

# Strategies for Developing and Sustaining Partnerships with Underrepresented communities

Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, PhD  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
February, 2013

# Learning objectives

- ▶ Discuss the nature of “collaboration” in partnerships with underrepresented communities
- ▶ Review a model for developing and sustaining partnerships – 3 main phases: entry into the community, developing and sustaining the partnership, benefits and follow up.
- ▶ Analyze challenges and ways to overcome them
- ▶ Review strategies for sustaining partnerships overtime

# What is collaboration?

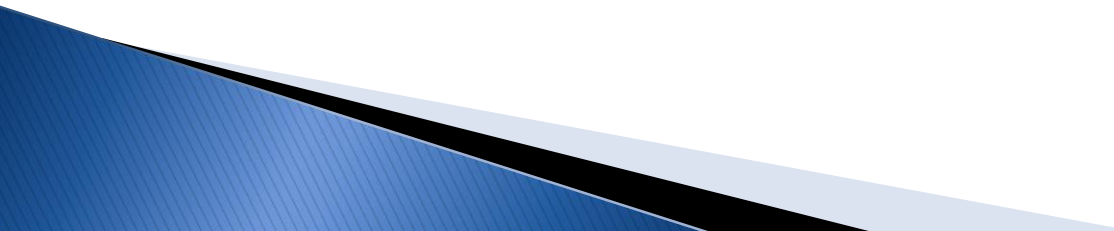
- ▶ “...is a mutually beneficial and well defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals”

(Mattessich & Monsey, 1997)

- ▶ Recognizes the unique strengths that each partner brings to the collaboration

“Understanding is a two-way street” –Eleanor Roosevelt

# What are underrepresented communities?

- ▶ Minorities (racially and ethnically diverse)
  - ▶ Low-income individuals
  - ▶ Rural communities
  - ▶ Marginalized communities because of gender, sexual preference, religion, race, age or any other characteristic
  - ▶ Individuals with disabilities
  - ▶ Groups of individuals who share a common predicament different from the mainstream
- 

# Why the need for collaborations with multicultural communities?

- ▶ Complex problems
- ▶ Addressing social problems need to come from a collaboration among different sectors, organizations, partners, and disciplines
- ▶ Coming together of scientific knowledge and experiential knowledge
- ▶ Need for evidence-based practice
- ▶ Increase gaps in well-being, health and rehabilitation outcomes
- ▶ New ways of thinking, doing, and conceptualizing research, evaluation & practice activities

# Who is involved in a collaboration?

- ▶ Collaborations involve different stakeholders consumers, grassroots groups, community activist, researchers, and community gatekeepers learning from one-another.

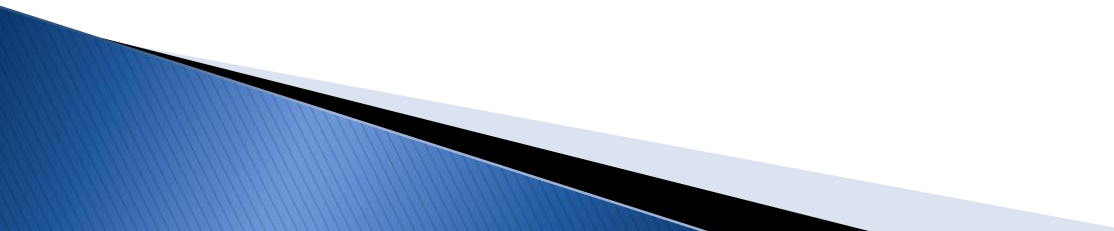
Ready to form learning communities

*“To make a significant  
difference in the lives of  
individuals and  
communities, their voices  
count on what matters  
most”*

*Suarez-Balcazar, Y.*



# Approaches to collaboration

- ▶ Participatory strategies (PAR, community-engagement, )
  - ▶ Asset/strengths based approach
  - ▶ Community-centered model
  - ▶ Empowerment based
  - ▶ Focus on sustainability & utilization
  - ▶ Capacity building (develop competencies)
  - ▶ Translate knowledge into real practices that improve community service & programs
- 






# I. Gaining entry into the community

- ▶ Volunteer
- ▶ Tour
- ▶ Visit
- ▶ Develop a relationship with gate keepers
- ▶ Learn about the community
- ▶ One-on-one contact



# Continuation...Gaining entry into the community

- ▶ Recognize your level of multicultural competence
    - Biases, ideas or preconceived notions of the community.
    - Willingness to learn about the community and new ways of doing.
  - ▶ Recognize your level of knowledge and awareness about the community
  - ▶ Recognize your level of skills – being able to communicate with the community
  - ▶ Identify the level of organizational support, from your own organization, to engage with the community
- 

