



Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Division of Community Engagement Resources

Division of Community Engagement

2016

ASPiRE Partner Report: Assessing the Impact of ASPiRE from the Perspective of Sustained Partners

Jennifer Jettner

Virginia Commonwealth University, jettnerjf@vcu.edu

Tessa McKenzie

Virginia Commonwealth University, tc McKenzie@vcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/community_resources

 Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Downloaded from

http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/community_resources/51

This White Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Division of Community Engagement at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Division of Community Engagement Resources by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

ASPiRE Partner Report: Assessing the Impact of ASPiRE from the Perspective of Sustained Partners

Abstract

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the quality of ASPiRE's partnerships from the perspective of partners. In addition, this effort also gathered preliminary information about partners' perspectives on VCU as a whole and functioned as a pilot test to inform future efforts for collecting partner voice about VCU's partnerships across the university.

Keywords

community, community engagement, civic engagement, university-community partnerships, partnerships, partner, engagement, living learning programs, ASPiRE, VCU, Virginia Commonwealth University

Disciplines

Higher Education

Virginia Commonwealth University

ASPiRE Partner Report

Assessing the impact of ASPiRE from the perspective of sustained partners

June 21, 2016

Prepared by:

Jennifer Jettner, PhD Candidate, MSW
Research Associate & Strategic Project Manager

Tessa McKenzie, MPH
Research Coordinator

Office of Community-Engaged Research | Division of Community Engagement
Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs



VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Background	6
Methodology	8
Focus Group Results.....	9
Survey Results	15
References	16
Appendix A. Invited Partner Agencies.....	18
Appendix B: Email Invitation	19
Appendix C: Focus Group Script & Questions	20
Appendix D: Partner Voice Survey	21

Executive Summary

At VCU, we recognize that our partnerships are how we “make it real”. Community-university partnerships enable us to educate our students, develop new knowledge, and promote community well-being and civic engagement. Nowhere is the value of community-engagement – making it real – more evident than in our Academic Scholars Program in Real Environments (ASPiRE) program.

ASPiRE, launched in 2012 -2013, provides a comprehensive experience for undergraduate students to enrich, deepen, and empower students’ understanding of their capacity to create positive change in communities and address critical societal need. We know that this work is only possible through sustained partnerships.

Purpose

Thus, the purpose of this evaluation was to assess the quality of ASPiRE’s partnerships from the perspective of partners. In addition, this effort also gathered preliminary information about partners’ perspectives on VCU as a whole and functioned as a pilot test to inform future efforts for collecting partner voice about VCU’s partnerships across the university.

Key Findings

Long-term partners were invited to participate in two focus groups in December 2015. The focus groups were facilitated by non-ASPiRE staff to encourage honest feedback. The following are the key findings from these focus groups.

Partnership Quality. Overall, partners reported being pleased with ASPiRE due to the quality of their relationships with staff and the high quality of students they receive.

- Staff are **dependable**, flexible, and committed; **communication** has been **regular** and **clear**.
- ASPiRE students are **well prepared**, displaying **cultural humility**, passion, and **leadership**.

Benefits. Partners reported that their ASPiRE partnership provided a variety of benefits to themselves, the communities they serve, as well as to students, and VCU.

- A key benefit, not easily categorized by stakeholder groups, was that partners felt as if they were **breaking down barriers** – race, income, generational, and so on – **together**, with students and VCU.

Key Ingredients for Successful Partnerships. **Clear communication** and **supportive infrastructure** that provided logistics, like volunteer management and transportation, have been critical for the continued success of the partnerships.

Barriers & Challenges. Critical challenges included the following:

- **Lack of Student Feedback.** Partners wanted student perspectives to demonstrate student change and for storytelling with their own stakeholder groups (i.e., funders, etc.).
- **Lack of “Student” Voice & the Constraints of Semester Schedules.** Partners were interested in longer-term projects such as developing and implementing a social media marketing campaign and website development. However, such planning has been difficult without knowing students’ interests and intentional coordination around semester-based schedules.
- **Lack of “Pass the Torch” Mechanism.** Partners noted that it would be useful to encourage some sort of consistency among students to ‘pass the torch’ and increase the knowledge sharing that occurred between veteran and new students.

