

**Strengthening Community-University Partnerships:  
University of British Columbia Okanagan Community Service Learning  
Program**

by

Mia Burgess

B.A., University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2008

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@Mia Burgess, 2019

University of Victoria

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This project explored the experiences of current nonprofit partners of the University of British Columbia Okanagan's (UBC-O) Community Service Learning (CSL) Program. The research sought to understand, from the perspective of the agencies, their motivations for partnership, the benefits and costs of partnerships, necessary elements of successful partnerships, and areas of improvement for the CSL program. Related, the primary research question for this project was: *“How can the CSL program strengthen nonprofit partnerships and ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for nonprofit organizations and UBC-O in the delivery of co-curricular and curricular student placements?”*

Nonprofit organizations are integral partners of the CSL program. This research is intended to assist the CSL program to better understand the goals, needs, and desired outcomes of nonprofit partners. The research is also designed to assist in balancing partnerships to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for nonprofit organizations and the UBC-O CSL program.

## Literature Review

The literature review provided a framework for understanding current research on community-university partnerships in service learning programs. Existing literature indicates that university and nonprofit goals often differ; that community-university relationships are complex and require clear definition of roles, responsibilities, and intended outcomes; and nonprofit partners should be included in service learning project and program design. Communication is an important aspect of developing and sustaining partnerships and poor communication and negative student attitudes is a barrier to partnerships. The literature review also highlighted the need for future research to explore the benefits and effects of service learning programs in communities.

## Methodology and Methods

The primary methodology used in this research was a gap analysis that first identified the current state of the CSL program and then presented recommendations for achieving the desired future state and goals of the project, to assist in helping to identify reciprocally beneficial outcomes for the CSL program and nonprofit partners.

The main research method was individual, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, followed by targeted questions. Ten current nonprofit partners were interviewed to ensure relevant and current feedback about the CSL program. A thematic analysis was utilized to identify and examine themes that emerged in the interviews. The themes formed the basis of the findings, which were combined with the literature review findings to provide recommendations.

## **Key Findings**

Five key themes emerged from the data analysis process:

- **Theme 1**-Agencies are motivated to partner with the CSL program for a variety of reasons
- **Theme 2**-Agencies received a variety of benefits from partnerships with the CSL program
- **Theme 3**-Time dedicated to onboarding students was the main cost for agencies
- **Theme 4**- Necessary elements for a successful partnership
- **Theme 5**-Ways the CSL program could better support agencies during partnerships

## **Recommendations**

Four recommendations were provided to the client for this project:

- **Recommendation 1**: Develop a process for addressing student related issues
- **Recommendation 2**: Implement a consistent project planning process
- **Recommendation 3**: Engage nonprofit organizations in broader CSL program development and planning
- **Recommendation 4**: Increase community presence and volunteer opportunities for nonprofit organizations

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The University of British Columbia (UBC) opened its Okanagan campus in Kelowna, British Columbia in 2005 and the campus prides itself on being “an intimate learning community embracing bold new ways of thinking” (University of British Columbia-Okanagan [UBC-O], 2018a, para. 1).

In 2007, the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBC-O) adopted the learning exchange model from UBC’s Vancouver campus with the goal of implementing service learning in the Central Okanagan region (Bond, 2007, p.4). UBC-O’s Community Service Learning (CSL) program reflects UBC-O’s commitment to community engagement (Bond, 2007, p. 3). The CSL program will be the focus of this research project.

### 1.1 Positionality Statement

As noted by Bourke qualitative research is influenced by researcher identity, biases, and expectations of how others will act based on pre-conceived notions (2014, p.1). For these reasons, it is important to acknowledge my position as researcher in the context of this study.

When I was an undergraduate student at UBC-O, I engaged in service learning and volunteer work, which helped me apply the sociological theories and concepts I was learning to phenomena in my community. This service work shaped the trajectory of my career and prepared me to work in the nonprofit sector in roles focused on addressing systemic issues that contribute to homelessness. This experience, combined with over ten years of employment in the nonprofit sector, has provided me with a unique lens to understand service learning programs and informed my interest in engaging the UBC-O service learning program to undertake this research.

As a current employee at a nonprofit charity, I am an insider in the nonprofit sector and I share the value of community impact and social change with the subjects of my research (Greene, 2014, p.3). My position as an insider increased the likelihood I was accepted as a researcher (Greene, 2014, p. 4). I am aware of the challenges nonprofit organizations face including administrative capacity issues, lack of sustained funding that impacts program delivery and overburdened staff and leadership (Lobell, Sikka, & Menon, 2015, pp. 17-19). This insider knowledge informed my approach to engaging with research participants. I knew roughly when nonprofit organization were busier, for example, at fiscal year end when reporting is required and around granting deadlines. Given this knowledge, I was flexible with dates and timeframes for interviews, provided a variety of options to potential participants, and made requests for interviews well in advance of desired interview dates.

It has been important for me to be aware of my personal biases throughout this research so that I am not projecting my views onto participants (Greene, 2014, p.4). Throughout my research, I acknowledged when the data contradicted my preconceived notions because of my personal experiences and biases.

## 1.2 Background and Problem Definition

In 2007, UBC-O engaged nonprofit agencies in the Central Okanagan region to determine whether a learning exchange model similar to UBC Vancouver's learning exchange should be developed at UBC's Okanagan campus (P. Bond, personal communication, January 24, 2019). The Vancouver learning exchange is a non-traditional academic center or hub in the community where students, faculty, and the community learn from each other and exchange ideas focused on improving community and addressing social issues (University of British Columbia Vancouver [UBC-V], 2019a, para. 1). Students volunteer their time and expertise to support members of the community through community-based programs including: the English conversation program, computer workshops, and drop-in activities (UBCV, 2019b, para. 1-3). The learning exchange also encourages community-based research and offers resources to support nonprofit organizations (UBC-V, 2019c, para. 1; UBC-V, 2019d, para.1).

In the UBC-O engagement process, nonprofit agencies indicated an interest in partnering with UBC-O to implement a learning exchange program in the Central Okanagan (Bond, 2007, p. 5; P. Bond, personal communication, January 24, 2019). UBC-O developed a strategic plan for a responsive model that integrates community-university engagement activities to support UBC-O to positively contribute to addressing complex social issues in Central Okanagan communities (Bond, 2007, p. 4). Four key components of the UBC-O learning exchange strategic plan are “curricular (course-based) CSL for students; volunteer opportunities for UBC-O students, staff, faculty and alumni; volunteer opportunities for groups/individuals in the community (community partners) who want to enhance community organizations through the sharing of knowledge and expertise and; public dialogue and reflection about important community issues” (Bond, 2007, p. 4). The UBC-O learning exchange model varied from the Vancouver model to account for differences in community needs, the size of the campus, and available resources (P. Bond, personal communication, January 24, 2019).

Since its inception in 2007, the UBC-O learning exchange has been renamed the CSL program. The CSL program continues to be university-led and partners with nonprofit agencies located in the Central Okanagan region, including cities Kelowna and West Kelowna and district municipalities Peachland and Lake County (Regional District of Central Okanagan, 2018, para.1).

The CSL program responds to community social issues by channeling local community expertise and the expertise of staff and alumni through collaborative community-university engagement (Bond, 2007, p. 5; UBC-O, 2018b, para.1). The program aims to achieve the following key goals: introduce and connect students to community challenges through service learning; provide opportunities for staff, students, faculty and alumni to develop an understanding of social issues, raise awareness of such issues and make a positive impact; and facilitate community-university knowledge sharing (Bond, 2007, p. 7).

The CSL program has two streams: curricular service learning that is embedded in the classroom and co-curricular service learning outside of registered courses (UBC-O, 2018d, para.1; P. Bond, personal communication, October 11, 2017). Curricular projects include a partnership with a UBC-O professor and the placement is tied to course credit, while co-curricular projects are independent of course work (UBC-O, 2018d, para.1; P. Bond, personal communication, October 11, 2017). Students in both streams participate in project placements and complete tasks and work that supports nonprofit agencies, which varies depending on the project. Program success is largely dependent on the CSL program's ability to foster and maintain partnerships with nonprofit agencies that accept students for curricular and co-curricular placements (P. Bond, personal communication, October 11, 2017).

