

A University-Sport Partnership: Towards a Sustainable Knowledge-Transfer Model

Clare Hanlon, Brian King and Sharon Orbell

Dr Clare Hanlon is the Associate Head of School, School of Sport and Exercise Science; Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living; Victoria University

Professor Brian King is a professor in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Ms Sharon Orbell was the Associate Director of Engagement and Partnerships, Victoria University.

Abstract

In the 1980s Victoria University (Australia) and the Western Bulldogs Football Club (Australian rules) jointly initiated a range of projects which connected to teaching, research and/or community engagement. The initial *ad hoc*, informal and project-focused approach has subsequently progressed to more formal engagement with a clear strategy and implementation plan. This case study reports how a model that has been piloted with a sport organisation and incorporates

business, science and community has formed a template for other university-community partnerships. The model builds collaboration and communications and provides a centralised referral point and templates which minimise duplication of effort. The paper highlights lessons learnt from the choice of a sport organisation to implement the model and its role in shaping university-community partnerships.

Keywords: *University stakeholder partnerships, partnership-focused model*

Introduction

The rapid growth of relationships between universities and community organizations has been widely documented - from engagement involving mutually beneficial exchange of competencies, to more formalised partnerships where two independent bodies form a collaborative arrangement in the pursuit of commonly agreed objectives (Audit Commission, 1998). Growth has been prompted by the realisation that collaborative advantage is achieved where the relevant

outcomes cannot be achieved by working independently (Lee, 2011). In the choice of potential partners, sporting organizations satisfy a number of relevant criteria because they combine a community dimension (drawing upon a community supporter base), business (many larger-scale sporting organisations are substantial commercial ventures in their own right), brand consciousness (a growing concern for universities) and science (as a support to player performance). Though sport is not immediately associated with scholarly university activities, the sporting prowess of elite institutions such as Oxbridge and the US Ivy League demonstrates that education providers appreciate the association with elite athlete performance.

The sharing of power between universities and the community in collaborative activities is consistent with contemporary principles of liberal democracy where civil organizations are expected to be transparent in their dealings, including with other parties (Pusser, Kempner, Marginson & Ordorika, 2012). Traditional one-way interactions between “expert” universities and “recipient” communities

do not produce longer-term sustainable relationships. In response more universities are partnering with community organisations in the pursuit of mutual benefits, and to exchange information which both addresses community needs and supports university research, teaching and learning (Holland & Ramaley, 2008; Le Clus, 2011). The interest and desire to be associated with sporting organizations is most evident in the case of universities which are active in sport, through research and education programmes and in the university name for example Beijing Sport University and German Sport University Cologne. Universities are increasingly expected to address the issues that most concern communities and society, spanning the realms of politics, society, economy, culture and environment (Gonzalez-Perez, 2010). Though expectations about improved performance have been high, the use of performance outcomes and on using standardised tools has been modest (Le Clus, 2011).

This paper documents the shift from a relatively *ad hoc* relationship to an engaged and sustainable university-community partnership with a major sporting organization. It then provides a case study of the progress made by Victoria University (VU) to establish and implement a strategic university-community partnership model by applying resources such as standardised templates. In doing so the paper explores sport as an activity that has university-wide relevance and a special resonance with the specialist school/faculty. It discusses the partnership-focus in an applied setting (research and teaching about sport) and evidence of the mutual benefits of the model. The model is in its second year of implementation at the time of writing.

Moving to an Engaged Partnership

Universities and communities are neither natural nor traditional partners and collaborations take time (Sandy & Holland, 2006). This is equally the case when the “community” is manifest as a sporting club. When progressing engaged university-community partnerships challenges have included inadequate investment in the partnership, a

lack of systematic data for management reporting and decision-making, the nature, scope, and importance of industry and an over-dependence on personal contacts rather than organisation-wide relationships (Shadbolt & Kay, 2005). These challenges demand a cultural shift amongst staff in the university and in the community organization. To collaborate effectively, a re-orientation may be required amongst university staff to the outcomes being sought by community bodies and community staff may need to learn flexibility in dealing with apparently cumbersome university processes and procedures. To enhance the prospects of forming sustainable relationships it will be important to overcome the engrained behaviours of both organisations, to develop relationships, trust and new skills, and to foster the sharing and evaluation of experiences (Holland & Ramaley, 2008). The prospect of obstacles should be acknowledged such as changes of personnel and leadership at central university level. These may influence the commitment to engagement activities within universities (Gander, 2009). Another challenge is fluctuating club performance on the

sporting field. The highs and lows of winning and losing are different from the longer term view that has been associated with the older established universities. Neither type of organisation is immune to the forward march of corporatism, but the cultures are very distinct as well as having obvious commonalities.

