Empowering Citizen Researchers through Community Foundations

A COMMUNITY CASE STUDY

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Who are the experts?

- Researchers
- Consultants
- Policy-makers
- Funders and Grantees
- Community Organizations
- Individual Citizens

“Community is not abstract. It is about real people with real names. The community developer’s relationship with people is unique. **We have expertise but we are not experts. We seek to strengthen the skills of the communities so they no longer need us**” (Ron Hustedde, 1998, p. 161).
Common Script

- **Needs Assessments – A Common Script**
  - Survey Questionnaires
  - Key Informant Interviews;
  - Focus Groups; and,
  - Report that all too often disappears

- This process can fail to empower community members to continue to ask questions and assess needs and assets, especially after the “expert” leaves (Pstross, Talmage, & Knopf, 2014).
  - Inadequate training provided to community members (Wittig, 1996).
Citizen as Researcher Approach

- This *modus operandi* must change.
- Community research must become even more collaborative (Wittig, 1996).
- Call for “a strengthened local focus with increased local participation and citizen-researcher collaboration” (Heller, 1990, p. 160).
- Departure from expert-driven research to citizen-driven research is expanding, anchored originally in action research’s initial conception (e.g., Lewin, 1946).
Community Foundations

Our mindset with our citizen as researcher approach:

- Community foundations continually strive to understand the areas they serve and how best to expend their limited resources to address salient community needs.

- “What if community foundations were given the tools to assess their own communities, the communities that they know best?”
FCF (Foothills Community Foundation) is a unique partnership that brings support, opportunity and community service to the Desert Foothills.

FCF currently addresses community needs through community service projects, cultural programs, and the support of education.

≈ 240,000 Residents; ≈ 200,000 Surrounding Areas

Taken directly from http://www.azfcf.org/
Foothills Community Foundation

MISSION

- We are dedicated to providing resources for education, community service, and cultural enrichment.
- We serve residents of all ages throughout Carefree, Cave Creek, Northeast Phoenix, North Scottsdale, and surrounding areas.

VISION

- FCF will create a better tomorrow in the Desert Foothills by encouraging the celebration of art and culture, treasuring our desert environment, assisting those in need, and encouraging lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles.
How We Got Involved
A UNIVERSITY AND FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIP
DR. RICHARD KNOPF
Purpose

Four Research Questions

1. What are the community points of pride?
2. What are the community challenges?
3. What is it that must be maintained or preserved within the community?
4. What do people want to add to their community?
Methods

- Online Survey Questionnaire (n = 492)
  - Recruitment by Foundation
  - ASU hosted and analyzed the online questionnaire
- Key Informant Interviews (n = 17)
  - Recruitment by Foundation and Citizen Researchers
- Four Focus Groups (n = 27)
  - Recruitment by Foundation and Citizen Researchers
Citizens as Researchers

- The foundation had input into all measures designed.
- Arizona State University developed and provided formal training for citizen researchers regarding how conduct and analyze interviews and focus groups.
- Citizen researchers conducted, took notes, and transcribed interview and focus group data into a text file that was sent to the researcher.
- Citizen researchers categorized results into themes.
- ASU researchers categorized raw data into themes.
- ASU researchers compared analyses for consistency.
- ASU researchers composed the final report.
Lessons Learned

- This process is not necessarily novel, but likely underutilized.
- This process likely be efficient, effective, and impactful.
  - Comparison studies need to be conducted.
- Training of citizen researchers does require a great deal of preparation and intentionality.
- Citizen researchers anecdotally appeared to enjoy the experience.
  - More research is needed regarding their reflections.
- Raw data qualitatively showed consistency across participants and citizen researchers
- Themes qualitatively showed consistency between ASU and citizen researchers
“We have expertise but we are not experts. We seek to strengthen the skills of the communities so they no longer need us” (Ron Hustedde, 1998, p. 161).

Will the community ever no longer need us?

- We think so, but we must continually evaluate or refine our approaches.
- We must also be willing and able to transfer any new approaches to communities through training and development programs.
Thank You

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