The CSL program coordinator and senior manager are responsible for the following tasks:

- Cultivating relationships with local nonprofit organizations and engaging them to be partners;
- engaging professors to partner with curricular projects;
- identifying, supervising and monitoring student project placements;
- providing oversight and support to students, professors (curricular) and nonprofit partners before and during student placements; and
- providing an opportunity for students to critically reflect on their experiences to connect their community work to their academic learnings (P. Bond, personal communication, October 11, 2017; UBC-O, 2018b, para. 1).

According to Bond, the client for this project, community and post-secondary relationships are imbalanced, resulting in CSL programs that are one-sided and focused on UBC-O's goal of providing opportunities for faculty and students to increase knowledge of social issues and not on ensuring beneficial outcomes for nonprofit partners and the community (P. Bond, personal communications, January 22, 2018). Partnerships with nonprofit agencies are vital to the operation of the CSL program and the program's ability to facilitate community-university knowledge exchange (P. Bond, personal communication, October 20, 2018).

The client further notes that the community is a resource for the university and without proper engagement, this resource could cease to exist (P. Bond, personal communication, January 22, 2018). To create a sustainable environment, Bond argues that the CSL program must better understand the needs of the nonprofit organizations to retain current partners and attract new partners.

Given the above issues, the CSL program seeks to better understand what nonprofit partners need from their relationship with the CSL program and how to balance those needs to ensure that the program positively benefits nonprofit organizations as well as students and UBC-O. The primary issue being explored is how the UBC-O CSL program can better understand and respond to the needs of nonprofit partners to increase the CSL program's impact in partner

organizations in Central Okanagan communities (P. Bond, personal communication, October 11, 2017).

This research project is designed to enrich CSL program staff's understanding of community engagement and partnerships (Bond, 2007, p.7). The recommendations in this report can be used by Mr. Bond to strengthen and enhance CSL program partnerships to increase partnership opportunities. This project will also contribute to the state of current existing knowledge of university-led service learning programs.

### **1.3 Project Client and Deliverables**

The client for this project is Mr. Phil Bond, Senior Manager, Student Experience Office, UBC-O. Mr. Bond was integral to the development of the CSL program in 2007 and continues to facilitate the growth of the program in his position as senior manager. The researcher communicated with Mr. Bond and Ms. Lori Field, CSL Program Coordinator, throughout the project.

Mr. Bond provided input and decision making throughout the project to ensure the final project is relevant and useful to the CSL program. Mr. Bond was involved in the following aspects of the research project: co-determining research questions, co-designing the semi-structured interview questions, identifying interview participants, and reviewing and providing feedback on project drafts.

This report provides the following project deliverables to the client:

- A literature review that provides information on the theoretical background of service learning;
- the results of semi-structured interviews and key themes that emerged related to the research questions;
- a presentation by the researcher to the client (if requested); and
- recommendations for how the CSL program can strengthen its approach to working with community partners.

### **1.4 Project Objectives and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to assist the client to understand, from the perspective of nonprofit partners, the needs, benefits and challenges of partnerships and identify program staff skills and attributes that support strong community-university partnerships.

#### ***Primary Research Question:***

- How can the CSL program strengthen nonprofit partnerships and ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for nonprofit organizations and UBC-O in the delivery of co-curricular and curricular student placements?

### *Supplementary Research Questions:*

- From the perspective of community partners, what are the necessary components needed for successful CSL-nonprofit partnerships?
- What motivates nonprofit organizations to partner with the CSL program?
- What are the benefits and costs for nonprofit agencies partnering with the CSL program?

### **1.5 Organization of Report**

Following the introduction, the next section of the report is a literature review that discusses relevant literature and identifies main themes that explore community-university engagement in university-led service learning programs. Section three provides a detailed description of the research methodology, methods, data analysis, ethic process, lists the research respondent agencies and explains the limitations and delimitations of the project. Section four presents the findings and identifies the five themes that emerged from the research. Section five presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings, which inform the recommendations provided in section six of the project.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides a framework for understanding the existing body of knowledge on community-university engagement in university-led service learning programs. Specifically, it examines literature (academic and non-academic) relating to community-university partnerships, challenges faced by service learning community partners and raises questions about the community benefit of service learning programs. Related, it is important to note that scholarly research on community impact and benefit of service learning programs is somewhat limited as most research focuses on student benefit of service learning programs, which is why this review is supplemented by grey literature when necessary. Since this research project is focused on understanding the needs of CSL program partners and strengthening community-university partnerships, the literature review will not discuss student benefit.

Key terms used to find scholarly research were: ‘service learning’, ‘community benefit’, ‘community challenges’, ‘service learning partnerships’, ‘experiential learning’, ‘higher education’, ‘nonprofit management’, and ‘community need’. Research was conducted using the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar and JSTOR. The following journals were utilized: Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, Nonprofit Management and Leadership, and the Journal of Education and Urban Society.

The following themes emerged from the literature review that will be further explored in this chapter:

- Service learning programs tend to be implemented with a focus on the benefit to universities and students;
- the goals of university service learning programs and the goals of nonprofit partners often differ;
- nonprofit organizations want to be more involved in the design of service learning programs; and
- additional research needs to be undertaken to understand the benefit of service learning from a community-based perspective.

### 2.2 Service Learning Overview: Service learning programs tend to be implemented with a focus on the benefit to universities and students

The term service learning began appearing in academic literature in the 1960s and the foundations of the practice are informed by the work of John Dewey, a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and psychologist concerned with educational reform (Champagne, 2006, pp. 97-98). Service learning programs rapidly expanded in universities and colleges in the 1980s and continue to be implemented in a variety of disciplines to bridge gaps between universities and communities and to educate students about challenging social issues (Champagne, 2006, p. 100; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.4; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.18). According to several authors, service learning

programs involve students in real-world situations to foster an understanding of complex community issues and connect theoretical classroom learnings with practical action through student placements and knowledge exchange (Lenton., Sidhu, Kaur, Conrad, Kennedy, Munro, & Smith, n.d., p. 11; Chupp & Joseph, 2010, p. 191; Leiderman, Furce, Zapf & Gross, n.d., p.3; Champagne, 2006, p.98; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, pp. 3-4). Service learning bridges community service/improvement and student skill development and is premised on the belief that learning is contextual, rooted in action, engagement and reflective thinking which helps students foster a greater understanding of issues rooted in political, social and economic contexts (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.3). Champagne points out that Dewey's ideas of experiential learning, the need for reflection to understand a phenomenon, and the notion of reciprocal learning continue to inform service learning practices today (2006, p. 98).

Scholars Piaget, Lewin and Kolb continued to examine student's reflective thought and action as it related to student's experiential learning, leaving out the importance of community impact of service learning programs (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, pp. 7-9). Freire notably pointed out that there is a need to examine and critique power structures that exist between university and community that can be reinforced through service learning (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.9).

Kretzamn and McKnight's work questions service learning programs' focus on students and demands a re-examination of how universities work with communities; challenging universities to focus on building upon existing community assets and meeting community needs as defined by communities (Pacho, 2015, p.15; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.7). Kretzman and McKnight ) argue that service learning programs should be relationship-driven and asset based, building associations between community members, organizations and universities to strengthen and empower communities (1993, pp.172-174).

### **2.3 CSL Program Design: The goals of university service learning programs and the goals of nonprofit partners often differ**

#### ***University Goals***

According to several authors, service learning programs remain focused on student and university benefit, notwithstanding an acknowledgement from universities that reciprocal benefit for the student and the community is a goal of service learning (Canadian Alliance for Service Learning, 2018a, para. 11; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.145; Brudney & Russell, 2016, p. 278). Scholars note that universities implement service learning programs to advance their institution's community engagement and universities provide little opportunity for community partners to be meaningfully engaged in program design (Lenton et al., n.d, p.11; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.2; Leiderman, et al., n.d., pp.2-3; Stoecker et al., 2010, pp. 281-283). This is in contrast to literature that emphasizes the importance of reciprocity in service learning and the acknowledgement that service learning programs are rooted in power structures; Jacoby and Howard call for a focus on redistribution of power and an examination of structure and systems that perpetuate inequality and oppression (2014, p. 247). Service learning programs can reinforce inequalities in the design

and delivery of program by creating programs with unbalanced partnerships. Several authors indicate that service learning programs operate from the perspective that communities are recipients responsible for adapting to the needs of the university (Bortolin, 2011 p.52; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.6; Brudney & Russell, 2016, p. 289). This approach could be understood as service-LEARNING, in which service learning goals are primary and service outcomes and community benefit are considered secondary (Sigmon, 1997, p. 3). Despite these inequalities, nonprofit agencies continue to partner with service learning programs, however their motivations for partnership differ from the motivations of universities.