Formulating guidelines offers a means of addressing the challenges associated with university-community partnerships. Hogner and Kenworthy (2010) have proposed guidelines to build a capacity for effective communications and have argued that the two parties should have an equal voice and though contributing differentially, should do so in ways that are equally valued. Other researchers have proposed building a capacity for communications through university boardroom involvement in the relevant community organisation over a fixed period. Such an approach can foster mutual understanding and strengthen joint decision-making to foster the depth of the partnership in the eyes of community representatives (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Documentation may be useful to frame the partnership, including terms

of reference, partnership agreements, rules of engagement, contracts, decision-making guidelines, checklists and a Memorandum of Understanding (Ferman & Hill, 2004; Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010). Investments in foundation-type arrangements should reduce the risks associated with potential financial pressures, differing timeframes, university political pressures and changing funding priorities (Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010). Finally, mapping is needed as a guide for internal and external stakeholders to monitor the various engagements and where and when they are occurring (Hutt, 2010).

The approaches adopted by universities and community partners vary, depending on the type and level of engagement. Some focus on engaged learning, whereas others promote engaged scholarship. In the case of sport, there are more obvious prospects for scholarly engagements where the university has an active interest in sport science, particularly where laboratory based research is a credible means of attracting competitive external research funding. In addition sport offers community, business and scientific dimensions and

opportunities (eg, the Australian Sports Commission) that may strategically align with the vision of universities. A further approach involves universities engaging with the community as a whole. Some universities embrace the full range of engagements that have been mentioned, whilst others increase their commitment progressively (Holland & Ramaley, 2008). Engagements may also operate at a variety of levels, depending on the type of partner. One approach to capturing the progressive levels of engagement is a partnership continuum (VicHealth, 2005). The four levels of engagement progress from informal networking, to coordinating, cooperating and finally to formal collaborations. Rapid progress is most likely where the partner has the advantage of propinquity (ie. located in the neighbourhood of a teaching campus). This was the case with the WBs and Victoria University.

Sustaining an Engaged University-Community Partnership

Ellis and Leahy (2011) view sustainability as “an active, ongoing, positive process that involves evaluating and developing aspects of the

partnership as needs vary and new participants become involved” (p.155). In view of the time commitment involved in developing university-community partnerships, it is important to pursue longevity and sustainability. Partnership momentum should extend beyond the initial vision and enthusiasms of a core group of protagonists. The formation of lasting and reciprocal relationships between university and community partners has the benefit of building resilience through financial and economic uncertainty and social change (Northmore & Hart, 2011). However, universities often have few discretionary resources to deploy on activities outside the core activities of teaching and research. Periodic organizational restructuring may also limit the receptiveness to employing non-traditional practices (Shea, 2011).

Sustainable relationships will require ongoing funding and stakeholder willingness to instigate meaningful change (Spiro, 2009). Participation will need to be genuinely reciprocal with a sense of ownership amongst both partners (Shea, 2011). The case of a sporting club has the complexity that staff in the university may be passionate

supporters (e.g. as club members and hence advocates) whereas other staff may support rival teams. In addressing influencing factors, effective leadership should be cross-organisational, sensitive to the cultures of partners and energetic in the promotion of trust (Reardon, 2006). An examination of a sustainable community-university engagement by Shea (2011) highlighted several factors which help to ensure sustainability. These include strong individual working relationships built on trust and communications, a commitment to the shared vision, collaborative leadership practices, wide-reaching participation, a commitment to shared learning and reciprocity and finally an infrastructure that can withstand leadership changes. In addressing the various challenges, the respective partners should engage in practices that are reflective, ongoing and are reciprocal learning processes (Shea, 2011). Universities are commonly viewed as “learning organisations” and should be well placed. Sporting clubs must not only survive but demonstrate a capacity to learn from both victory and defeat, thereby stimulating enhanced performance.