Recommendations to Improve ASPiRE

Increase Student Voice. Partners recommended providing partners with student interests so they could identify select students to work with for longer-term projects and plan around both community and academic calendars. One mechanism suggested for this was through student profiles that would be accessible to partners.

Partners also stated that knowing student interests would allow them to offer a variety of activities, rather than make assumptions as to what students were capable of or interested in. Partners were willing to provide opportunities that pertain to students’ interests and were particularly interested in providing social entrepreneurship, program evaluation, and research opportunities.

Create a “Pass the Torch” Mechanism. Partners stated that there seemed to be a “cohort” effect in which older students informally mentored younger students on site. Furthermore, such a “cohort” effect seemed to increase productivity as students were quickly acclimated to the organization and the service activity.

Thus, partners recommended promoting 2nd year students into more formal leadership positions, perhaps as site leaders, to empower students as well as increase the capacity of both the ASPiRE and community programs.

Improve Student Cohesion. Lastly, partners suggested that ASPiRE do the following to improve student cohesion:

- Have icebreakers during orientation and socials throughout the year, &
- Provide permanent nametags that would be mandatory when out at ASPiRE events.

Recommendations for VCU to Improve Community-University Partnerships

Make a Long-Term Commitment. Partners stated that VCU should make a long-term commitment with the community to address local issues and to be a catalyst for social change. Partners wanted VCU to become involved in a more **thoughtful** way. Partners generally saw VCU's role as a **convener** and **facilitator**, not as a “**savior**”.

Be More Accessible to Partners. Partners also stated that it was difficult to partner with VCU as it was difficult to communicate and coordinate among the many “scattered” units across the university.

Recognize their Hard Work. Lastly, partners wanted VCU to recognize that it took time and effort on their part to provide quality experiential learning opportunities for students. Partners recommended that VCU provide small grants that would help offset their time in planning and implement projects for student experiential learning activities.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Overall, ASPiRE partners overwhelmingly indicated that they valued – and felt valued by – their VCU ASPiRE partnerships. Partners indicated that challenges or barriers were simply ways to deepen their relationship and impact on all parties involved.

1. We recommend that partner recommendations, particularly those that focus on increasing student cohesion, voice, and leadership, be further developed by ASPiRE staff and select partners.
2. We also recommend that this report be shared and considered as VCU continues to develop infrastructure in obtaining partner voice. We found that focus groups and regular communication between community-academic partnerships did not appear to be as “burdensome” as originally thought. In many cases, partners wanted more frequent feedback and evaluation with impact results that they could also use in fundraising, promotion, and outreach.

Background

Community-university partnerships expand the university's capacity to educate our citizenry, develop new knowledge, and have a positive impact on our communities (Boyer, 1996). Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey (2001, p. 39) define partnership as a "...a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals." Boyer's seminal work on engagement (1996, p. 21) suggested partnerships between higher education institutions and the community must connect "the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems." When these connections are made, partnerships expand the university's capacity to educate our citizenry, develop new knowledge, and have a positive impact on our communities (Boyer, 1996). Leveraging partnerships in this way allows for Weerts and Sandmann's (2008) conceptualization of a "two-way" or collaborative approach to create and share knowledge for the mutual benefit of institutions and society.

Difficulty in Obtaining Partner Perspectives

Evaluating the impact of partnerships from both university and community perspectives remains a significant challenge at the institutional-level, particularly with respect to obtaining community voice (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Gellmon et al., 2001). Certain elements have been demonstrated in the literature as crucial to successful partnerships: mutuality and reciprocity, shared decision-making between the institutional scholar and the community partner; and transparency (Bell-Elkins, 2002; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Williams, Cameron Wake, Abrams, Hurtt, Rock, Graham, Hale et al., 2011).