***Nonprofit Goals: Nonprofit organizations want to be more involved in the design of service learning programs***

Several authors indicate that nonprofit agencies partner with universities to meet agency needs that allow them to better achieve their missions and mandates, to demonstrate collaboration to funders, to access higher education resources and out of a genuine interest in helping students grow, learn and enhance their skills (Bell & Carlson, 2009, p. 34; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.61; Leiderman, et al., (n.d.), p.3; Cronley, Madden & Davis, 2015, p.284). This should not come as a surprise; nonprofit organizations are operating in a neoliberal climate characterized by government disinvestment in social welfare programming; therefore nonprofits are tasked with responding to complex social issues with limited resources and shrinking government funding to support their work (Lobell et al., 2015, p. 15). Martin, SeBlonka & Tryon note that some organizations partner with CSL programs because students have a technical capacity that organizations are unable to fulfill with their paid staff (2009, p.69). However, by participating in service learning programs, nonprofit agencies risk taking time away from achieving agency specific agendas by devoting time and resources to meeting the needs of student volunteers (Eby, 1998, p. 5).

Research conducted by Leiderman, et al., (n.d) examined partnership experiences with higher education institutions by engaging 19 service learning program partners from 11 higher education institutions in a two-day summit with the goal of making recommendations for successful community campus partnerships (pp.4-5). The results of the data collected from the summit indicated that community partners' goals for engaging with higher education institutions included: increasing community residence attendance at university and fostering confidence of community members, increasing community capacity to address a social issue, and achieving outcomes that assist agencies to achieve their mandates (Leiderman, et al., n.d, pp. 10-11).

Organizational capacity (revenue, staffing) affects community partners' ability to take on service learning program students, however, when an agency is considering taking on a student, the quality of student placements and perceived benefits can outweigh an agency's lack of resources (Littlepage, et al., 2012, pp.316-317; Cronley, Madden & Davis, 2015, p.284). The goals of nonprofits and universities impacts the design and development of community-university partnerships in service learning programs.

## **2.4 CSL Program Partnerships: Additional research needs to be undertaken to understand the benefit of service learning from a community-based perspective**

Jacoby and Howard explain that community-university relationships can be complex, dynamic and challenging to navigate; requiring service learning staff to possess strong community development skills that allow them to manage complex relationships and balance the needs of community with the needs of the university (2014, p.51). Partnerships are most successful when roles are well defined, both parties are accountable and both parties hold equal authority; therefore, service learning programs should be grounded reciprocal, mutually-beneficial community-university relationships (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p. 51). Several authors note that collaboration and communication that includes community partners in program design, agreement on expectations, timelines and outcomes is critical to the success of service learning programs and this occurs when universities work alongside agency leaders and acknowledge the administrative impacts and dedication agencies undertake as partners (Littlepage, Gazley & Bennett, 2012, p.317; Cronley, Madden & Davis, 2015, p.284; Blouin & Perry, 2009, p.133).

Stocker et al. indicate that nonprofit agencies possess community expertise and want to be involved in the design and implementation of CSL programs to help programs make a greater impact in communities and would prefer that students are trained for service work prior to being placed, to avoid overburdening nonprofits; indicating that nonprofit partners would like service learning programs to focus on community benefit (2010, p. 281). Brudney & Russell undertook a literature review on the valuation of community-engaged learning research to present new methodologies for assessing the community perspective and value of student involvement in community-engaged learning partnerships (2016, p.278). Brudney & Russell discovered that valuing community engaged learning can be supported by labor-based accounting; understanding volunteer time according to the hourly rate similar to what labor equates to in paid employment; understanding the value of community-based projects and a project-based accounting approach that evaluates the value of goods and services provided by volunteers (2016, pp. 281-282).

Community Campus Partnerships for Health, a nonprofit organization that “promotes health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and academic institutions” developed guiding principles for partnerships aimed at ensuring reciprocity and inclusion of nonprofit partners (2013, para.2; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.246; Appendix A). These principles are reinforced by Chupp & Joseph who note that a university commitment to mutually beneficial partnerships, sharing of power and a willingness to engage community partners in the design and implementation of service learning programs is thought to strengthen the delivery of service learning programs and promote community impact (2010, pp. 207-208). Strong partnerships may counterbalance or mitigate barriers to partnership experienced by nonprofit agencies.

### ***Barriers to Partnerships***

Several authors note that service learning programs are often implemented without a strong examination of long-term benefits to communities and the achievements of community defined goals (Chupp & Joseph, 2010, p. 191; Stoecker et al., 2010, p. 281). Lack of communication between universities and nonprofit partners, poor student-organization fit and poor student behavior during the partnership are also barriers for successful community-university partnerships (Blouin & Perry, 2009, p.133). Short-term service learning placements are common and require nonprofit partners to invest considerable amounts of time and resources with outcomes that result in little benefit to nonprofit agencies (Stoecker, Loving, Reddy, & Bollig, 2010, p. 281; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.16). Scholars indicate that nonprofit partners reported an inequity in nonprofit agency resources that prevent them from fully participating in service learning programs, resulting in nonprofit organizations feeling overburdened by partnerships (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.246; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.6). This raises questions as to whether service learning programs are truly reciprocal and highlights power imbalances in the operationalization of service learning programs (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.246). Universities should understand that without careful partnership and consideration of program design, service learning programs will continue to be weighted towards meeting the needs of the university and students (Bortolin, 2011 p.52; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.6).

### ***Short-Term Service Learning Projects***

Martin et al., note that most service learning placements are short-term; students serve for a few hours, often during a university semester, which creates challenges for nonprofit organizations who must invest considerable time preparing and training students, only to repeat the training with new students in the following semester (2009, pp-57-59). Issues with timing and project management impact nonprofits because it can be difficult to prepare and carry out a meaningful project in a short time-frame (Martin et al., 2009, p. 64). The academic calendar and educational requirements of students, for example, exam scheduling, can negatively impact nonprofit organizations, as they are expected to meet the student's schedules and needs, creating gaps in service and leaving nonprofit organizations scrambling to address gaps (Martin et al., 2009, p. 66). Additionally, when students build trust-relationships with clients served by the nonprofit organization and the placement ends, clients can be negatively impacted, especially young clients that participate in nonprofit programming because they lack stability and role models (Martin et al., 2009, p. 62). Martin et al. suggest that universities could address some of these challenges by integrating service learning into year-long courses so students can gain a foundation before beginning service work and complete service work over the school year (2009, p. 71). Martin et al. further argue that when engaging in short-term placements, universities should ensure that realistic goals and outcomes are clearly agreed upon by the nonprofit organization, the student and the University so they can collectively work towards a shared goal, adapting the projects when necessary to ensure all parties benefit from the project (Martin et al., 2009, p. 65).

## 2.5 Summary

A growing body of literature suggests that the impact of service learning programs in community is not fully understood and more attention needs to be paid to the community impact of service learning programs (Chupp & Joseph, 2010, p. 190; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.2; Geller, Zuckerman & Seidel, 2016, p. 168; Leiderman, et al., n.d., p.3). Research on service learning programs indicates that universities should not assume that service learning benefits community agencies; researchers believe that inequality of service learning program design, which favors the goals of university over community, potentially exploits communities and reinforces social hierarchies and inequalities (Cronley, Madden & Davis, 2015, p.285; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, p.4). Jacoby and Howard suggest it is imperative that universities adopt a critical view of service learning with an emphasis on the importance of social justice, critiquing power structures and distributing power with the goal of equality among all participants in service learning projects is emerging is also an important factor in understanding community benefit (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.9).

The key themes in the literature review help to answer the primary research question *“How can the CSL program strengthen nonprofit partnerships and ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for nonprofits and UBC-O in the delivery of co-curricular and curricular student placements?”* in the following ways:

- Although service learning programs remain focused on university goals to educate students, nonprofits are motivated to partner with service learning programs to increase organizational capacity to achieve their missions and mandates.
- Service learning programs should increase communication, planning and agree upon the roles, responsibilities and goals of partners to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for non-profit partners and universities.