A variety of scholarly publications have documented case studies of university-community partnerships. These have addressed the university role in forming engagement partnerships with community organisations, the culture changes that are required, prospective supporting resources and the varieties and levels of engagement (e.g., Gander, 2009; Gonzalez-Perez, 2010; Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010). Though various case studies have addressed the opportunities and challenges associated with sustainable community-university engagements, modelling of the relationships and documenting the necessary resources has been scarce, particularly where the special features of sporting organizations need to be taken into account. The present case study documents the development of such a model between VU and the Australian Football League’s Western Bulldogs (WBs).

The Context of the Case Study

Victoria University's main campus and the WBs headquarters are located about two kilometres apart in Melbourne's Western Suburbs and thus have the advantage of proximity. The inner-urban locality was previously heavily industrial and both organizations have a strong working class history. The origins of the university (it was established in 1916) were in a working men's educational facility. The initial engagements between the two organizations occurred during the 1980s through project initiatives formulated at local (i.e., School or Faculty) level. The major point of contact within Victoria University was the School of Sport and Exercise. When a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was finally drawn up (in 2005), no project objectives or expected outcomes were specified. However in light of the shared backgrounds of both organisations and their proximity, the formation of an engaged partnership around the potential achievement of key outcomes was a genuine prospect. This would involve an MOU incorporating project-focused activities for both parties. When it was finally agreed that a

focus was needed on projects designed around a collective vision a document was formalised. An enthusiastic Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and University Vice-Chancellor headed the respective organisations and these two leaders were strong advocates for a comprehensive partnership-focused model. The relevant CEO was a former Australian Olympian (in sailing) and the Vice-Chancellor was a self-confessed sport enthusiast. Given this background the ongoing momentum of the partnership was tested when a new CEO and University Vice-Chancellor were appointed in a single year. It was fortuitous that the incoming senior leaders proceeded to ratify the partnership promptly, albeit with additional flexibility to accommodate an alignment with the new strategic directions of both organisations. Momentum has built quickly and there are over 15 teaching and research-related VU/WB projects in progress. Ongoing projects include sport science cadetships; work integrated learning within teaching units (commonly though not exclusively in the field of sport); cross-promotional activities at key events; and sharing of facilities (VU, 2012). When assessed according to

the VicHealth partnership continuum (VicHealth, 2005), these projects are generally at the more formalised level of collaborative engagement.

Consistent with the partnership ethos, the University is committed to achieving Boyer's (1990) vision of universities as organizations which address fundamental societal needs and pursue the greater good. The VU/WBs partnership model combines aspects of pursuing "core business" and of ensuring sustainability. There is an implicit assumption that the activities of a sporting club are integral to the needs of society and to pursuing the greater good.

Progressing from Informality to a Strategic University-Community Model

A successful VU/WBs partnership model depends on an active, ongoing and positive process that evaluates progress to date, whilst acknowledging an evolving relationship as requirements change and new participants became involved (Ellis & Leahy, 2011). To evaluate this success, interactive inquiry has been undertaken to balance

problem-solving actions performed in a collaborative context with data-driven collaborative analysis or research to understand underlying causes and enable future planning (Reason & Bradbury, 2007). The action-based research approach that has been adopted is cyclical and typically comprises an examination of the situation, implementation of change and evaluation of any changes brought about (Piggot-Irvine, 2002).

Examining the situation. Since 2008 VU has reviewed its existing partnerships to align key strategic partnerships more closely to its core business of learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange. Sport and exercise science was identified as the University's first area of research excellence with an assumption that it would continue to play a lead role in the centenary year of 2016. However it quickly became apparent that VU lacked standardised resources to measure community engagements and outcome-focused partnerships which could form the basis for a sustainable partnership model. In taking stock of the prevailing situation and guiding the establishment of a model to frame

strategic partnerships, a leadership seminar was conducted, an external consultant appointed and partnership workshops were held. Since sport had been identified as a research priority, there was widespread support for the view that the initial piloting of a partnership approach should have a focus on sport and a prominent local partnership.

