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## Building University/Community Partnerships: A Pre-College Program for Foster Youth

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## Building University/Community Partnerships: A Pre-College Program for Foster Youth

### Cover Page Footnote

NSEP is grateful for the partnership with Alabama DHR which provides funding for youth to attend the program. We are also grateful for each university and community partner that works together to deliver a successful program.

# Building University/Community Partnerships: A Pre-College Program for Foster Youth

M. Sebrena Jackson, Alex D. Colvin,  
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## Abstract

Developing programs to assist youth who are transitioning from foster care to college is key to their success. Although the number of campus programs that serve youth from foster care has grown over the past 10 years, the number of pre-college programs has not grown at the same pace. Universities are in a unique position to create pre-college programs to serve youth from foster care. Building strong community collaborative partnerships can assist pre-college programs in developing program components to address the needs of youth transitioning from foster care into college. Using an interorganizational community-based collaborative framework, this article will discuss key components to building a successful collaborative. The National Social Work Enrichment Program will be highlighted as an example of the pre-college program model.

## Introduction

A majority of youth in foster care aspire to attend college (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). Research shows that 84% of 17–18-year-old foster youth want to go to college (Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care, 2014). Unfortunately, many will face challenges that impede their educational pursuits. When attempting to transition to college, many of these youth face daunting obstacles, including navigating the college application process, a lack of preparation for independent living, a lack of supportive adults, insufficient financial resources, and inadequate emotional support to cope with the academic demands and social stresses related to college life (Batsche, Hart, Ort, Armstrong, Strozier, & Hummer, 2014; Day, Dworsky, & Feng, 2013; Gillum, Lindsay, Murray, & Wells, 2016). Without proper preparation and connections to services and resources, their transition to college tends to be unsuccessful. Policies and programs that support college completion are necessary to understand factors that assist foster youth when they enroll in college (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). With increasing attention being devoted to college access for foster youth, engaged universities, through pre-college programming, are working to reduce disparities in access to higher education (Edwards, 2010; Jackson, Colvin, & Bullock, 2019).

Pre-college programs serve as a highly visible form of public engagement with the community (Kellogg Commission, 1999). Though the term “pre-college” is applied in many ways, the term here refers to campus-based college access

programs (Edwards, 2010). Pre-college programs can be found at postsecondary institutions across the country and offer opportunities for students to prepare academically and socially for higher education, as well as expose students to campus living and learning experiences to increase their independence and self-confidence (Edwards, 2010; Jackson, et al., 2019). Without coordinated investment and central organizational structure and support, pre-college programs may not yield their greatest impacts of enrolling students from underserved populations and improving retention rates of underserved students, as well as increasing college completion rates for this group (Edwards, 2010). For these reasons, creating collaborations between community-based organizations and universities can be a powerful strategy to achieving a vision that is impossible when such entities work alone (Gajda, 2004).

Collaboration is predicated on establishing strategic alliances between local service organizations and communities (in this instance the university community) to increase access to resources (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 1996). Through partnerships, the collaborative comes together to develop a plan for the direction of program creation and to enhance service delivery (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 1996). As such, interorganizational collaborations can be used to increase participation and representation from many groups (university faculty, social service personnel, community-based organizations, community leaders and stakeholders, etc.) that would otherwise be excluded (Cnaan Sinha, & McGrew, 2004).

The literature is sparse regarding programs that address the establishment of interorganizational community-based collaboratives to develop pre-college programs for foster youth. The *Child Abuse and Neglect User Manual Series* (2010) (retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/umsugg/>) recognized that comprehensive community partnerships could be a useful approach to addressing the diverse needs of youth in foster care.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to fill that gap in the literature by providing a conceptual examination of the National Social Work Enrichment Program (NSEP), created as a collaborative with a diverse group of community partners: the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR), social service agencies (Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Focus on Senior Citizens, The Arc of Tuscaloosa County, Caring Days Adult Daycare, Friendship Baptist Church, Temporary Emergency Services, Community Services of West Alabama, and Five Horizons Health Services), Toastmasters International, Tuscaloosa County Health Department, and The University of Alabama, which provides a six-week on-campus summer camp experience for foster youth. Before discussing NSEP in more detail, the next section will discuss the key components to building a successful collaborative through an interorganizational community-based collaborative framework.