The literature review suggests that more needs to be learned about community benefits to understand the impact of service learning from a community-based perspective and this informed the focus of the research questions overall. The questions were intentionally written to gain the perspective of the nonprofit organization to add information to gaps in understanding community benefit of service learning programs. The table below (Table 1) illustrates how the literature review themes informed the research questions specifically:

Table 1: Literature Review and Research Questions

Literature Review Themes	Corresponding Research Questions
Service learning programs tend to be implemented with a focus on the benefit to universities and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways did the project impact your agency’s capacity to undertake its work?</li> <li>• What were the costs of partnering with the CSLP?</li> <li>• What benefits did the project have for the student participants?</li> <li>• How did the CSLP staff respond to needs and issues that emerged during the partnership?</li> <li>• What skills could CSLP staff improve upon when working in partnership with community?</li> </ul>
The goals of university service learning programs and the goals of nonprofit partners often differ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What elements need to be addressed for a partnership to go well?</li> <li>• What benefits did the partnership with the CSLP bring to your organization and/or to the larger cause your organization works towards?</li> <li>• To what extent did the CSLP possess knowledge and understanding of your agency’s needs and your work in the community?</li> </ul>
Nonprofit organizations want to be more involved in the design of service learning programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the CSLP staff collaborate with you to define the roles of the student, UBC-O staff and your agency for the student placement?</li> <li>• How should partners be involved in the design of future CSLP projects?</li> </ul>

The next section explores the methodology, methods, data analysis, ethics review process and the limitations and delimitations that were used to analyze the research findings that inform the project recommendations, in conjunction with the literature review findings.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

This project involved two research phases. A literature review was first conducted to provide an overview of research previously conducted on the project topic. The second phase of the project involved conducting primary research with current nonprofit partners of the CSL program.

### **3.1 Methodology**

The primary methodology used in this report was a gap analysis. According to Dahlgaard-Park, the gap model of service quality is applied by businesses and evaluates service quality by identifying the gap between customers expectations and customer experience to increase customer satisfaction (2015, p. 251). The gap model is appropriate for this project because the project is evaluating the perception of CSL program participants about the quality of services provided by the CSL program and explores partner's motivations for partnership, perceived benefits, perceived costs and how the CSL program can better support partners.

The gap analysis identified the current state of the CSL program partnerships and nonprofit program partner's expectations for a future state. Recurring themes that emerged were analyzed and informed recommendations for how the CSL program can improve partnerships with nonprofit organizations.

The project is also informed by the foundational principles of action research that emphasizes community relationships, community participation and collaboration between researcher and community (Clark & Ventres, 2016, p. 3). This form of research supports community change initiatives by respecting existing community knowledge and developing research projects that are connected to interventions that address local social issues (Stoecker et al, 2010, p.283). Collaboration between client and researcher in developing the research questions, interview questions, client identification and the incorporation of the client's feedback on project drafts are the ways in which action research informed this project.

### **3.2 Methods**

#### ***Semi-structured Interviews***

The primary research method was individual, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, followed by targeted questions asked to provide further clarification. Semi-structured interviews are a type of qualitative data collection tool in which open-ended interview questions are used by the researcher as a guiding script for the interviews and allow for flexibility in gathering information from participants (Ayres, 2008, p.812). The researcher developed a written interview guide (see Appendix A), consisting of open-ended questions asked in the order in which they were listed in the interview guide and the researcher asked targeted follow-up questions when more information was needed (Ayres, 2008, p.812; Roulston, 2008, p.583).

Individual semi-structured interviews were chosen instead of focus groups because existing relationships among nonprofit agencies might limit and/or affect the information agencies are willing to share with the researcher in the presence of other agencies.

### ***Research Participants***

Targeted interview participants were selected to ensure relevant perspectives and experiences of the CSL program. The client sent the researcher, via email, names and contact information for current CSL program partners and information about the CSL projects the partners participated in. The researcher contacted 12 current CSL program partners involved in curricular and/or co-curricular projects via email to invite them to participate in the research. Ten agencies agreed to participate, and 11 interviews were completed. One agency requested two staff be interviewed, which was allowed.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were provided with a signed consent form in the initial email from the researcher inviting them to participate. To ensure interviewees had a strong understanding of the CSL program partnership, each partner agency was responsible for identifying the appropriate staff person to be interviewed based on that staff member's work with the CSL program. The researcher explained the consent form and signed consent was obtained prior to the commencement of the interview. Interviews were conducted at the offices of each nonprofit agency. The participants were informed verbally and in the written consent form (prior to signing consent form) that due to the small sample size of interviews, CSL program staff may be able to associate answers to the participant. Identifying characteristics of the interviewees was removed for the final project report but the names of participating agencies is included in the report to demonstrate the diversity of participant agencies.

All participants except one consented to being digitally recorded. For the participant that declined to be recorded, the researcher captured that interview in writing. All interviews were documented by the researcher using notes.

The following CSL program partners participated in interviews:

- BC Cancer Agency
- Baptist Housing
- Brain Trust Canada
- Bridge Youth and Family Services
- MCC Thrift Store
- Peter's Independent Grocer Literacy Book Sale Event
- Tetra Society Okanagan
- Westside Health Network
- YMCA Okanagan
- National Network for Equitable Library Services

Initially, the researcher intended to interview six CSL program partners to ensure the project could be completed in the MACD program timeframe; however, after further discussion with the client and further consideration of project timelines, the researcher increased the sample size from six to ten participants to attain more robust information for the research project. The sample size of research participants was always limited by the small number of current CSL program partners, which varies throughout the year but averages 12-15 active partners at any one time (P.Bond, personal communication, October, 20, 2018).

### **3.3 Project Tasks**

The following tasks were undertaken to ensure the objectives of the project were met:

- Identify participants (in collaboration with client);
- develop interview questions and framework (in collaboration with client);
- identify the best methods for contacting participants (in collaboration with client);
- select a time/date/location for the interviews;
- develop an informational document for potential participants that outlines the purpose of the research (in collaboration with client);
- interview ten nonprofit CSL program partners;
- record, transcribe and code data; and
- determine best way to present data in project report for client (in collaboration with client).

### **3.4 Ethics**

This research was approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. The ethics review considered the following recruitment documents: email contact form for recruitment (Appendix B); email contact follow-up script (Appendix C); participant written consent/assent form (Appendix D); and the initial semi-structured research questions, which were modified after ethics approval (Appendix E).

The main ethical considerations were the researcher's dual role as nonprofit funder and researcher and the potential for research participants to perceive a power relationship between the CSL program and their agency, which could influence how participants answered questions.

The researcher is employed at the Central Okanagan Foundation, a community foundation that provides grants to nonprofit organizations in the Central Okanagan. The researcher coordinates federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding that is awarded to homeless-serving nonprofit organizations in Kelowna. This potential perceived conflict of a funder-nonprofit relationship was mitigated by ensuring that the researcher was not interviewing agencies receiving federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding.

Potential perception of a power relationship between the CSL program and interviewees was mitigated by the researcher ensuring that research participants were aware that raw data collected by the researcher would not be shared with the client.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

A thematic analysis was used to identify and examine themes that emerged in semi-structured interviews collected by the researcher to accurately present the stories and experiences of the research participants (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38). The concept of identifying emerging theories rather than testing hypotheses is a component of grounded theory, a type of thematic analysis distinguishable from other research methodologies because it does not involve collecting data to test a hypothesis (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.11). However, this research does not meet all requirements of a grounded theory project, particularly the use of comprehensive memo writing and the generation of new knowledge to form a theory (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.18).

The researcher approached the thematic analysis with an intention to accurately present what participants shared in a way that acknowledges that participant experiences arise from a socially constructed reality (Gibbs, 2007, pp. 6-7). The researcher seeks to present the research findings through the eyes of participants while acknowledging that the researcher's analysis is influenced by her subjective interpretations. The researcher analyzed the data using an inductive approach based on the accumulation of similar themes that emerged in the research (Gibbs, 2007, p. 5).

The researcher undertook a systematic approach for analyzing the qualitative data derived from the transcribed research interviews (Gibbs, 2007, p. 49). The researcher used a data-driven, or open coding process; the codes were not predetermined but emerged out of the themes identified by the researcher (Gibbs, 2007, p. 46; Birks & Mills, 2015, p.10). The researcher utilized NVivo software to assist in identifying passages of text that were linked by a common theme; those themes were then linked using a name for the idea, otherwise described as a code (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38).