A VU Staff Leadership seminar was conducted whereby key staff members from functional areas such as Finance, Information Technology, Business Development and Work Integrated Learning reflected on the VU project-based partnerships and brainstormed key elements for supporting partnerships. To better understanding the relationship with one group of stakeholders, the *VU Government Relationship Plan* was commissioned. One of its recommendations was the appointment of so-called Partnership Managers. These were to provide a 'go-to' person for all interactions with the relevant partner (a business, a community group or a Government Department). Meanwhile a series of internal VU partnership workshops were conducted to map current and potential partnerships. Through this exercise the VU/WBs

partnership was viewed as being central. This was significant given that the stakeholders came from a wide range of discipline areas, many of which would not have an immediate association with sport or football. Partnership workshops were also conducted with a combination of internal and external stakeholders with a view to reviewing the effectiveness of existing partnership strategies. Data collected from the leadership seminar, external consultant and partnership workshops identified four resources as critical for assisting the establishment of a partnership-focused model. It was recognized that a balance was needed between the generic (the wide ranging concerns of both organisations and a template that could accommodate multiple disciplines and organisational types) and sport specific issues.

Implementing the change. The four resources were: a framework for engaging and partnering with external organisations; an engagement toolkit; a strategic partnership annual cycle and the appointments of an Associate Director of Engagement and Partnership and Partnership

Managers. The resources address the various challenges associated with the development of engaged university-community partnerships (Shadbolt & Kay, 2005). The guidelines have a strong focus on the role of communications (Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010). The following summarises the aims and intentions of the resources.

The VU Framework for Engagement and Partnerships with External Organisations provides guidance to university staff. The document addresses the challenges identified by Shadbolt and Kay (2005). For example, the framework provides definitions for partnership and engagement activities, a mechanism for approving and developing engagement activities based on four tiers of partnership, governance based on a “hub and spoke” approach (to define relationships between central administration and local areas such as faculties and schools), and guidance on the appointment of relationship managers. In the WBs case, the designated relationship manager was the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) who is a sport scientist and has a

natural empathy with the relevant discipline as well as with university-wide concerns.

The establishment of an Engagement Toolkit was guided by the previous work of the UK-based fdf Employer and Partnerships (fdf innovating workforce development, 2007). The toolkit focuses on the operational stages of building and managing partnerships. Each section incorporates relevant checklists and identifies prospective questions and issues during the expansion phase. The strategic partnership annual cycle was developed to model principles of sound practice for the management of partnerships. This process provided a starting point to contextualise the strategic partnership management model. Feedback on the annual cycle was gained from the VU Industry and Community Engagement Management Advisory Committee (comprising academic and industry representatives) and from the University Community.

An Associate Director of Engagement and Partnerships was appointed to provide internal management of key partners and implement partnership practices. The reflective responses emphasised

that consistency was essential for ensuring sound management practices. This is consistent with commonplace practice in many universities to create senior engagement roles which have carriage of university-community partnerships (Le Clus, 2011). Partnership Managers were appointed as the central VU point for interactions with each significant partner organisation including the WBs. These managers have responsibility for implementation and significant inputs into the client engagement plans (Nous Group, 2010). Table 1 summarises how these resources were applied and what resulted in the move towards a VU/WBs partnership-focused approach.

Table 1: Factors to Assist in the Move Towards a Strategic Partnership with the WBs

Resource	Application	Outcome
VU framework for engagement and partnerships with external organisations	Stakeholder audit of the WBs, to consolidate partner intelligence and establish a system for collating information on partnerships	A template to gather information from both parties.
VU engagement toolkit; Strategic partnership annual cycle	Partnership workshop. To annually review the partnership and set priorities for projects and investment of resources. This workshop also served to confirm (i) mutual commitment to the partnership, (ii) intersection of values, mission, and core business, and (iii) a shared understanding by stakeholders.	A joint vision statement, individual purposes aligned with the vision and complement the other party's purposes and jointly agreed timelines.
Partnership managers	Appointment of Partnership Manager to act as the central person for related VU/WBs.	WBs Partnership Reference Group to act as a mechanism for managing the partnership, identifying issues, prioritising projects and gathering intelligence. The group identified the need for (i) terms of reference, (ii) to define communication between the organisations, (iii) an operational plan and (iv) a tool to assess projects within the partnership.