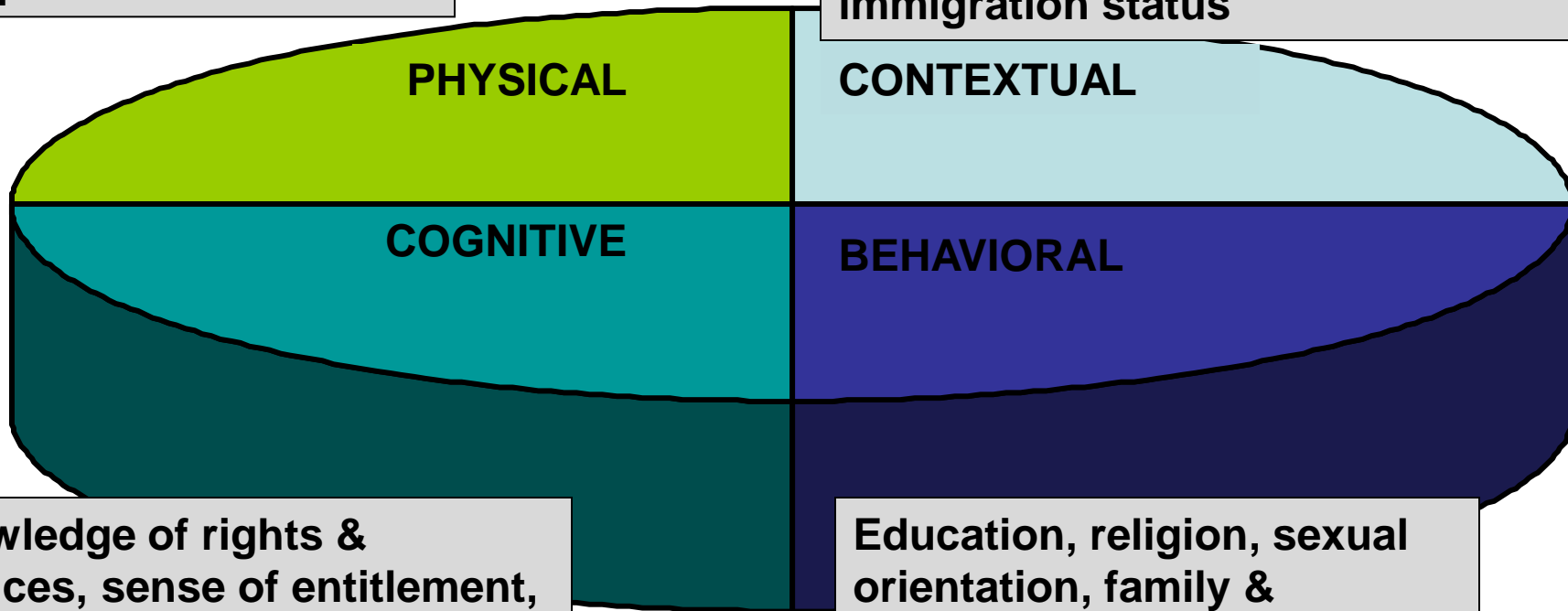
## 2. Developing & sustaining mutual collaborations

- ▶ Develop trust
  - Clarify expectations, identify common goals, plan
- ▶ Develop open & honest communication
- ▶ Respect for each others abilities, knowledge and strengths
- ▶ Open-mindedness to adapt to political, social and cultural atmosphere
- ▶ Partners need to be invested equally
- ▶ Sensitivity to diversity
- ▶ Team needs to reflect the community
- ▶ Transparency, balance of power

# Recognize factors that impact multicultural communities

Race/ethnicity, gender, age, disability, appearance

Socioeconomic status, level of urbanicity, national origin, oppression experience, immigration status



Knowledge of rights & services, sense of entitlement, beliefs & values, social identity, personal history, perceptions of time & personal space, disability

Education, religion, sexual orientation, family & community support, language proficiency, political involvement, level of acculturation, occupation

# 3. Strategies for sustaining collaboration

- Create reinforcers/incentives/ small wins for participating
- Give something back to the community – in-service, training/capacity building in areas of need.

- Recruit individuals from the same ethnic/racial background into your group
- Outreach to multicultural communities in settings within the community (faith-based organizations, ethnic clubs and organizations, community fairs).