#### ***Process***

After data collection was complete the researcher transcribed recorded interviews. During the transcription process, the researcher noted initial key words that emerged. The researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading and re-reading interview transcripts. The researcher generated an initial set of items and recurring themes. The researcher then re-read transcripts again, evaluated the initial themes and restructured the codes to accurately reflect the data. Throughout this process the researcher referred to the research questions and wrote reflections and notes. The researcher then examined how codes connect to overarching themes that emerged in the research and reviewed the themes, which are presented in this report (Gibbs, 2007, pp.144-146).

### **3.6 Project Limitations and Delimitations**

The methods of this project limit the applicability of the findings. The project is directly applicable to the UBC-O CSL program and not generalizable beyond this program. Research

interviews only provide a snapshot view of the experiences and perceptions of current CSL program participants.

The following delimitations made by the researcher impacted the findings: limiting the study to current CSL program participants; client identification of study participants; and the decision not to include participants that were funded by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding managed by the researcher (two potential participant organizations). Factors outside the researcher's control also impacted the findings: participants' inability or unwillingness to participate. The strength of the qualitative data obtained was dependent on how much feedback nonprofit agencies were comfortable sharing with the researcher.

The final product of a grounded theory study includes the development of a new theory that explains a process associated with a phenomenon and is often a novel theoretical idea (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.13). Grounded Theory requires a researcher to have a strong understanding of thematic coding and research processes based on novel theoretical ideas, however, due the time limitations of the MACD program, the researcher's inexperience in analyzing data and the complexity of developing a new theory, this research project will not include the development of a new theory (Gibbs, 2007, p. 349). It would be beneficial for future research studies to undertake a grounded theory project that can generate a new theory that could add to limited academic literature exploring ways that CSL programs could be strengthened to benefit communities, from a community perspective.

## 4.0 FINDINGS

The following chapter highlights five key themes that arose from the interviews. Interview questions focused on understanding nonprofit partner motivations for partnership, benefits and costs of partnerships, the necessary elements for partnerships, and how the CSL program can better support nonprofit partners. The number of respondents and the number of references made for each theme are indicated in brackets. Overarching themes that emerged included the importance of timely and meaningful communication, understanding nonprofit partner needs, and supporting student volunteers.

### 4.1 Theme 1 - Agencies are Motivated to Partner with the CSL Program for a Variety of Reasons

#### *Why did your agency partner with the CSLP?*

Respondents listed several motivations for their partnership with the CSL program. The top three motivations included: a desire to increase capacity for program delivery (5 respondents, 13 references); to bring awareness to the agency's work (4 respondents, 12 references) and to educate students (4 respondents, 8 references). Of those respondents that indicated educating students was a motivation, two agencies noted that bridging intergenerational gaps between students and agency clients was an important motivator for partnerships. One respondent noted "It's an opportunity for students to interact with older adults, maybe get a greater appreciation of each other" (R5, personal communication, November 19, 2018).

Respondents indicated they were motivated to partner with the CSL program for financial reasons and as a means for program sustainability. Respondents also indicated they were motivated to build a relationship with the university to access opportunities for other partnerships; collaborating with a higher education institution was important to them; and partnering provided an opportunity for agencies to receive input about their programs from the community.

### 4.2 Theme 2-Agencies Received a Variety of Benefits from Partnerships with the CSL Program

#### *In what ways did the project impact your agency's capacity to undertake its work?*

*What benefits did the partnership with the CSLP bring to your organization and/or to the larger cause your organization works towards?*

Respondents indicated they received numerous benefits from partnerships with the CSL program. The top benefit identified was that the partnership created awareness of the agency's purpose and work (6 respondents, 11 references). This included raising awareness in the broader community and raising awareness with student volunteers. One respondent indicated "That's another benefit to us in terms of broadening the awareness of the issue that we're trying to promote in the community" (R7, personal communication, December 13, 2018).

Increasing agency capacity to deliver programs and services (4 respondents, 11 references) was the second most commonly referenced benefit. Respondents noted “It’s like having four more people to work with me or, I’ve described it as having four educated perfectly trained and dedicated volunteers totally available to help me do my job.” (R1, personal communication, October 29, 2018) and “We were working with children to help them support their reading and learning and things like that and so having those extra volunteers allowed us to just increase our capacity to really serve the children.” (R9, personal communication, January 13, 2019).

Enhancing intergenerational awareness (4 respondents, 8 references) and increased client wellness (3 respondents, 8 references) were also benefits identified by respondents. One respondent indicated “The program just marked the life of residents. Gave them a better quality of life. So, it’s been fantastic” (R4, personal communication, November 19, 2018).

Additional benefits included: increased agency staff knowledge, for example, “...we become educated. We grow in our usefulness in the way we do our work because we learn from the students” (R1, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Partnerships created connections; increased agency marketing materials; added resources other than labour and provided the opportunity to collaborate with a higher education institution. One respondent’s agency utilised their demonstrated partnership with UBC-O to attract funding from other sources.

#### **4.3 Theme 3- Time Dedicated to Onboarding Students was the Main Cost for Agencies**

##### ***What were the costs of partnering with the CSLP?***

Respondents overwhelmingly identified time spent as the main cost to the agency during partnerships (11 respondents, 28 references). Time costs included providing on-boarding, orientation and training to students as well as supervision of students during the project placement. Related to the cost of partnerships, respondents indicated lack of time was a barrier to participation in the CSL program (2 respondents, 2 references).

Additionally, transportation costs were identified (2 respondents, 5 references). Transportation was a cost to the agency when they had to travel for meetings related to the partnership and was identified as barrier to accessing student volunteers that had to travel from UBC-O to project placements in West Kelowna.

#### **4.4 Theme 4- Necessary Elements for A Successful Partnership**

##### ***What elements need to be addressed for a partnership to go well?***

Respondents indicated it is necessary for all partners involved in the project to have clearly defined expectations and agreed upon outcomes for the project (7 respondents, 12 references) “I think it really comes down to making sure both sides are very clear on what the outcome will be” (R1, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Secondly, agencies indicated the need for clear role definition for partners (4 respondents, 7 references) and identified the need

for the CSL program to ensure students were a fit, for example, “You want to know that the people that are working on your stuff believe in or at least have some connection to it. I think. That’s just my humble opinion” (R1, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Two respondents (5 references) indicated they felt it was important that the CSL program staff attend the agency office, meet staff and observe their programs. Respondents also identified receiving feedback about partnerships, having a shared vision for the project and coordination was important.

Communication was broadly identified as an important element for successful partnerships (10 respondents, 24 references). Specifically, respondents indicated that advance, timely and open communication and informing agencies of the CSL program’s overall goals, as well as communication with student volunteers and agency leadership was important. One respondent noted “My challenge is to get leadership to understand the value” (R1, personal communication, October 29, 2018).

#### ***How should partners be involved in the design of future CSL program placements?***

Respondents offered a variety of suggestions for partner involvement in designing future CSL projects including: mentoring new CSL program partners (3 respondents, 5 references); providing feedback about future project design (2 respondents, 3 references); participating in CSL program strategic planning (1 respondent, 1 references); and participating in presentations about their programs to students (1 respondent, 1 references).

Respondents preferred to enter into partnerships when CSL program staff had a pre-determined project idea or plan in mind before they approached agencies, to ensure that agencies spend minimal time on planning/designing the project (5 respondents, 12 references). Respondents indicated that their time was limited “I think what happens is you know in the land of our nonprofit and writing grants and doing events and all of that life just gets so busy. So, I think it’s probably easier that it’s generated from the university because sometimes we are just full out” (R4, personal communication, November 19, 2018).

#### **4.5 Theme 5-Ways the CSL program could better support agencies during partnerships**

##### ***How could the CLSP better support your agency in future partnerships?***

***What skills could CSLP staff improve upon when working in partnership with community?***

##### ***Addressing Student Related Challenges***

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that addressing issues with students was one opportunity for the CSL program to better support nonprofit partners (11 respondents, 39 references). Respondents indicated that the CSL program could better support partners by recruiting volunteers (4 respondents, 12 references); addressing issues with students (4 respondents, 8 references); increasing volunteer time (3 respondents, 3 references); preparing

students for volunteer work (3 respondents, 5 references); and supporting student volunteers (2 respondents, 4 references). Respondents would like the CSL program to provide feedback about student experiences at the end of CSL projects “They should collaborate in the sense of giving feedback. That probably would be the number one thing at this moment. If they would give the feedback on how the students experienced their time” (R8, personal communication, January 12, 2019).