### **Approaches for Pre-College Program Capacity Building**

Several theories exist that explain the development of collaborations within social service-oriented alliances (Reitan, 1998); however, Bailey and McNalley-Koney's (2000) framework of interorganizational community-based collaboratives offers distinguishing features. The framework emphasizes the human and organizational components such as leadership, membership, and environmental linkages needed to implement interorganizational efforts. The interorganizational community-based collaborative framework also considers the necessary system components such as evaluation, decision-making, resources, and policies (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 2000). Accordingly, there are external and internal factors that can impact the outcomes of interorganizational collaborations.

In their framework of interorganizational collaboration, Bailey and McNalley-Koney (2000) focus on partnership building among organizations and individuals who unite to work collectively

through common strategies toward a shared goal. Strong community collaboratives are key to the success of pre-college programs designed to serve youth transitioning from foster care. Pre-college programs must collaborate with organizations that are equally committed to the college success of this population. The interorganizational collaboration is accomplished through integrating eight core components: leadership, membership, environmental linkages, structure, strategy, purpose, tasks, and systems. Using these components, the framework emphasizes an understanding of key processes inherent to the development of collaboration (Bailey, 1992).

#### *Leadership*

As the first core component of the leadership collaborative framework, leadership includes the individuals and/or organizations that formally or informally guide and direct the activities of the collaborative. Furthermore, Northouse (2010) asserts that leadership is a method in which an individual influences a group to achieve common goals. Bailey and McNalley-Koney (2000) report that leadership may consist of one or both of the following: a) the organizational leader(s), or the convening organization(s); and b) the individual leader(s) or the entrepreneur(s). Leadership establishes direction by creating a vision and developing strategies to accomplish long-term goals; aligns people by communicating goals and ensuring their commitment to the mission; and motivates and inspires people by meeting their needs and appealing to their values and emotions so that they remain energized and move toward the mission (Kotter, 1990). The director of the pre-college program should serve as the leader of the collaborative partnership. Therefore, the director has the primary responsibility of building the pre-college program. As an effective leader, the director should be both assertive (guiding and directing) and responsive, articulating the larger vision of the alliance while constantly being aware of its smaller elements and how all the elements relate to the whole (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 1996).

#### *Membership*

Within the Bailey and McNalley-Koney (2000) collaboration framework, membership is identified as the second core component. Membership consists of the remaining participants not included in the leadership, who commit to work with united leaders to accomplish goals.

The membership of an organizational unit actually comprises multiple affiliations (i.e., members participating on behalf of any agency and members representing themselves and/or their communities) (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 1996). These leaders, members, and community groups represent the primary stakeholders of the collaborative (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 2000). Stakeholders are those individuals and community groups who have a vested interest in the success of the collaborative and possess varying resources pertinent to the collaboration (Shemer & Schmid, 2007). Almog-Bar and Schmid (2018) note that it is important to assess the options, motivation, and commitment of the stakeholders to establish a community partnership. The pre-college program director should identify the initial members of the collaborative. In the case of pre-college programs for foster youth, a representative from an agency that serves youth transitioning from foster care would be an important member. A university representative would also be a key member of the collaborative. The director should also consider the membership needed to support the delivery of the program curriculum. For example, if developing leadership skills were a program component, the director would want to see if there is a local Toastmasters International chapter that would be interested in being a member of the collaborative to assist with leadership training and development. Other members may also include a foster parent and a former foster youth who has graduated from college. Members from the university such as a dean of student affairs, housing director, and financial aid director should also be a part of the collaborative partnership.