As a result of applying the resources to a VU partnership four templates to support the partnership evolved and these contributed to the formation of a model. These included a Terms of Reference (ToR), an Operational Plan, a Communication Matrix and a Project Assessment Tool. The importance of incorporating such documents within a partnership is consistent with the literature (Ferman & Hill, 2004; Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010).

Terms of Reference. These were established to provide guidance for the WBs University Reference Group and to ensure the development, implementation and future direction of the management of the WBs partnership. The Group responsibilities, composition, frequency of meetings, powers and reporting line are identified. For the most part the ToRs are generic, but it was important to take full account of the different dynamics of a football club and of a university.

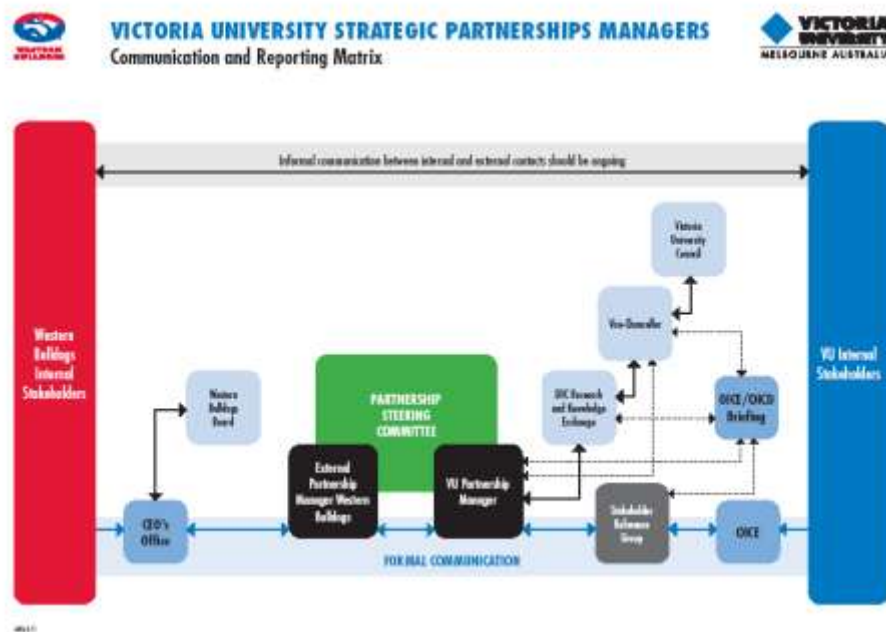
Operational Plan. The plan was created during a VU/WBs partnership workshop which established the importance of mutual benefits and the exchange of information catering to organisational

needs (Holland & Ramaley, 2008; Le Clus, 2011). Mutual benefits arose from an exchange of information that jointly addressed WBs needs, whilst supporting VU research, teaching and learning goals. The operational plan incorporated issues, strategies, associated actions, expected outcomes, responsibility and a timeframe. The recognition of these components provides insights into the challenges encountered when establishing and maintaining a partnership (Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010; Shadbolt & Kay, 2005).

Communication Matrix. The sizes of the two organizations differ substantially with the University workforce consisting of over 3,500, whereas the WBs employs approximately 150. The prospect of numerous project invitations from VU staff to WBs employees could quickly become overwhelming. In this context, managing communication flows is critical (e.g., Beehr, Glazer, Fisher, Linton & Hansen, 2009; Hogner & Kenworthy, 2010). To ensure that the proposed system was streamlined, a Communication Matrix (Figure 1) was designed with provision for formal and informal communications

between the partners. Informal invitations such as requests to place students in internships could be made directly by staff. However a formal process of communication through the WBs University Reference Group is required for larger scale project initiatives such as submissions for large research grants. The channel involves the respective VU Partnership Manager and ultimately to the VU/WBs Partnership Steering Committee.

Figure 1: VU/WB Communication matrix



Project Assessment Tool. To accommodate the ongoing development and evaluation of partnership-related projects (Ellis & Leahy, 2011), a template was developed for use by each partner. It was incorporated within existing decision-making processes with a view to determining the merit of prospective projects. The questions within the tool are stable, with a capacity for subsidiary questions tailored to the needs of the project. Key themes include whether the project aligns with organisational goals, core business and branding, and its prospective impacts and effectiveness. Victoria University and WBs complete a project assessment independently before meeting to discuss the results. Discussions generally revolve around project feasibility and the potential for mutual benefits.