Respondents identified student volunteer inconsistency and negative student attitudes as problematic. Respondents indicated that student commitment was a barrier to partnerships (3 respondents, 4 references). Training students that do not follow up as volunteers afterwards is a drain on agency staff resources, as indicated by one respondent “Their [student] intent is to help and we want to encourage that. But I know this is gonna cost us and then we're not going to see them again” (R8, personal communication, January 12, 2019).

### ***Increasing Communication***

Respondents indicated it would be beneficial for the CSL program to increase communication with the agency (6 respondents, 6 references) including educating agencies about the CSL program; understanding agency’s programs and educating agency leadership about benefits of partnership with CSL program. Respondents indicated that CSL program staff should increase communication with partners around opportunities for projects, explain the goals of the CSL program and address CSL program staff transitions. Suggestions also included improving the CSL program website and ensuring that CSL staff remain neutral actors during partnerships.

Notably, respondents indicated that CSL program staff were responsive and supportive of the agency’s needs during the partnership. One respondent indicated “I think Phil as a person, he’s very accommodating and [sic] he’s very passionate about the [CSL] program. He wants it to be successful. His desire and passion are part of the reason why I believe our partnership was so successful” (R4, personal communication, November 19, 2018).

## **4.6 Summary**

CSL program partners value UBC-O’s commitment to delivering the CSL program. The partnership created awareness of partner agencies and increased agency capacity to deliver programs which responds to nonprofit’s need to address capacity challenges, often a result of limited funding and resources needed to undertake their work. Nonprofits indicated a sense of duty to educate students that will one day be leaders in Central Okanagan communities and communities around the world, a goal shared by UBC-O in their mission statement and a specific goal of the CSL program, which seeks to integrate experiential community learning with traditional education to increase students understanding of their roles in community (UBC-O 2018a, para.1; Bond, 2007, p.4). Nonprofit partners indicated they would be interested in supporting CSL program project design in a variety of ways; however, the most common suggestion was as mentors to new partners.



## 5.0 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The main objectives of this section are to interpret the results presented in the findings and examine how they are similar or dissimilar to the literature review to answer the primary research question “*How can the CSL program strengthen nonprofit partnerships and ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for nonprofits and UBC-O in the delivery of co-curricular and curricular student placements?*”. The chapter will begin by answering the supplementary research questions and conclude with answering the primary research question. The implications of the findings and how they related to the client’s objectives for the project will be clearly articulated at the end of the section.

### 5.1 Answering the Research Questions

#### ***Supplementary question: What motivates nonprofits to partner with the CSL program?***

The findings suggest that nonprofits are largely motivated to partner with the CSL program to increase agency capacity and to create community awareness of their agency. Student volunteers are assets that can be utilized to fill agency gaps through labour and by providing technical skills to support service delivery. Nonprofits are interested in educating students and this is a motivation for partnership; a goal shared with the CSL program. These findings are supported by the literature review, which suggests that nonprofit partners are motivated to partner with CSL programs as a means to achieve their missions and mandates, to increase capacity and educate students (Bell & Carlson, 2009, p. 34; Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.61; Leiderman, et al., (n.d.), p.10-11; Cronley, Madden & Davis, 2015, p.284). Understanding partnership motivations can inform the CSL program’s engagement practices and project development.

#### ***Supplementary question: From the Perspective of Current Partners, what are the Necessary Components of Successful Partnerships?***

The findings indicate that communication is a fundamental element of successful community-university partnerships. Timely and open communication between partners at the early stages of the partnership, throughout the partnership and at the conclusion of the partnership, in the form of sharing feedback, is important to nonprofit partners, as is identifying agreed upon outcomes and roles and responsibilities of partners. Respondents viewed the initiation of communication and planning as the responsibility of the CSL program but indicated a willingness to be active in this process. The literature review supports the findings that communication and collaboration between partners around the goals, timelines, expectations and outcomes is an important element for successful partnerships (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.51; Appendix A).

The findings suggest that the following project planning components need to be co-defined for all CSL program project placements:

- Intended outcomes of the project;

- clear definition of roles and responsibilities of partners;
- CSL program staff must ensure that students are a fit for the program;
- CSL program staff must communicate with nonprofit partners to ensure they understand the broader goals of the CSL program;
- CSL program staff communicate with partner's agency leadership to explain the benefits of the CSL program, if requested;
- CSL program staff provide opportunities for nonprofit debriefing and feedback at the end of the project, including feedback from students; and
- CSL program staff communicates future partnership opportunities.

In addition to communication, the findings suggest that the CSL program can better support partners by designing a website that provides information about the program including partnership opportunities. The CSL program should ensure staff remain neutral during partnerships regardless of their opinion of the agency or the agency's work; ensure staff understand the agency's work and needs and communicate staff transitions to nonprofit partners. Additionally, the findings indicate that nonprofits want CSL program staff to address issues with students that impact partnerships and the delivery of project placements, and recruit volunteers, including connecting partners to student volunteers for projects outside of the CSL program.

Understanding the required elements of communication mentioned above will help the CSL program modify their approach to working with nonprofits to implement projects that are mutually beneficial. As indicated in the literature review, community-university partnerships are complex and dynamic and require skilled staff capable of harmonizing community and university needs (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.5). Understanding the skill required to deliver service learning programs and the nuances of supporting nonprofits with diverse needs can help the CSL program ensure current and future staff are successfully engaging partners and building relationships. Further, engaging partners in the planning process distributes decision making power, a concept supported by the literature review as a best practice for ensuring equity in community-university partnerships (Jacoby & Howard, 2014, p.9).

The findings suggest that partners want to be engaged in the design of future CSL programs, reinforcing the literature review's findings that nonprofits offer community expertise and want to be involved in the design of service learning programs (Stoecker et al., 2010, p.281). Notably, the findings support partner involvement in broader CSL program planning including; mentoring new partners, participating in strategic planning and participating in presentations about their programs to students, as opposed to designing specific projects that would be delivered in the CSL program. 50% of respondents indicated they preferred that the CSL program staff approach them with a pre-determined project idea. Therefore, overall CSL program design must be distinguished from CSL project design when determining how to engage partners. However, project design should not be conflated with project planning and communication processes; the findings clearly articulate a need for a shared planning process for the implementation of all projects. Engaging partners in broader program design in a way that

meets partner expectations would assist the CSL program to build rapport and strengthen reciprocal community-university partnerships by giving nonprofits a sense of control and influence in the partnership.

***Supplementary question: What are the benefits and costs for nonprofit agencies partnering with the CSL program?***

### ***Benefits***

Respondents benefit from the CSL program in a variety of ways, as indicated in the findings section of this project. Interestingly, the top two benefits identified by respondents: partnerships created awareness of the agency's work and partners increased agency capacity to deliver programs and services, were also the top two motivations for partnerships. Indicating that the CSL program, to an extent, is benefiting partners based on their motivations for partnerships.

These findings provide some insight into gaps in research exploring the community impact of service learning programs. However, it is important to recognize that nonprofits are one segment of the community and are not representative of the entire community. Future research on community benefit should acknowledge that benefits to nonprofit partners might not always reflect benefits to the broader community.

### ***Costs***

The findings strongly suggest that the number one cost to partners in CSL programs is the time they dedicate to on-boarding and supervising students. This is particularly burdensome when the students do not return to volunteer after they are trained due to poor fit or disinterest in the project. The literature review supports these findings, highlighting that barriers to partnerships include poor student fit and poor student behaviour (Boulin & Perry, 2009, p.133). The findings suggest that ensuring students understand and agree to the expectations and time commitments prior to project placement is one way the CSL program could support partners. It is unclear whether the CSL program staff can address time costs related to on-boarding or supervising students, as the training is often specific to the agency. Supervising students during project placements would likely be an unmanageable task for CSL program staff, especially considering there is one part-time staff dedicated to the CSL program. Regardless, the CSL program should be mindful of the amount of time agencies dedicate to project placements to avoid overburdening partners and provide supports to mitigate time costs when possible. The CSL program should not interpret this finding as a reason not to engage partners in planning and communication, as this was an important finding of the study; communicating about time costs as part of the project planning phase would help the CSL program understand what the nonprofit can dedicate to the project placement, contributing to project success.