#### *Environmental Linkages*

Leaders and members should solicit the assistance of environmental linkages, the third core component. Within this framework, Bailey and McNalley-Koney (2000) describe environmental linkages as the relationships between the leaders of a collaborative and members of other external organizations and individuals. Laverack (2006) explains that environmental linkages relate to the connection of a community to other communities or resources. Environmental linkages often contain the history of the community and its needs. As such, they can often be used to identify external environmental forces that support or oppose the development of strategic alliances. The organizations and individuals involved in

these linkages are not formal members; instead, they provide support for its efforts by donating meeting space, providing funding, or referring consumers (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 2000). For these reasons, the environmental linkages may be critical to the collaborative's existence. Environmental linkages for pre-college programs should include child welfare agencies that serve youth transitioning from foster care. The state and/or county child welfare agency could not only refer youth to the program but may also provide funding for a pre-college program. At the university level, a dean and/or program director in a school of social work may also be an important environmental link for the program. The social work program may be willing to donate classroom space for meetings. The social work program may also assist the pre-college program director in leveraging other resources (e.g., faculty and staff speakers, access to campus facilities, and transportation) on the college campus, including students to serve as mentors or program assistants.

#### *Structures*

As stakeholders are identified, the collaborative alliance should develop a specific structure and strategies for achieving the collaborative's purpose. Within the collaborative framework, structure refers to the way in which people and tasks are organized within the collaborative to achieve its purpose (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 2000). A formal collaborative structure allows for meaningful engagement of partners, but formats vary based on the issues being addressed (Jolin, Schmitz, & Seldon, 2019). These include how committees are arranged, the way decisions are made, the extent to which policies and procedures are formally defined, and the manner in which functions and services are assigned. Without a structure to manage the scope of work, collaboratives cannot identify what strategies and tasks positively contribute to goal attainment. Successful collaborations are able to develop a strategic plan with a shared mission statement, shared goals, defined responsibilities, and a detailed action plan (Capacity Building Center for States, n.d., retrieved from <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/about-states/>).

Pre-college programs must identify the best structure to support the work required to serve youth. Committees could be formed that address areas that impact the population most often. For example, youth transitioning from foster care may

have challenges identifying housing for scheduled university breaks. A committee could be formed within the collaborative to address this specific challenge.

### *Strategy*

Within Bailey and McNalley-Koney's (2000) model, strategy refers to the means through which the collaborative seeks to achieve its purpose. Strategy includes the extent to which leadership and members agree on ideology, articulate activities and programs, and perform collaboratively. Clarke and Fuller (2010) define collaborative strategy as the joint determination of the vision and long-term collaborative goals for addressing a given social problem, along with the adoption of both organizational and collective courses of action and the allocation of resources to carry out these courses of action. The fundamental strategy is to collaborate, or work together, to increase the impact of services and products provided (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 2000). Therefore, the strategy should embody the shared values, purpose, and goals of the stakeholders. When serving youth who are transitioning from foster care to college, stakeholders must be committed to providing programs and activities that provide youth with the knowledge, skills, resources, and support to successfully transition.

### *Purpose*

Purpose is the sixth core component of the interorganizational collaboration framework. Bailey and McNalley-Koney (2000) argue that the purpose of the collaborative is whatever the alliance seeks to jointly achieve (e.g., allocate resources, provide services, or suggest policies). The purpose can also be described in the collaborative's mission and overall goal, with an emphasis on end result. Who the participants are, what they do, and how they all come together to do it are three different components in articulating the mission and goals of the collaborative. In essence, the purpose of the collaborative unit is to serve as the ground on which the unit is built, and embody the shared values that bond the collaborative together. Therefore, the purpose provides the foundation for the development of collaborative components as well as synthesis of its various components. A collaborative formed to provide a pre-college program for youth transitioning from foster care has a mission and overall goal of successful high school graduation and college enrollment for the

youth. All program activities should focus on this outcome for program participants.

### *Tasks*

Bailey and McNalley-Koney (2000) suggest that neither the purpose nor the strategy of a collaborative can be achieved without first identifying the tasks appropriate to fulfilling the objectives. Accordingly, tasks are the specific activities that collectively enable the collaborative to operationalize its strategy and accomplish its purpose. The outcomes of the tasks are the basis for achievement of the larger goals of the alliance. The collaborative body is ultimately responsible for the oversight of tasks in pursuit of the shared goals. Examples of tasks that may be considered by a pre-college collaborative include recruitment strategies for program participants, ways to market the program, development of a curriculum, and a research and evaluation plan.