At the same time, certain barriers to successfully engaging in community-university partnerships have also been noted in the literature. Partners most commonly report barriers of inadequate communication and unclear expectations about the purpose, nature, and desired outcomes for the relationship (Cronley, Madden, & Davis, 2015). While studies have made advances in understanding community-university partnerships, the lack of partner voice and perspectives still remains a significant gap.

ASPiRE

VCU's ASPiRE program provides a unique opportunity to assess the quality of a community-university partnership. ASPiRE is a living-learning program promoting community engagement through academic coursework and co-curricular experiences. The mission of ASPiRE is to enrich and deepen students' understanding of their capacity to create positive change in communities and address critical societal needs through long-term sustainable partnerships.

ASPiRE currently serves undergraduate students. Students are required to:

- Reside in the West Grace South Residence Hall for two-years,
- Complete all academic coursework on time for the Community Engagement Certificate of Completion, &
- Complete a minimum of 100 hours of co-curricular experiences.

ASPiRE began during the 2012-2013 academic year with an inaugural class of 143 students. In a short amount of time, the program has grown. For the 2014-2015 academic year,

- 198 students were enrolled,
- 10,017 hours completed in co-curricular activities, and
- 104 partners were served.

See ASPiRE's 2014-2015 Annual Report for more information.

Purpose

As ASPiRE continues to grow, it is critical that we assess the quality of its partnerships. Moreover, ASPiRE recognizes that it can only do the work that it does with the assistance of their partners. Thus, the purpose of this evaluation was to assess the quality of ASPiRE's partnerships from the perspective of partners.

In addition, this effort was also a pilot test to inform future efforts for collecting partner voice on VCU's partnerships across the university.

Methodology

Partner perspectives on their relationship with ASPiRE was obtained through focus groups. Focus groups, as opposed to surveys and interviews, were selected as the most feasible option to obtain rich information and nuance (Gelmon et al., 2001).

The focus groups were facilitated by non-ASPiRE staff to increase a sense of safety among participants and encourage honest feedback. Two Division of Community Engagement staff co-facilitated the focus groups. These facilitators had some level of knowledge about ASPiRE and its role within the Division, but were not under the auspices of ASPiRE leadership and management.

Sample

Two focus groups with sustained partners were conducted in December 2015. Sustained partners were defined as partners who had been involved with ASPiRE for at least two years. ASPiRE identified these sustained partners (see Appendix A) and invited them to attend a focus group (see Appendix B). The invitational email indicated that the focus groups would be co-facilitated by non-ASPiRE staff.

Sixteen (16) sustained partners were invited and twelve (12) accepted the invitation. Due to varying circumstances (i.e., sick child, etc.), ten (10) attended the focus groups.

Measures

Focus group questions were developed based on those used by Gelmon and colleagues (2001) in a similar study. An evaluation team – composed of the co-facilitators, the Director of ASPiRE, and the APSiRE Community Partner Coordinator – revised the questions to fit the context and their evaluative goals (see Appendix C).

In addition, a few questions were inserted to assess how partners perceived working with VCU as a whole, if relevant. These questions would be used to inform the Division's larger goal in obtaining partner voice across the university to enhance and improve community-engagement at VCU.

Lastly, a brief survey about preferred contact method and frequency was added to the focus group sessions to inform future data collection efforts (see Appendix D).

Analysis

Focus group sessions were not tape recorded to encourage honest feedback. Instead, notes were taken on large sticky flip charts. These notes were typed up and expanded within 24-48 hours from completing the focus groups. Then, the co-facilitators compiled the notes into one document and discussed and agreed upon major themes. "Major" themes were items where the majority of members mentioned or agreed with a sentiment; however, frequencies of themes were not formally counted. In addition, the co-facilitators made note of themes that were "novel" or surprising suggestions, regardless of whether the majority agreed with the sentiment.

Focus Group Results

PARTNERSHIP QUALITY

Overall, partners reported being pleased with ASPiRE due to the quality of their relationships with staff and the high quality of students they receive.