# More on strategies ....

- Create Joint ownership over the project/partnerships
- Determine roles and responsibilities of partners
- Discuss fiscal considerations
- Recognize unequal power dynamics

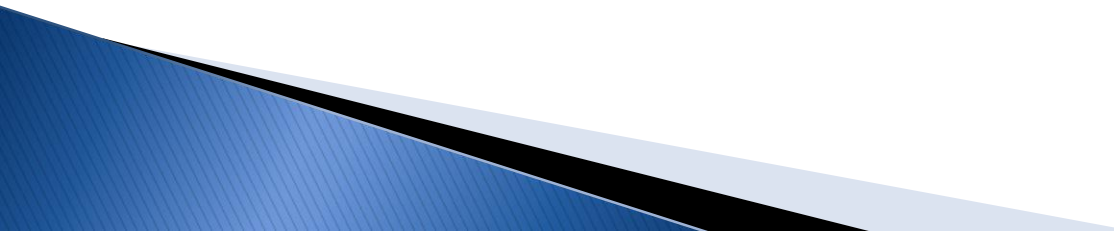
- Create structures and processes for communicating between partners
- Develop agreed upon norms & processes
- Develop plans to evaluate partnership & celebrate success

# Benefits of collaborating with Multicultural communities

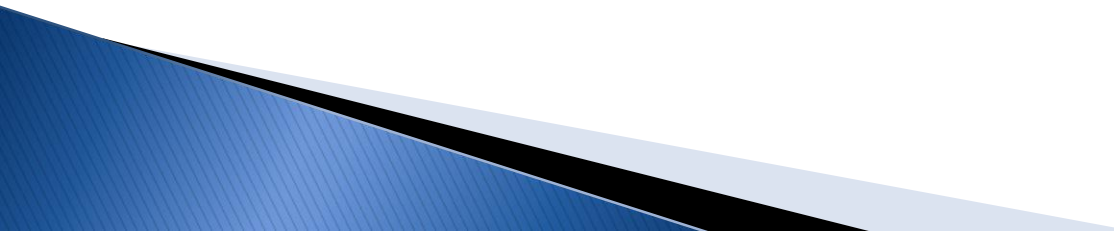
- ▶ Leads to a more authentic understanding of the social reality of the community and potential solutions to social issues.
- ▶ Fosters dialogue which leads to critical awareness.
- ▶ It builds on community assets and strengths. The collaboration process can liberate the outsider of his/her own biases. Outsiders are encouraged to recognize that, as cultural beings, we hold attitudes and beliefs that can influence our perceptions and interactions with individuals who are different from ourselves.
- ▶ Enhance the understanding of diversity issues and cultural and ethnic differences among individuals – celebrate diversity



# Considerations for outside partners

- ▶ Linear thinkers beware
  - ▶ Defining and redefining boundaries and roles
  - ▶ “Address the entrenched conservatism of discipline–defined research and the reticence to allow non–academics at the research table”
  - ▶ Start small
  - ▶ Tailor partnership to the needs of the community and the institution
- 

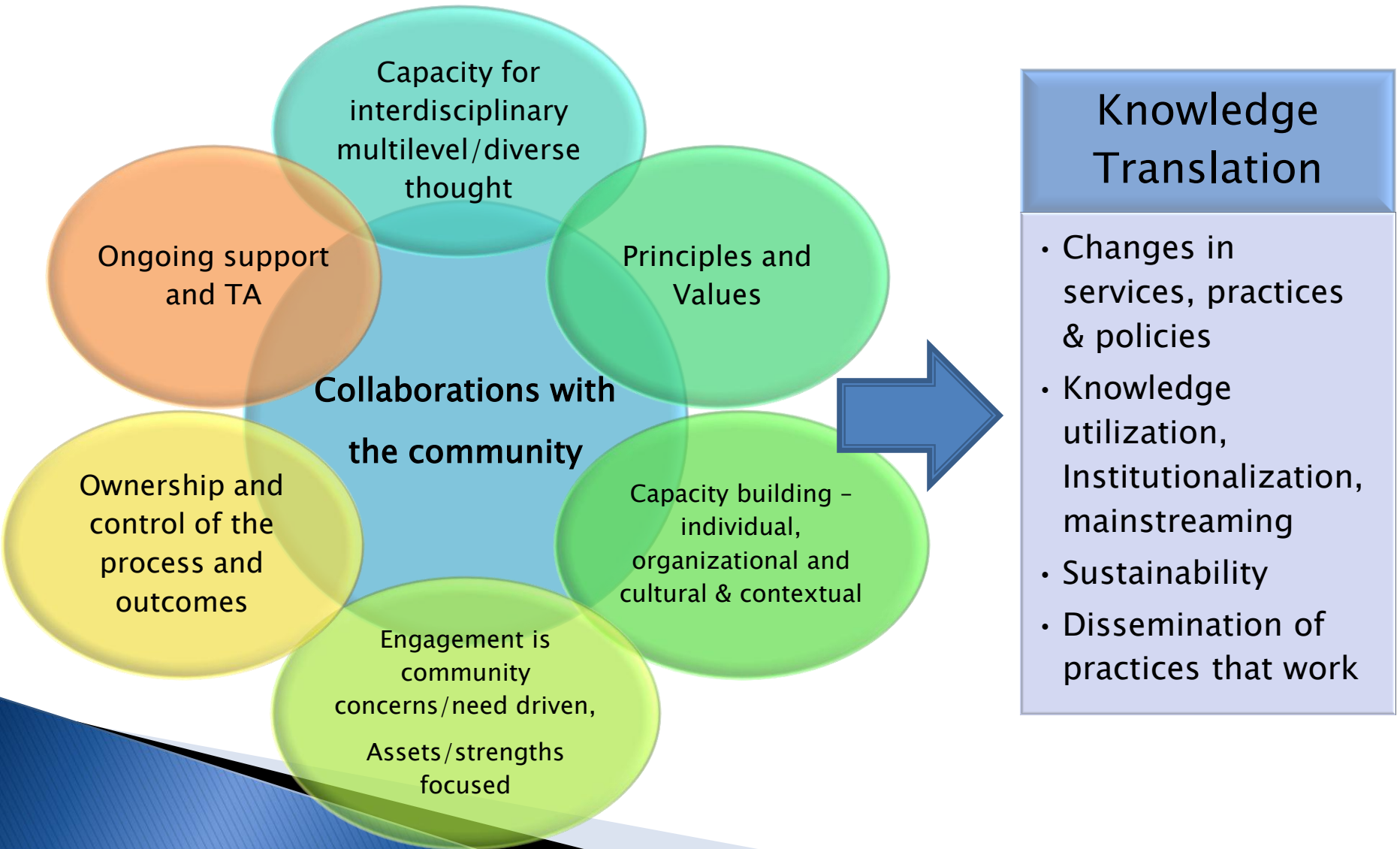
# Challenges and barriers to collaborations