### *Systems*

The final core component of the collaborative framework is the systems. Systems are the operating ties that hold the collaborative structure together. Within the collaborative, systems include the established mechanisms for budgeting and resource allocation, inter- and intra-collaborative information flow, decision-making, communication, planning, administration, human resource management, and evaluation (Bailey & McNalley-Koney, 2000). According to Funderburk, Damron-Rodriguez, and Simmons (2006), systems proved critical to effective program operations: a master work plan with monthly and yearly timeframes; a unified calendar to coordinate activities; and member (individual and organizational) rosters. Systems also aide in ensuring information flow, such as lines and methods of communication designed to target appropriate contacts and streamline communications. Communication methods can include in-person committee meetings, individual phone contacts and meetings, and email contacts regarding meetings and notices (Funderburk, Damron-Rodriguez, & Simmons, 2006). Streamlining communication with members helps prevent information overload, while retaining member focus on specific roles and tasks (Funderburk, Damron-Rodriguez, & Simmons, 2006). For example, pre-college programs have to determine how information is shared among partners. Creation of a website and email are foundational tools that can be used. The program may choose to contract with

an outside program evaluator while creating internal systems to manage budgets and human resources.

### Model in Action

NSEP is one example of a pre-college program that has existed for 10 years in the state of Alabama. NSEP has relied on strong collaborative partnerships as a key to the success of the program. It serves foster youth who are upcoming high school juniors and seniors and recent high school graduates. Youth are referred to the program via self-referral and referrals from social workers. The NSEP staff also recruits prospective youth through social media (primarily Facebook), attendance at county independent living program (ILP) meetings, and the monthly regional ILP meetings. Youth interested in attending NSEP must complete a two-page application and submit a brief essay that discusses personal goals, including college goals and how participation in NSEP would help reach those goals. Final approval for program participation is given by a state DHR ILP coordinator. Youth are chosen based upon completion of the required documentation (application and essay), a recommendation from the social worker, and no major behavioral concerns as determined by a review from DHR. Youth and social workers are notified by email immediately following DHR approval. A welcome letter is sent, along with a list of items needed while staying on campus.

Although the program has operated at multiple sites (Alabama State University, Alabama A&M University, and The University of Alabama), it is now held solely on the campus of The University of Alabama. This shift is due to funding constraints and more fully developed collaborative partnerships between The University of Alabama and community partners. During the six-week campus experience, youth live in a residence hall, eat in university dining facilities, use on-campus recreational facilities, and attend various workshops in the School of Social Work classrooms. Additionally, social work students at both the bachelor's and master's level are hired to serve as program assistants and mentors. As program assistants, these students live in the residence halls along with the youth and provide ongoing supervision of youth throughout the duration of the program. Program assistants lead exercises such as icebreakers and team-building exercises. They also lead workshops on topics such as the transition from high school to college.

Program assistants serve as a link between the program, youth, and agency partners.

Community partners work together with NSEP staff to deliver the core program components of NSEP: college readiness skill development, employment skill development, leadership skill development, and healthy relationship skill development.

### *College Readiness Skill Development*

College readiness describes the complex, interconnected set of skills, traits, habits, and knowledge that students need in order to go to college and be successful (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012). On-campus partners are key to the development of college readiness skills for youth in NSEP. The campus partnership begins with the Office of Academic Affairs, which approves youth applications as visiting campus scholars. This designation allows youth to obtain campus identification cards. These campus identification cards give youth access to campus facilities and other amenities such as laundry facilities in the residence halls or printing in the computer labs. A consistent location for all program class time is an important next step. NSEP partners with The University of Alabama School of Social Work for classroom space to host college readiness workshops. The college readiness component includes speakers from several offices on campus that conduct presentations on various college readiness topics. For example, admissions and recruitment staff share keys to completing the college application successfully. Financial aid officers discuss the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and applying for scholarships. A representative from the housing office shares the process for obtaining housing and the benefits of living on campus. An academic advisor meets with the youth to discuss the importance of connecting with academic advising and its impact on college success. The registrar defines this role and why students need to know about the office. The Center for Academic Success presents tips on how to be successful in college, including study skills, note-taking skills, test-taking skills, and time management. The Office of Disability Services shares resources for students on the college campus and the support that is available. The police department discusses campus safety. The Student Affairs office reviews the importance of students connecting to campus organizations during their freshman year. The University Recreation Department shares information about health and

wellness and the connection to success as a college student. Students who are a part of the campus support program for foster youth conduct a panel presentation. They share their personal foster care stories and also share tips to be successful in college. NSEP program staff also lead workshops on topics such as the transition from high school to college, living with a college roommate, and tips on conquering freshman fears.