Relationship Quality. Partners found program staff to be **dependable**, flexible, and committed. Just as important, partners noted that **communication** was **regular** and **clear**.

Given that ASPiRE is a relatively new, partners recognized that the program has evolved and improved over time as logistics have been “figured out.” A **critical** development has been ASPiRE providing **transportation** for students to attend events

Student Quality. Partners were impressed by the **caliber** of ASPiRE students. Partners stated that ASPiRE students come to them **well prepared**, displaying:

- Cultural humility,
- Enthusiasm & passion, and
- Leadership & dedication.

ASPiRE students just go the extra mile without being asked ...

They are not ‘*voluntolds*’ ...

We call them the ASPiRE Army ...

Partners also noted a sense of **consistency** among **students**.

Consistency was a debated term as students were not always the same for each event. However, in some cases a few students were ‘returnees’ or ‘veterans’ in that they had volunteered with a partner organization previously.

Veteran students took it upon themselves to informally orient new students to partner agencies and give ‘how-to’ guidance during events. Such, **knowledge sharing** among students was invaluable to partners in being able to accomplish more during events.

BENEFITS

Partners reported that their ASPiRE partnership provided a variety of benefits to themselves, the communities they serve, as well as to students, and VCU.

Organizational benefits

- **Cost-savings.** Partners stated that ASPiRE students were a labor force engaged in public service activities; thereby relieving their organization and the community of the financial burden.

- **Exposure & Outreach.** Partners stated that their partnership provided them with exposure to students. Such exposure increased their outreach efforts.
- **Intergenerational Understanding & Hiring Practices.** Partners also stated that they were able to learn more about millennials in their interactions with ASPiRE students. Somewhat surprisingly, partners have passed this information along to their human resources department to inform recruitment & hiring practices.

Community benefits

Partners had **difficulty differentiating** between their **organizational** benefits and **community benefits**. This is likely because improved capacity – an organizational benefit – led to improved services for their clients or a specific community.

For example, partners that served a youth population (pk-12) stated mentorships and role modeling as a community benefit. A few partners also stated neighborhood improvement and beautification efforts were benefits to the broader community.

Student benefits

- **Experiential Learning & Skill Development.** Partners stated that students received the benefit of being able to learn and hone their professional and leaderships skills in a “real-life” setting.
- **Career Development & Professional Networking.** Such real-life opportunities, according to partners, enabled students to have “light-bulb” moments in which they figured out their passion. In addition, students were able to begin building their professional network that had the potential for life-long benefit as students worked towards their career goals.
- **Spiritual & Emotional Growth.** In addition to growing as a professional, partners stated that these real-life opportunities gave students the chance to grow as a person spiritually and emotionally.

Engaging with difference was noted as a crucial activity for personal growth and development. Students often worked with diverse populations – in some cases meeting someone radically different from themselves (i.e., a person experiencing homelessness) for the first time.

Such experiences provided students the opportunity to reflect and identify potential stereotypes they might have held about people and complex social issues.

It's a transformational experience, not just transactional.

VCU benefits

- **Building Trust & Reputation.** Partners consistently stated that the ASPiRE program shed a “positive light” on VCU and that this program was VCU taking “leaps towards social responsibility.”
- **Recruitment & Attainment.** Partners thought that the ASPiRE program would attract students to attend VCU. Partners also thought the program helped students stay and complete their degrees as they are able to build a sense of community and a support network with fellow students and community partners.

Other benefits

Notably, when asked if there were “other” benefits, partners stated that they felt as if they were **breaking down barriers** – race, income, generational, and so on – **together**. In other words, partners felt that themselves, the students, and staff all benefited from working together for something bigger than themselves. They all learned in the process – not just the students.

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERING: KEY INGREDIENTS

Holistic Program & Purposeful Design. Partners stated that the holistic nature and the purposeful design of the program produced high quality students. Partners noted that students seemed to feel as if they were part of something bigger than themselves and had a sense of pride in what they did.

ASPiRE student just have a little more ‘polish’ to them.