Evaluating the implementation of the partnership-focused model.

Presentations, reports, workshops and audits were conducted with stakeholders involved in the VU/WBs partnership. The focus was on the

effectiveness of the partnership, resources deployed and associated templates.

In the partnership. Feedback was gathered from VU/WBs Partnership Managers and from annual cycle workshops where the benefits were identified, both tangible and intangible.

Feedback from VU and WBs Partnership Managers confirmed that the design, templates and implementation of the model was viewed as effective. The annual cycle workshops provided formal stakeholder feedback from within each organisation about the extent to which the partnership objectives were being achieved through the operational monitoring, management reviews and strategy assessment mechanisms. The operational monitoring comprised an audit and confirmation of projects assessed against the Project Assessment Tool, ensuring commitment to clearly articulated project deliverables and activation of an agreed operational plan for the partnership within a defined timeframe. The management reviews involved filtering new projects through the VU/WBs Stakeholder Reference Group and the Partnership

Steering Committee. These two groups conducted an annual project review and identified trends associated with the “key deliverables”. Finally, the Partnership Steering Committee undertook an annual review and assessment using the key performance indicators that apply to the partnership. The assessment of outcomes confirmed that the partnership model was sustainable. Data collected from the Partnership managers and obtained during workshops included tangible and intangible benefits that flowed from the collaboration. For example one tangible benefit was the implementation by the WBs of a market design that was created by VU marketing students, and the intangible benefits created were trust, bi-directional knowledge transfer, loyalty, mutual benefits, and equal power balance in the relationship. These intangible benefits support Holmes and Moir’s (2007) research that found positive outcomes in a partnership then evolved. As a consequence of the feedback a revised Strategic Partnership Agreement and associated sponsorship was drawn up. It was agreed that mutually agreed projects should be targeted towards the vision of each organisation and enhance

the branding and reputation of both parties. A prime example of the sponsorship is where WBs will donate \$1(AUS) for every club member, annually to support the VU Achievement Scholarships where funding is provided to students from the West to study at VU (VU, 2012).

External to the partnership. With a view to disseminating the learning derived from the partnership, the intent of the Partnership Manager position was jointly presented by VU and WBs representatives and was outlined at a national partnership conference workshop comprising attendees who were actively involved in university/community partnerships (Orbell, 2011). The data obtained from the evaluation forms confirmed the viability and importance of the role of the Partnership Manager. The Partnership Project Assessment Tool was presented and discussed during a workshop session within the same conference (Orbell, 2011). Attendees gave a 94% positive rating on content and strongly confirmed that the template is a useful and appropriate tool for tertiary/community partnerships.

Lessons Learnt

This case study offers a means of informing readers about experiences to date and providing insights for the proponents of other emerging university-community relationships, with particular reference to collaborations with sporting organizations. The learnings to date from the VU/WBs partnership include recognition of the need for shared vision and trust, an outcomes-based focus and standardised tools, university representation on the board of the relevant community organisation, and the identification of a key person to manage the sustainable partnership-focused model and internal university engagement and partnerships. The following section outlines the opportunities and challenges associated with each recommendation:

A shared vision and trust between the CEO and University Vice-Chancellor and shared enthusiasm for sport were major contributors to the transformation of the partnership from a project-driven to a partnership-driven approach. They also helped to ensure the implementation and sustainability of the partnership at the most senior

levels (including on the respective boards/councils). Consistent with Shea (2011), a resilient partnership infrastructure was built to address the prospect of turnover in the key leadership positions. Despite the adoption of new institution-wide strategic directions by the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor and CEO, the partnership has adapted successfully to the changes (consistent with Spiro, 2009). As a result, collaborative leadership practices were evidenced and support the success of a university-community partnership (Shea, 2011). The model was flexible enough to allow for the evaluation and development of aspects of the partnership as new participants become involved (Ellis & Leahy, 2011). This typifies the need for clarity and for sufficient flexibility to withstand a changing and sometimes hostile environment. Evidence shows that this has been achieved in the present case.