- ▶ University/organizational bureaucracy
  - ▶ Budget cuts, lack of staff at the agency
  - ▶ Transitioning from a university driven project to an agency driven project.
  - ▶ Lack of follow after project is completed
- 

# Challenges...

- ▶ Issues of control. Research/project protocol clashes with the philosophy of the organization (like control groups)
- ▶ “Time frame for research projects is often too short to accomplish tasks (timeframe), keeping up with all projects”
- ▶ “Sometime researchers are not prepared to go into the community.” Lack of community experience and cultural competency.
- ▶ Often partners expect community partners to be expert researchers and “we are not”
  - Community dynamics
  - Overextended community stakeholders

# Community Partnerships and Knowledge Translation



# Conclusions

- ▶ Commit resources, time, and supports
- ▶ Engage in ongoing brainstorming to build learning climate and open communication
- ▶ Be accountable
- ▶ Check pulse
- ▶ Celebrate success
- ▶ Address challenges

*It is not  
easy, it  
takes time,  
it is worth !*



# Resources

- ▶ Balcazar, F. (2001). Strategies for reaching out to minorities with disabilities. *Research Exchange*, 6(2).
- ▶ Balcazar, F., Suarez-Balcazar, Y., & Taylor-Ritzler, T. (2009). Cultural competence: Development of a conceptual framework. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 31, 1153–1160.
- ▶ Balcazar, F., Garcia-Iriarte, E., Suarez-Balcazar, Y. (2009). Participatory Action Research with Colombian Immigrants. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral, Sciences*, 31(1), 112–127.
- ▶ Balcazar, F., Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Keys, C., Taylor-Ritzler, T. (2010). *Race, Culture and Disability: Rehabilitation Science and Practice*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers, Inc.
- ▶ Jason, L.A., Keys, C.B., Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Taylor, R.R., Davis, M., Durlak, J., Isenberg, D. Participatory Community Research. American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
- ▶ Mattessich, P. & Monsey, B. (1992). Collaboration: What makes it work. St. Paul, MN. Amherst Wilder Foundation.
- ▶ Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Harper, G., Lewis, R. (2005). An interactive and contextual model of university-community partnerships. *Health Education and Behavior*
- ▶ Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Balcazar, F., Rodawoski, J., Taylor-Ritzler, T., Portillo, N., Willis, C. (2011). Development and validation of a cultural competence assessment instrument. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 77(1), 4–13.
- ▶ Suarez-Balcazar, Y. & Balcazar, F. (2007). Empowerment Approaches to Identifying and Addressing Health Issues in minorities with Disabilities. In C. Dumont & G. Kielhofner (Ed). *In Positive Approaches to Health* (Chapter 7). 2007 Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- ▶ Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Munoz, J., & Fisher, G. (2006). Building culturally competent Community- university partnerships for Occupational Therapy scholarship. In G. Kielhofner, G. *Scholarship in Occupational Therapy: Methods of Inquiry for Enhancing Practice* (pp.632–642). Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company.
- ▶ Taylor-Ritzler, T., Balcazar, F., & Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Kilbury, R., Alvarado, F., James, M.(2010). Engaging ethnically diverse individuals with disabilities in the VR System: The Paradox of empowerment and oppression. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 33, 3–14.