Prepared Students. Partners consistently stated that ASPiRE students were some of the **most prepared** volunteers that they have worked with – including adults.

ASPiRE students came to them with a global understanding of what it meant to work in the community; their **cultural humility** and cultural competence were evident.

High Quality Staff. Partners said that staff made it easy for them to partner together. They have been **open** and **flexible** in responding to their needs. For example, ASPiRE staff have never said ‘no’ when partners contacted them for students, have been there for them when they’ve been in a bind, and are willing to learn from mistakes.

Communication. **Regular** and clear communication has been crucial for success. Even ‘checking in’ when there is nothing new to report was valuable. Partners stated that such communication let them know that they were being thought of and that an issue, topic, or project had not been forgotten.

Support Infrastructure. Partners also stated that ASPiRE had critical support infrastructure in place, such as **volunteer management** and **transportation**, that made it easy for them to work with and incorporate students into their programming needs.

- **Volunteer Management.** Staff often took responsibility for coordinating and communicating with students, thus, alleviating this task on partners.
- **Transportation.** Transportation for students to attend service events was praised as a program improvement and critical resource for a successful partnership.

REMAINING BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

Partners reported that there were some challenges to partnering with APsiRE, such as lack of student feedback and knowledge on student interests. These challenges seemed to indicate a desire for greater communication and transparency to assist partners with project planning, as well to highlight this partnership with their own stakeholders.

Lack of Student Feedback. Majority of partners stated that they would like to receive feedback from students about their service experience with their organization. Specifically, partners wanted student perspectives to:

- Demonstrate student change, and for
- Storytelling with Student Voices.

Partners indicated student feedback would be useful for sharing and reporting to their own funders, community outreach, and publicity.

Lack of “Student” Voice & the Constraints of Semester Schedules. Partners also indicated a greater desire to hear from students about their interests and learning goals.

We want to move towards deeper and more transformational activities, rather than short-term, transactional ones.

Partners felt that they could, in some cases, develop larger-scaled and longer-termed projects that would address their needs and engage students in deeper experiential learning activities, such as developing and implementing a social media marketing campaign and website development. However, such planning was difficult without student voice and intentional planning around semester-based schedules.

Lack of “Pass the Torch” Mechanism. Partners noted that it would be useful to encourage some sort of consistency among students to ‘pass the torch’ and increase the knowledge sharing that occurred between veteran and new students. However, partners were not sure what “this” mechanism would look like.

Lack of Knowledge on Student Training. While partners consistently stated that APsiRE student were well-prepared, they were unsure of what training students received. Partners indicated this information would be useful for them to know so they could cut redundant information from their orientation trainings with students.

Lack of Formal Partnership Roles & Responsibilities. Lastly, some partners indicated that a formalized MOU or MOA would be useful for them to:

- Clarify roles and expectations,
- Communicate this partnership with their stakeholder groups (i.e., new CEO, Board, etc.), and

- Evaluate themselves.

Lack of Student Cohesion. Some partners stated that students often did not know each other beforehand. These partners indicated that the lack of easy familiarity and a shyness among students sometimes contributed to delays in getting the work done smoothly.

PARTNER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASPiRE

Increase Student Voice. Partners recommended providing partners with student interests so they could identify select students to work with for longer-term projects and plan around both community and academic calendars. One mechanism suggested for this was through student profiles that would be accessible to partners.

Partners also stated that knowing student interests would allow them to offer a variety of activities, rather than make assumptions as to what students are capable of, or interested in. Partners were interested in providing more social entrepreneurship opportunities and also desired assistance with program evaluation and research.

Create a “Pass the Torch” Mechanism. Partners stated that there seemed to be a “cohort” effect in which older students informally mentored younger students on site. Furthermore, such a “cohort” effect seemed to increase productivity as students were quickly acclimated to the organization and the service activity.

Thus, partners recommended promoting 2nd year students into more formal leadership positions, perhaps as site leaders, to empower students as well as increase the capacity of both the ASPiRE and community programs.

