members as references. The CIS road map uses this same standard for declaring individual self-interest as a way to delineate the benefits for the community and the academic institution. Once the community-university partnership recognizes and agrees to these benefits, the benefits become mutual and are to be honored by the body as a whole.

The governance model of the PNHHC became as important as research, advocacy, and public policy work. At times we had to struggle to stay in our relationship. But the dialogues that included conflict became the fodder for work on “leveling the playing field” and establishing a more democratic model of equal participation

and decision-making. Relationships transcended profound differences, helping the PNHHC members to have greater understanding and acceptance of others different from themselves.

Establishing a governance structure is an extremely important part of the CIS process. Governance decisions will reflect and affect power dynamics, respect, and trust. A CIS sets forth a process whereby the likely impact of the partnership's work on the community and on the university can be anticipated and analyzed. Although the CIS is grounded in enhancing mutual benefit and mitigating risk for both community and institutional partners, the community should be given both special protections and greater attention to its desired outcomes because it is so often at a disadvantage with respect to institutions. If this is kept in mind, the CIS can be used to address both the fundamental matter of the responsibilities researchers and academics have to the various communities that stand to be affected by the conduct and/or consequences of their work, and the distinctive relationships that characterize community-university collaborations.

## Conclusion

The development of the CIS is based on hindsight. Though rooted in the work of the PNHHC, it was not used by the PNHHC, nor has it been used formally by any other community-university partnership. Its utility to such partnerships is yet to be determined, and we are hopeful that this process will be implemented and evaluated by others.

CBAs are helping communities deal with very real and important issues in the physical realm of real estate development. In some ways, this physical reality might be an easier venue for citizens to participate in than the more abstract, intangible domains of research, intervention, and service-learning. A special process tailored to the needs of partnerships in these domains is necessary. We believe the CIS can assist these partnerships in forming, surviving, and even thriving.

Institutions of higher learning are increasingly becoming more civically engaged, or exploring what it means to do so. Engagement holds the potential for meaningful change and great benefit for both communities and institutions of higher learning. Funders recognize this opportunity and are requesting genuine, meaningful partnerships, yet communities and institutions of higher learning grapple with defining the characteristics of partnership and evaluating partnership authenticity. Attempts to overcome these problems may be informed by use of the CIS process.

Community-university partnerships can do harm in as many ways as they hope to provide benefit. The turbulence created by governance disagreements, often the result of discordant community and institutional norms and practices, may cause harm as great as the potential benefit of a specific project. Engaging in a CIS process may help identify such discrepancies and produce systemic change at the institutional level. We believe that the CIS provides a helpful guide that will allow communities and universities to decrease the potential for negative impact and enhance the potential for benefit for all partners. When this is achieved, a self-perpetuating cycle is set in motion, one in which the improvement of community health enhances the health of the academic institution and vice versa.

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## About the Authors

- Susan Ann Gust is a community activist and small business owner of a thirty-year-old construction management, consulting, and community development company. Her work in construction and economic justice led to her founding the ReUse Center in Minneapolis. The ReUse Center is the nation’s first retail reusable building material store. Currently through her business, she and her husband are facility managers of a 113-year-old building that houses a family violence prevention program. Susan is also co-coordinator with Catherine Jordan of an initiative called GRASS Routes (Grassroots Activism, Sciences and Scholarship). This initiative on the University of Minnesota campus assists in the forming, mentoring, and sustaining of community-university partnerships. She was a University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute Public Policy Fellow in 2003–2004. Her civic work includes cofounding and serving on the Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative, where she learned the importance of research in restoring community health with the encouragement and inspiration of her now good friend and university research partner, Catherine Jordan. She serves on the board of the Community University Health Care Center (CUHCC) community clinic. She also is serving her second-term appointment as the Ward 9 representative to the City of Minneapolis’s Public Health Advisory Committee. Susan is a board member of Community Campus Partnerships for Health, a national nonprofit that promotes health through partnerships between communities and higher education institutions.
- Catherine Jordan, pediatric neuropsychologist by training, is executive director of the Children, Youth, and Family Consortium and an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of

Minnesota. Dr. Jordan's research has focused on developmental neurotoxicology and her efforts have been concentrated on two large, longitudinal, community-based participatory research projects: the Phillips Lead Poisoning Prevention Project, which studied the efficacy of a culture-specific peer education model for the primary prevention of lead poisoning, and the DREAMS (Developmental Research on Early Attention and Memory Skills) Project, which studied the developmental effects of lead poisoning on attention, memory, and behavior regulation in children of the Phillips Neighborhood. Both were overseen by the Phillips Neighborhood Healthy Housing Collaborative, founded and coordinated by Susan Gust. Through these projects Cathy became intensely interested in models of research that aim to address community-defined needs and contribute to social and political change yet enhance scientific methodology and contribute valid information to our knowledge base. Her experience in Phillips highlighted the multiple barriers that researchers and community members face in conducting collaborative research, as well as the powerful role collaborative research can play in effecting real change in communities. These experiences led to the creation of GRASS Routes, a university-wide initiative aimed at facilitating community-university research and educational partnerships, and to a continued working relationship and friendship with Susan Gust.