***Primary Research Question: How can the CSL Program Strengthen Nonprofit Partnerships and Ensure Mutually Beneficial Outcomes for Nonprofits and UBC-O in the Delivery of Co-Curricular and Curricular Student Placements?***

The findings suggest that the CSL program can strengthen partnerships in a variety of ways to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for partners, including ensuring ongoing communication with partners and students at all stages of the project; addressing student-related issues; ensuring volunteer recruitment and proper matching of students during projects; increasing volunteer time; supporting students; identifying ways to address costs to partners and taking a leadership role in developing and implementing a project planning process that ensures roles, outcomes, time commitments and processes are clearly defined and agreed upon for each partnership. If the CSL program is considering increasing partnerships, staff capacity should be examined, as there is currently one part-time staff responsible for coordinating the program.

## **5.2 Implications of Findings**

The primary issue acknowledged by the client, as indicated in section 1.3 is that community-university partnerships are often one-sided (P. Bond, personal communications, January 22, 2018). This research was conducted to assist the CSL program to better understand and respond to partner needs to ensure sustainable partnerships and increase the CSL program's impact in nonprofit agencies.

The findings clearly demonstrate that nonprofits perceive a variety of benefits they are motivated to partner with the CSL program primarily as an avenue to address agency capacity challenges, to create awareness of agencies' work and to educate students. The findings provide a robust overview of the challenges of partnerships, from the perspective of partners, offering insights into potential areas for change within the current delivery of the program.

The findings also clearly indicate that communication is an integral aspect of community-university-partnerships. Communication throughout the partnership must be maintained and ongoing. The findings can be used by the CSL program to modify the structure and delivery of the CSL program to ensure that clearly articulated roles, responsibilities, anticipated outcomes and benefits are co-identified by partners at the outset and that there is an opportunity for feedback between students, nonprofits and the CSL program staff to ensure nonprofit partners and universities receive mutual benefit from partnerships.

## **5.3 Other Themes and Ideas That Emerged from the Research**

### ***Student Benefit was at the Forefront of Respondents' Minds***

As mentioned in section 4, student education is a motivation for nonprofits to partner with the CSL program. Perhaps not surprisingly, students were top of mind during the interviews. Respondents made 34 separate mentions of student benefit throughout the interviews. Increased awareness (6 respondents, 12 references); developing a deeper understanding of community issues (5 respondents, 6 references) and student skill development (3 respondents, 6

references) were the top three benefits to students, as identified by respondents. Additionally, nonprofits working with a senior population indicated that intergenerational connections made during CSL project placements was a social benefit to their clients, students and the community broadly.

These findings were not identified as a main theme in the findings section of the project, as this research project is focused on strengthening community-university partnerships and a large body of literature already explores student benefit. However, the findings that nonprofits consider student benefits cannot be ignored. Further research should explore whether perceived benefits to students is linked to nonprofit motivations to partner, as student education was the third most common partnership motivation identified by respondents.

### ***Short-term Service Learning Projects***

The literature review suggests that short-term service learning programs do not produce much benefit considering the time committed by nonprofit partners (Martin et al., 2009, pp.57). The findings both support and contradict the literature review, however, additional research should be undertaken to examine this topic further, due to the small scale of the study and limited discussion about this topic by respondents. 3 respondents indicated that short-term placements were burdensome because the agency spent time on-boarding and supervising students for one semester (approximately 3-4 months) and these respondents indicated an interest in accessing volunteers that would participate for the whole school year. However, two respondents indicated that short-term placements were beneficial (2 references). Respondent #3 indicated “I think in this case it was fantastic for us because we were kind of in and out” (personal communication, November 19, 2018). This response was in reference to a media project that required little involvement of nonprofit staff and were completed in a short time-frame. The findings indicate that perceptions of volunteer commitment length being burdensome or beneficial may depend on the type of project being undertaken; short-term placements are not always perceived negatively, as the literature indicates.

## **5.4 Implications of Findings**

The implications of the additional findings indicate that student benefits cannot be viewed separately from nonprofit partner benefits and more research needs to be undertaken to determine whether student skill and knowledge development highlighted by the findings has an impact on the community broadly, after students’ placements end. Further research should examine the benefits, challenges and motivations for short-term and long-term project placements to identify optimal project design timeframes.

## **5.5 Project Limitations and Areas for Further Research**

The findings and literature review indicate that more research should be undertaken to understand the community benefit of service learning programs, including a clear definition of ‘community’. The research project focused on interviewing nonprofit agency partners about their

experiences as direct partners with a focus on the impacts of partnerships on nonprofits, however, the study did not examine whether the CSL program positively impacts clients served. An assumption can be made that by increasing capacity of nonprofits (identified as an important benefit throughout the research) the CSL program is supporting nonprofits in their service delivery but how this relates to enhancing client experiences is not explored. If the CSL program wants to more fully understand community impact, future research should examine the impact of the CSL program on clients that access nonprofit services. It would be beneficial to identify project placements that involve students directly working with clients and interview clients about their experiences. Additionally, interviews could be conducted with faculty partners to understand their perspectives of CSL partnerships.

## **5.5 Summary**

The findings suggest that nonprofit organizations benefit from CSL partnerships and are often motivated to partner with the CSL program to increase agency capacity, to create community awareness and educate students. It is important to nonprofit organizations that students benefit from the project placement and student benefit cannot be separated from nonprofit benefit; there may be a connection between motivations to educate students and perceived student benefit. Communication at the beginning, throughout and at the conclusion of the project placement is an essential element of successful community-university partnerships and the complexity of such partnerships requires staff to be skilled in balancing community and university needs. The findings overwhelmingly identify time commitments as the main cost to partners, specifically time spent on-boarding and supervising students, despite this, partners want to be involved in CSL program design. More research needs to be undertaken to determine the benefits and costs of short-term and long-term project placements and overall more research needs to be undertaken to understand community benefit of service learning programs, including and beyond benefit to nonprofit partners.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The primary purpose of this project was to identify ways the CSL program can strengthen nonprofit partnerships to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes, with the recognition that the development and implementation of service learning programs have historically been one-sided and to the benefit of universities.

The following recommendations were developed from ideas presented in the literature review and the themes that emerged during the analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with current nonprofit CSL program partners. Costs, efficiency, effectiveness and current CSL program staffing resources were also taken into account when developing the recommendations. The recommendations are listed in order from immediate actions to future actions.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

#### ***Recommendation 1: Develop a Process for Addressing Student Related Issues***

This recommendation addresses the findings that nonprofit partners would like the CSL program to address student-related issues and challenges. In order to do so, it is recommended that the CSL program:

- Develop a process for ensuing student-fit for project placements
- Develop a process for identifying and addressing student related problems that arise during project placements; and
- Communicate these processes to nonprofit partners.

#### ***Recommendation 2: Implement a Consistent Project Planning Process***

This recommendation addresses the findings that indicated the CSL program needs to increase partnership communication and planning. Below are the fundamental elements that need to be addressed once a project idea has been discussed with the nonprofit. All phases proposed below should be undertaken in partnership with the nonprofit agency. These recommendations are supported by the findings and the guiding principles for partnerships aimed at ensuring reciprocity and inclusion of nonprofit partners in service learning program design (see appendix A).

#### ***Planning Phase***

CSL program staff should research the partner agency's mission, mandate and programs and schedule a planning meeting with the nonprofit (and professor if curricular) to:

- Clearly define partnership roles and responsibilities of student, volunteer and nonprofit (and professor if curricular);
- Identify assets, needs and strengths of all partners;

- Agree upon and clearly outline time commitments for each partner and project placement timelines;
- Understand the time cost to the nonprofit and determine if there is a means for the CSL program to mitigate this cost;
- Agree on outcomes of the project for all parties;
- Discuss program benefits for nonprofits (can use findings from this research), with a commitment to communicating this to leaders in the agency, if requested;
- Identify preferred form of communication for nonprofit partner (phone, email);
- Commit to an ongoing communication plan to adhere to throughout the project;
- Attend nonprofit agency, meet staff and observe program; and
- Provide a one or two day project management training course made available through UBC-O.

The CSL staff should ensure this is captured in writing and shared with the nonprofit partner, so the document can be referenced during the partnership.

### ***Throughout the Project***

CSL program staff should check-in to address any concerns that arise and provide support as required.