Visits to college campuses throughout the state are an integral part of the college readiness component of the program. Each Thursday during the six weeks, youth are transported in vans to tour college campuses around the state of Alabama. Youth visit four-year colleges and universities, as well as community and technical colleges. The entire group visits at least 15 college campuses during the program. The college tour experience focuses on public institutions because the state recently launched a scholarship called Fostering Hope (Alabama Fostering Hope Scholarship (n.d.)), which covers tuition and fees for eligible youth enrolled full-time in a post-secondary certificate or undergraduate degree program at a public institution. Eligible youth may attend any of the state's 42 public community and technical colleges, four-year colleges, or universities. However, private colleges and universities are not part of this program.

#### *Employment Skill Development*

Employment skill development entails an activity-based approach that helps youth learn about employer expectations, work environment dynamics, and the required skills for workplace success (Klein, 2018). NSEP partners with local social service agencies to provide employment skill development opportunities for each youth. Agency partners (such as Boys & Girls Club, the YMCA, Temporary Emergency Services, etc.) were selected because most have a volunteer component to their services. These agencies also employ professional social workers or staff with social service backgrounds who can serve as supervisors for the youth. While developing basic employment skills, youth also learn about areas of social work practice.

Youth work three days per week, Monday through Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The workday ends at 2 p.m. so that youth are able to attend afternoon classes. NSEP drivers transport youth to and from work sites. Youth receive a weekly monetary stipend of \$150 for successfully completing work assignments. Work assignments

vary at each site but may include clerical work, assisting with activities with agency clients, assessing inventory, conducting home visits with workers, and assisting with community events.

In addition to job training at local agencies, youth develop résumés and learn the basics of completing applications for employment. Youth also attend workshops led by NSEP staff on key soft skills needed to be successful in the workplace. At the end of each workday, youth return to the classroom to debrief about their day. They discuss highlights from the day, including what they enjoyed most, what challenges were experienced, and what lessons were learned. Youth also identify areas where growth and understanding are needed.

#### *Leadership Skill Development*

Leadership skill development refers to engaging in activities that promote youths' ability to guide peers on a course of action and shape their opinion and behavior, along with cultivating youths' ability to examine their own strengths and weaknesses and set and carry out personal and vocational goals (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2013). Leadership skill development is the third primary program component of NSEP, which collaborates with Toastmasters International's Tuscaloosa Club #858 to offer its Youth Leadership Program. Toastmasters International's mission is to "empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders" (retrieved from <https://www.toastmasters.org/about/our-mission>). The Youth Leadership Program is a workshop consisting of eight one- to two-hour sessions that enable youth under the age of 18 to develop communication and leadership skills through practical experience. NSEP youth meet with volunteers from Tuscaloosa's local Toastmasters chapter one evening per week during the first four weeks and two evenings per week during the fifth and sixth week. Youth operate in leadership roles, using the Toastmasters meeting model. They learn to evaluate their own speaking ability; prepare and give speeches; give impromptu talks; control their voice, vocabulary, and gestures; and give constructive feedback. During the last meeting of Toastmasters, youth compete in a speech contest and the winner delivers their speech at the NSEP closing luncheon celebration.

Leadership skills are also developed as youth participate in a weekly community service project. Youth collaborate with program staff to identify

projects of interest based upon community needs. In the past those projects have included partnering with a local nursing home and playing bingo with residents, organizing a Habitat for Humanity store, developing care packages of toiletries for the families of children who are hospitalized unexpectedly at a local hospital, organizing a local food pantry, and serving food at a local homeless shelter.