Improve Student Cohesion. Lastly, partners suggested that ASPiRE do the following to improve student cohesion:

- Have icebreakers during orientation and socials throughout the year, &
- Provide permanent nametags that would be mandatory when out at ASPiRE events.

PARTNER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VCU

Partners were also asked, briefly, about their partnerships with VCU as a whole and what they would recommend for improvement. A few partners indicated that they had interacted with VCU as a partner site for internships, service-learning classes, as well as offering student volunteer opportunities in general (i.e., Blood Drive, etc.).

Based on those experiences, partners suggested that VCU:

Make a Long-Term Commitment. Partners stated that VCU should make a long-term commitment with the community to address local issues and to be a catalyst for social change. For example, partners indicated that there was a lack of nurses at each Richmond public school. Thus, the question posed was how could VCU help address that need?

Partners also wanted VCU to become involved in a more **thoughtful** way. Partners generally saw VCU's role as a **convener** and **facilitator**, not as a “**savior**”. Indeed, partners warned that VCU should not try to be something it is not, and thus place itself in a position of breaking promises or expectations.

Be More Accessible to Partners. Partners also stated that it was difficult to partner with VCU as it was difficult to communicate and coordinate among the many “scattered” units across the university.

Recognize their Hard Work. Lastly, partners wanted VCU to recognize that it took time and effort on their part to provide quality experiential learning opportunities for students. In some cases, partners would provide the service opportunity, even when the activity was not necessarily needed or a high priority for their own operations. Partners did this to “keep the relationship going” even when they could have spent that time on other projects.

Partners recommended that VCU provide small grants that would help offset their time in planning and implement projects for student experiential learning activities.

SUMMARY

Overall, partners indicated that the **committed relationship** they had with ASPiRE would be an ideal model for future VCU partnerships. Some recommended ASPiRE as a model for community-university partnerships and an experience that ought to be available for all VCU students.

Put simply, partners stated that they were more involved with ASPiRE compared to other VCU partnering activities (i.e., internships, service-learning, etc), as well as other partnerships they've experienced in the community. Higher levels of involvement meant partners had input and felt committed to, and thus, they “got more out” of the relationship.

As community people, we are more involved with ASPiRE compared to our other VCU partnerships. And so we get more out of it.

Indeed, some partners indicated that they were now focusing their efforts into developing fewer, but deeper, relationships and partnerships to achieve their strategic goals.

Survey Results

Partners were asked to fill out a brief survey at the end of each focus group. The purpose of the survey was to assess how partners would prefer to be contacted in future evaluative efforts.

Preferred Method

All partners (n=11) indicated that they would prefer to give feedback in focus groups (100%), followed by online surveys (64%), and interviews (55%). A few said that any of these methods would be fine, but they thought that the focus group was the best method.

Frequency of Contact

The majority of partners (n=11) indicated that annual contact was the ideal amount of time (73%), followed by 36% who said once a semester would be best. Only 9% said every two years.

References

- Bacow, L.S., Kassim-Lakha, S. & Gill, S.K. (2011). A university's calling: To repair the social fabric. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Universities-Calling-to/125946>.
- Blouin, D.D., & Perry, E. M. (2009). Whom does service-learning really serve? Community-based organizations' perspectives on service-learning. *Teaching Sociology*, 37, 120-135. DOI: 10.1177/0092055X0903700201
- Boyer, E. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach* 1(1), 11-20.
- Brinkerhoff, J. (2002). Assessing and improving partnership relationships and outcomes: A proposed framework. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 25(3), 215-231.
- Buys, N., & Bursnall, S. (2007). Establishing university-community partnerships: Processes and benefits. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29(1), 73-86.
- Eddy, P. A. (2010). Partnership and Collaborations in Higher Education. *Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Higher Education Report*, 36(2).
- Edwards, B., Mooney, L., & Heald, C. (2001). Who is being served? The impact of student volunteering on local community organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30, 444-461. DOI: 10.1177/0899764001303003
- Gazley, B., Littlepage, L., & Bennett, T. (2012). What about the host agency? Nonprofit perspectives on community-based student learning and volunteering. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(6), 1029-1050. DOI: 10.1177/0899764012438698
- Gelmon, S.B., Holland, B.A., Driscoll, A., Spring, A., & Kerrigan, S. (2001). *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques*. Campus Compact: Providence, RI.
- Mattessich, P., Murray-Close, M., & Monsey, B. (2001). *Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory*. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research.
- Weerts, D., & Sandmann, L. R. (2010). Community engagement and boundary-spanning roles at research universities. *Journal of Higher Education*, 81(6), 632-657.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Appendices