During the course of the initial VU/WBs partnership review, it became apparent that the aims and benefits of the collaboration were complex and that this exacerbated the challenges associated with assessment and measurement. This validates the deployment of

predictable, outcome-focused and standardised tools (Le Clus, 2011). The VU/WBs experience has championed a consistent approach to partnerships across the University. To emphasise the importance of sharing good practice a VU Community of Practice group has been established. University staff who are interested in industry and community engagement, have an opportunity to test the sustainable partnership-focused model for engagement and managing partnerships and discuss relevant templates and processes with their peers. Such peer-to-peer discussions about good practice build engagement capacity and address Le Clus's concerns (2011) about the paucity of standardised tools to measure university-community engagements. The discussion also helps to reinforce the centrality of the sporting partnership as a reminder that sport is a beacon for research excellence within and beyond the University.

The partnership has stimulated knowledge exchange between the two organisations. As previously noted involvement by a university representative on the board of the relevant community organisation for

a defined period can assist joint decision-making and reinforce the solidity of the partnership (Ferman & Hill, 2004). The participation of a VU Partnership Manager on the WBs board provides advice from a research, learning and teaching perspective and the various VU/WBs workshops have disseminated the outcomes of sport related research. Research into the performance of Australian Rules players has exemplified knowledge exchange. The commitment to information exchange also supported the construction of a VU learning and teaching facility within the redeveloped WB stadium precinct. Though the applicable education programs range widely across the field of health and wellbeing, sport remains the focus. Meanwhile the creation of a wider stakeholder grouping, known as SportWest, anchored around the VU/WBs relationship to promote sport within Melbourne's West has attracted active participation from partners such as the Maribyrnong Sports Academy (specialised training delivered at secondary school level and the Victorian Racing Club (which operates the adjacent racing

stadium). This is indicative of a context which is not confined to a single sporting code, thereby opening up wider stakeholder prospects.

In addition to appointing a university representative or Partnership Manager, this case study has underlined the critical importance of appointing a person to manage internal university engagement and partnerships. This person should drive the model from a university perspective with a view to activating the partnership and ensuring the deployment of resources. This appointment exemplifies the merit of a leadership team that builds trust between partners by promoting understanding within their organisation (Reardon, 2006). The four templates within the partnership-focused model ensured that clear information was available to both parties and provided overall direction. The use of these documents has encouraged the Partnership Managers to pursue the objective of sustainability. Such action mitigates potential threats to sustainability (Shea, 2011).

Opportunities for Research and Implications for Practitioners

The sustainable partnership model was intended to provide a strategic process for VU and the WBs to progress their collaborative vision around sport and the community and to provide resources to ensure viability. The model is innovative in its resilience to leadership changes and to the fluctuating resources which may impede the continuous development and evaluation of the partnership. These include appointments to key leadership roles, a Terms of Reference, Operational Plan, Communication Matrix and a Project Assessment Tool. Although the strategic partnership-focused model is in its infancy, the benefits have become increasingly evident over the two years of implementation. For example, the partnership has helped build an engagement throughout VU's dual sector of 50,000 students (further and higher education) with increasing enrolments by WBs players and administrators in VU courses and an increase of VU staff and students taking advantage of WBs offers of attendance at football games at reduced rates and special membership offers.

It is important to note that not all partnerships will be sustainable. As well as examining examples of best practice, it would be equally helpful to research university-community partnerships that have proved unsustainable and to identify the contributing factors. In the case of VU, the four templates developed as part of the VU/WBs model have been incorporated into other VU community partnerships. There is an evident opportunity for other universities contemplating stronger community engagements generally and with sporting bodies in particular to adopt a version of the sustainable partnership model that has been proposed in this paper. This could support their quest to establish and maintain mutually beneficial, sustainable partnerships with their local communities. It can also highlight the merits of a partnership model at institution-wide level to advance the field of sport research and education.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Professor Warren Payne for his review of the article and Emma Hall in her endeavour to search for relevant literature.