#### *Healthy Relationship Skill Development*

Healthy relationship skill development focuses on building and supplementing key interpersonal skills such as communication and conflict resolution as youth learn to make choices regarding sexual behavior. Healthy relationship skill development also includes helping youth form and maintain healthy family, peer, and network relationships (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2018). NSEP partners with the Tuscaloosa County Health Department to deliver the fourth component of the program: healthy relationship skill development. The Tuscaloosa Health Department receives state grant funds to deliver an evidence-based curriculum called Making Proud Choices. The curriculum provides youth with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to reduce their risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV, and pregnancy by abstaining from sex or using condoms if they choose to have sex. The program has four major elements. The first element focuses on goals, dreams, and adolescent sexuality. The second is knowledge, covering information about the etiology, transmission, and prevention of HIV, other STDs, and teenage pregnancy. The third focuses on beliefs and attitudes. The fourth focuses on skills and self-efficacy, covering negotiation refusal skills and condom use skills and providing time for practice, reinforcement, and support. The role of sexual responsibility and accountability is stressed, and the curriculum teaches youth to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior, to respect themselves and others, and the importance of developing a positive image. Youth discuss what constitutes sexual responsibility, such as condom use, and learn to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior (Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, 2018). Trainers meet with youth once each week, usually Friday mornings from 9 a.m. to noon to deliver the curriculum.

#### **Benefits of Collaborative Partnerships**

There are a number of benefits of collaborative partnerships. The Nutcache website, “Benefits of Collaboration Between Organizations and Teams” (n.d.) highlights five benefits: synergy, sharing resources, overcoming obstacles, increased community awareness, and access to constituents and funding. The sum of the whole is bigger than the sum of each part expresses the basic meaning of synergy (Covey, 1989). Working together collaboratively can result in greater accomplishments as compared to each organization working on its own separately. Organizations committed to partnering with a pre-college program that serves foster youth are able to rely on the strength of each organization to develop a program that addresses multiple areas and needs. The second benefit of collaborative partnerships is sharing resources. As funding is being cut at every level for social service programs overall, it is critical that organizations partner to share resources. For example, NSEP wanted to address the relationship challenges experienced by foster youth, so a partnership was formed with the Tuscaloosa Health Department. NSEP has youth and the Tuscaloosa Health Department has funding and trained staff to deliver content. Forming a collaborative partnership benefits both organizations and ultimately benefits youth.

The third benefit of collaborative partnerships is overcoming obstacles. When pre-college programs face obstacles to serving foster youth, another partnering organization may be able to step in to assist. For example, NSEP youth needed basic toiletry items and other supplies during the program, so NSEP reached out to a partnering agency, Temporary Emergency Services, to donate those items to each youth instead of having to use funds that were earmarked for other needs. Increased community awareness is a fourth benefit of collaborative partnerships. Each collaborative partner has relationships in the community and will share information regarding the efforts of the partnership. This increased community awareness could lead to additional partners and potentially additional funding for the program. The final benefit addressed is access to constituents and funding. This benefit is key to the sustainability of a pre-college program. For example, NSEP’s partnership with Alabama DHR has provided a sustained source of funding to implement the program each year. The partnership with Alabama DHR also provides access to eligible youth each year.

### **Challenges in Building Collaboratives**

Due to the complexity of interorganizational collaborations, challenges will emerge as partnerships are established and developed over time. Braganza (2016) argues that due to a lack of scholarship that focuses on the challenges and tensions within collaborative relationships, members of interorganizational collaborations are often not adequately equipped to foster, strategize, or prioritize these relationships. Challenges related to interorganizational collaboration may include imbalanced power, impeding cultures, poor communication, resistance to change, complex technical and logistical processes, and limited relationship maintenance (Follman, Cseh, & Brudney, 2016). While evidence suggests that partnerships are an effective way for organizations to address complex social problems, there is often inadequate funding available to support partnerships (Riggs, Block, Warr, & Gibbs, 2014).