Appendix A. Invited Partner Agencies

1. American Red Cross
2. Bon Secours
3. Daily Planet
4. East End Cemetery
5. FeedMore
6. Fit-to-Go
7. Friends Association for Children
8. Friendship Circle
9. East District Family Resource Center
10. Peter Paul Development Center
11. 7th District Health and Wellness Initiative
12. Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority
13. Partnership for Families
14. Neighbor-To-Neighbor
15. Richmond Promise Neighborhoods
16. SPARC/Live Art

Appendix B: Email Invitation

Subject heading: ASPiRE Focus Group Invitation

Dear [Name],

We hope this email finds you well. The purpose of this email is to invite **you** to a focus group to discuss your involvement with ASPiRE.

Specifically, we would like to know:

- How ASPiRE students have impacted your organization
- How ASPiRE students have impacted community needs
- Challenges or barriers to working with ASPiRE
- Suggestions for improvements

We are holding focus groups in early December. Please use **this** Doodle poll and let us know which of the dates/times offered are convenient for you. Select more than 1 option, if available.

Doodle Poll Options (select more than 1, if available)

1. Tue (12/1) from 7am - 9am; location TBD
2. Wed (12/2) from 4pm - 6pm; location TBD
3. Wed (12/9) from 4pm - 6pm; location TBD

Ideally, focus groups have 8-12 people. Once everyone has completed the poll, we will contact you with **your assigned** focus group date/time and location.

Jennifer Jettner and Tessa McKenzie will facilitate these focus group sessions. They are not ASPiRE staff. As such, we hope you will feel comfortable speaking freely with them. All the information you share will be anonymous to ASPiRE. Jennifer and Tessa will only share general themes and will not specify 'who said what'.

Light refreshments will be provided.

If you have further questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to me.

Thank you,

[ASPiRE Staff]

Appendix C: Focus Group Script & Questions

Welcome & Introduction

Purpose of meeting

- Benefits & challenges of your partnership with ASPiRE
- Suggestions for improvements

Confidentiality (re-iterate)

Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and briefly describe your partnership with ASPiRE.
 - a. How long?
 - b. What does ASPiRE do for you?
2. What is going well with your partnership with ASPiRE?
3. How would you describe the benefits of your partnership with ASPiRE?
 - a. Your organization? (i.e., increased capacity, delivery of services?)
 - b. Community?
 - c. Students?
 - d. VCU?
 - e. Other?
4. What has made your partnership successful? (i.e., key ingredients?)
5. What are some barriers or challenges to partnering with ASPiRE?
6. Would any of you say you have had or have heard about an unsuccessful partnership with...
 - a. ASPiRE?
 - b. VCU?
7. What could [ASPiRE / VCU] have done differently?
8. Suppose you had one minute to talk with VCU's president. What would you suggest [ASPiRE / VCU] do to make a greater impact for the individuals and communities you serve?

Appendix D: Partner Voice Survey

Partner Voice

VCU is interested in doing something like this focus group to hear more about its partners' experiences.

1. What is the best way for VCU to ask community partners about their experiences? (select all that apply)

- Online Survey
 - Focus groups
 - Interviews
 - Other (please describe)
-
-

2. How often should VCU ask community partners about their experiences?

- Annually
 - Every 2 years
 - Other (please describe)
-
-

3. Is there anything else you'd like to share that we did not talk about today?