References

- Audit Commission (1998). *A fruitful partnership: Effective partnership working*. London: Audit Commission.
- Beehr, T.A., Glazer, S., Fisher, K., Linton, L.K. & Hansen, C.P. (2009). Antecedents of or achievements of alignment in organisations. *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 82, 1-20. doi: 10.1348/096317908X310247
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ellis, B. & Leahy, M. (2011). A mutually beneficial relationship: University of the Third Age and a regional university campus. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 4, 154-167. Retrieved from <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index>
- fdf innovating workforce development (2007) *fdf employer and provider partnerships*. Fdf Lichfield Centre, Staffordshire, UK.
- Ferman, B. & Hill, T.L. (2004). The challenges of agenda conflict in higher-education-community research partnerships: Views from the community side. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 26(2), 241-257. Retrieved from <http://au.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-IJUF>
- Gander, L. (2009). The incubation model of university- community relationships: A case study in creating new programs, new knowledge, and new fields of practice. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 35(1), 25-44. Retrieved from <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index>
- Gonzalez-Perez, M.A. (2010). The civically engaged university model in Colombia. *International Journal of Technology Management & Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 161-173. doi: 10.1386/tmsd.9.3.161_1
- Hogner, R.H. & Kenworthy, A.L. (2010). Moving forward together in sustainable, effective, and partnership-oriented ways: Connecting universities and communities through global leadership service projects. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 18(2), 245-266. doi: 10.1108/19348831011046290
- Holland, B. & Ramaley, J.A. (2008). Creating a supportive environment for community university engagement: Conceptual frameworks. *HERDSA Annual Conference Proceedings*. Retrieved from <http://www.herdsa.org.au>
- Holmes, S. & Moir, L. (2007). Developing a conceptual framework to identify corporate innovations through engagement with non-profit stakeholders. *Corporate Governance*, 7(4), 414-422. doi: 10.1108/14720700710820498
- Hutt, R. (2010). Identifying and mapping stakeholders: An industry case study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 15(2), 181-191. doi: 10.1108/13563281011037946
- Le Clus, M. (2011). TaME: Tracking and measuring engagement – A review of the literature. Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.aucea.org.au>

- Lee, L. (2011). Business-community partnerships: Understanding the nature of partnerships. *Corporate Governance*, 11(1), 29-40. doi: 10.1108/14720701111108826
- Northmore, S. & Hart, A. (2011). Sustaining community-university partnerships. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 4, 1-11. Retrieved from <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/ijcre/article/view/2356/2565>
- Nous Group (2010). *Discussion paper: The roles of Cluster Champions & Client Managers*. Melbourne, Australia: The Nous Group.
- Orbell, S. (2011). How to develop strategic partnerships. *Partnerships Between Employers and Tertiary Education*, 30-31 August, Sydney, NSW.
- Piggot-Irvine, E. (2002). *Rhetoric and practice in action research*. Paper presented at the British Education Research Association. University of Exeter, UK. Retrieved from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents>
- Pusser, B., Kempner, K, Marginson, S., Ordorika, I (2012). *Universities and the public sphere*. New York: Routledge.
- Reardon, K. (2006). Promoting reciprocity within community/university development partnerships: Lessons from the field. *Planning, Practice and Research*, 21(1), 95-107. Retrieved from <http://www.mendeley.com/research>
- Reason P., & Bradbury, H. (2007) *Handbook of Action Research*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage.
- Sandy, M. & Holland, B. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 13(1), 30-43. Retrieved from <http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/>
- Shadbolt, P., & Kay J. (2005). Industry Engagement: Transforming Good Intentions into Good Practice. *AUQA Occasional Publications Number 5*, 168-172. Retrieved from <http://www.auqa.edu.au>
- Shannon, J. & Wang, T.R. (2010). A model for university-community engagement: Continuing education's role as convener. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 58, 108-112. doi: 10.1080/07377361003661499
- Shea, J. (2011). Sustainable Engagement? Reflections on the development of a creative community-university partnership. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 4, 136-153. Retrieved from <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php>
- Spiro, J. (2009). *Leading change handbook: Concepts and tools*. New York: Wallace Foundation.
- VicHealth (2005). Fact sheet: Partnerships. Retrieved from www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/.../Fact20SheetPartnerships1.pdf
- Victoria University (2012). Victoria University. Retrieved from <http://www.vu.edu.au/industry-and-community/community-partnerships/key-community-partners/western-bulldogs>