In a study that examines the activities, organizational characteristics, and relationships among cross-sector partnerships, senior officials across the government, nonprofit, and business sectors report that their organizations faced power struggles related to funding allocation and ownership of projects along with competing views on work procedures (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2018). Correspondingly, Adams (2019) identifies the unequal power distribution embedded in collaborative community-academic partnerships (CAPs). Because academicians tend to have greater access to funding, time, and resources and possess greater expertise than community stakeholders on specific topics, power differentials exist within these collaboratives. Additionally, there are often conflicting goals and interest in CAPs. Begun, Berger, Otto-Salaj, and Rose (2010) suggest that academicians engage in CAPs to advance their research agendas and to increase opportunities for promotion and tenure, while community stakeholders join CAPs to improve outcomes and policies centered around health, social factors, and employment for community members.

Braganza (2016) found that dedicating time, managing conflict and competition, overcoming biases, and establishing roles, responsibilities, and goals were the major challenges interorganizational collaboratives encounter. Interorganizational collaboratives cannot be successful if there is a lack of intentional investment in time for cultivating partnerships, building values, and establishing lines of communication. Furthermore, if little

to no protocols are in place to address inevitable conflicts, collaborative efforts can be hindered.

Collaboration is often needed to address complex issues; however, this may entail building interorganizational collaboratives with competing organizations. Because members of interorganizational collaboratives often compete for the same funding, hidden agendas may be present, which can impede on the development of positive relationships among organizations. Preconceived ideas and prior knowledge about other organizations within the collaborative, along with different views about social issues, can also interfere with relationship building. Additionally, lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities and the inability to establish clear goals can create a limited commitment among members within the interorganizational collaborative (Braganza, 2016).

As a pre-college program, NSEP has managed potential CAPs challenges successfully. The skilled leadership and experience of the NSEP program director has made a key difference. The program director wears the hat of both an academician and practitioner. The program coordinator also has extensive experience in university settings (admissions and recruitment, student affairs, etc.) as well as social service practice experience with community agencies. These skills allow NSEP to successfully navigate the university community and agency community to ensure the needs of both groups are met while also ensuring that youth transitioning from foster care have a successful pre-college experience.

### **Implications for Community Collaborative Partnerships**

While there are disadvantages and advantages to developing collaborative partnerships, evidence shows that partnerships are an effective way for groups working together to address pre-college service delivery (America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth, 2004; Rogge & Rocha, 2004; Brooks, Wertheimer, Beck, & Wolk, 2004; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002). College institutions have the potential to improve the collaborative partnership (Edwards, 2010; Rogge & Rocha, 2004). The university partner can not only provide staff and faculty with various expertise to deliver program components, but may also have faculty with skills to develop measures and collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of the collaborative, including its successes and areas needing improvement. These measures could aid the

pre-college program in improving its functioning and contribute to the collaborative's sustainability. Given that scholars have identified partnerships between stakeholders as a key mechanism to bridging the gap to improving service delivery, the science of collaborative partnerships becomes increasingly important for sustainability of the effort (Chambers & Arzin, 2013; Viswanathan, Ammerman, Eng, Garlehner, Lohr, Griffith, Rhodes, Samuel-Hodge, Maty, Lux, Webb, Sutton, Swinson, Jackman, & Whitener, 2004). The NSEP collaborative partnership illustrates that, when developed well, partnerships can be fruitful and have the potential to change the way pre-college services are offered to marginalized youth desiring to attend college.

### Conclusion

Pre-college programs designed to serve youth transitioning from foster care is one strategy that can be used to improve college access for this target population (Kirk & Day, 2011). With the multiple challenges experienced by foster youth, pre-college programs should consider building strong community collaboratives to strengthen the program. Bailey and McNalley-Koney (1996, 2000) offer a collaboration framework that can serve as a guide for building effective pre-college programs. Although community collaborative partnerships present many challenges, the benefits of these partnerships are positive results for youth in the form of additional resources, relationships, and support. Community collaborative partners who come together to fulfill a shared vision of supporting youth as they transition from foster care to college can develop a pre-college program that prepares youth for college success. These pre-college collaborative partnerships could ultimately improve the post-secondary educational outcomes of youth from foster care.

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