### ***At the Conclusion of the Project Placement***

CSL program staff should initiate a short debriefing session with the nonprofit partner (in person or via phone). The debriefing process provides the CSL program with on-going insight into partnerships and opportunities to modify their approach to ensure mutually beneficial incomes and provides concrete information that can demonstrate the effectiveness of the program and highlight gaps that should be addressed, supporting a continued examination and strengthening of the CSL program. The debriefing process should:

- Provide student feedback to nonprofit;
- Review initial planning document to determine:
  - Did the project meet the expected outcomes for all partners?
  - Were time commitments greater or less than originally anticipated?
  - Did the roles and responsibilities of partners shift throughout the project?
  - What could be improved in future partnerships?
  - What were the benefits of the project for all partners?
  - How can feedback from partners be incorporated into future project placements?
- Communicate potential future opportunities for partnerships; and
- Communicate process for future contact (ie: will the CSL program contact the nonprofit when future opportunities arise or should the nonprofit approach the CSL program?)

### ***Recommendation 3: Engage Nonprofits in Broader CSL Program Development and Planning***

The findings indicate that the CSL program should revise their strategic plan to reflect current practices and outline commitments to implementing processes that foster strong community-university partnerships. This could be achieved in the following ways:

- The CSL program should convene a community strategic planning committee to inform and make recommendations for the strategic planning process;

The CSL program should develop a mentorship framework and process for current partners interested in mentoring new partners

### ***Recommendation 4: Increase Community Presence and Volunteer Opportunities for Nonprofit Organizations***

Respondents noted that UBC-O has access to student volunteers outside of the core CSL program volunteers. Connecting student volunteers with nonprofits is one way to support nonprofits to increase capacity for service delivery in their agencies outside of CSL project placements. The findings indicate that the CSL program could support nonprofit partners to increase capacity in the following ways:

- Refine the CSL program website to include partnership opportunities for nonprofit organizations within the CSL program as well as general volunteer opportunities, featuring rotating spotlight stories on nonprofit partner agencies; and
- Organize a one-day forum/venue for current and prospective nonprofit partners to present about their program to interested students that is dual purpose:
  - To attract students generally interested in volunteering; and
  - To provide co-curricular and curricular students ideas for how they want to be involved in project, increasing the chances of successful student fit in CSL project placements.

### ***Considerations for Recommendations***

The extent to which the recommendations can be implemented will depend on UBC-O's ability to dedicate staff time to modifying the CSL program. Recommendations 2 & 3 require a shift in current practices and a dedication to increased communication during all aspects of the partnerships. Increased community engagement will require more staff resources; however, strengthening community-university partnerships enhances UBC-O's impact in the community and supports the university's commitment to embracing new ways of thinking and educating students to become leaders in their communities (UBC-O, 2018a, para.1).

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

Nonprofit partners deliver services and programs that provide valuable resources to support community-specific causes and it is important that universities delivering service learning programs ensure their programs enhance the work of their nonprofit partners and achieve outcomes that benefit all partners involved; nonprofits, students and universities. While university-led service learning programs have historically been one-sided and focused on university benefit, as identified in the literature review and by the project client, there are opportunities for service learning programs to modify their approaches to working with community moving forward, to ensure that the work of student volunteers enhances the community rather than draining already scarce nonprofit resources. It is clear from the results of this project that nonprofits are motivated to work in partnership with universities and in response to this willingness, the CSL program should find ways to ensure the outcomes, needs and goals of partners are reflected in CSL project placements. This project outlines the vast benefits of such partnerships for nonprofits; however, the project also highlighted the challenges and costs of partnerships experienced by nonprofit partners and the need for robust communication and a focus on delivering CSL programs that also strengthen partner resources.

This project provides recommendations specific to the UBC-O CSL program and due to the small scope of this study, the findings are not generalizable. The literature review indicates more research needs to be undertaken to understand community impact of service learning programs and this is supported by the findings of this project. A larger scale study that includes several service learning programs, an increased nonprofit partner sample size and the inclusion of partner agency client perspectives would offer more robust findings that contribute to research that explores ways to strengthen community-university partnerships, ensure mutually beneficial program outcomes and more fully understand the community benefit of such programs. Additionally, as highlighted in sections four and five, more research should be undertaken to understand the benefits, costs and impacts of short-term service learning placements to determine whether it would be beneficial to partners to extend the time frames beyond one semester term project placements.

Universities are pillars of innovation; educating students to become leaders in their communities and the reach and influence of universities extends far beyond their campuses, therefore universities are well positioned to contribute valuable resources for communities. As partners and benefactors of experiential education through service learning partnerships, universities should be concerned about the impact service learning programs have on nonprofit agencies and communities and commit to strengthening community capacity and ensuring beneficial outcomes for all partners.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIPS

The CCPH Guiding Principles of Partnership below are not meant to be prescriptive or adopted verbatim but rather to be used for discussion or as a model for developing one's own principles of partnership.

1. The Partnership forms to serve a specific purpose and may take on new goals over time.
2. The Partnership agrees upon mission, values, goals, measurable outcomes and processes for accountability.
3. The relationship between partners in the Partnership is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment.
4. The Partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners.
5. The Partnership balances power among partners and enables resources among partners to be shared.
6. Partners make clear and open communication an ongoing priority in the Partnership by striving to understand each other's needs and self-interests and developing a common language.
7. Principles and processes for the Partnership are established with the input and agreement of all partners, especially for decision-making and conflict resolution.
8. There is feedback among all stakeholders in the Partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the Partnership and its outcomes.
9. Partners share the benefits of the Partnership's accomplishments.
10. Partnerships can dissolve, and when they do, need to plan a process for closure.
11. Partnerships consider the nature of the environment within which they exist as a principle of their design, evaluation, and sustainability.
12. The Partnership values multiple kinds of knowledge and life experiences.

## **APPENDIX B: EMAIL CONTACT FORM FOR RECRUITMENT**

### **Email Contact script**

Dear [name],

My name is Mia Burgess. I am a graduate student in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria.

You are invited to participate in a study entitled **Strengthening University-Community Partnerships: UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program**. I am conducting the research as part of the requirements for a degree in Community Development. The study is also being conducted for a client, Phil Bond, Senior Manager, Student Experience Office University of British Columbia – Okanagan.

Mr. Bond has identified you as a partner of the UBC-O Community Service Learning Program.

The purpose of this research is to assist the UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program to identify ways to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for communities and universities through student project placements. Secondly, this research will identify skills and attributes required of service learning staff to support strong community-university partnerships.

You will be able to share information about your experiences with the Community Service Learning Program and community needs. Information gained through this research could enhance the delivery of student project placements to better support community partners. The project will also contribute to the state of current existing knowledge of university-led service learning programs and community partnerships.

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one in-person, 45 minute interview that I will conduct. I will meet with you at your agency. Audio and written notes will be taken. Prior to the interview, I will review the consent form with you and you will have the opportunity to ask questions before the interview begins. You will then be asked to sign the participant consent form. The consent form is attached to this email.

The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers. You may contact Ms. Speers at 250-721-8057.

Thank You.

## APPENDIX C: EMAIL CONTACT FOLLOW UP SCRIPT

### Email Follow Up Contact script

Dear [name],

I am connecting with you regarding your potential participation in the study entitled **Strengthening University-Community Partnerships: UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program**.

I am conducting the research as part of the requirements for a degree in Community Development. The study is also being conducted for a client, Phil Bond, Manager, Student Experience Office University of British Columbia – Okanagan. Mr. Bond has identified you as a nonprofit partner of the UBC-O community service learning program.

I wrote to you on [date] inviting you to participate in the study but have not received a response. Please kindly confirm whether you are able or unable to participate in this research study. I have included information on the study below, as contained in the original email sent on [date].

The purpose of this research is to assist the UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program to identify ways to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for communities and universities through co-curricular Community Service Learning Program student placements. Secondly, this project will identify necessary skills and attributes required of service-learning staff to support strong community-university partnerships.

You will be able to share information about your experiences with CSLP and community needs. Information gained through this research could enhance the support the delivery of co-curricular student placements that better support nonprofit partners delivering services to community members. The project will also contribute to the state of current existing knowledge of university-led service learning programs and community partnerships.

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one in-person, 45 minute interview that I will conduct. I will meet with you at your agency. Audio and written notes will be taken. Prior to the interview, I will advise you of the details of the study and you will be asked to sign participant consent form. You will have the opportunity to ask questions before the interview begins.

The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers. You may contact Ms. Speers at 250-721-8057.

## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT WRITTEN CONSENT/ASSENT FORM



**University  
of Victoria**

*PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM*

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### **Strengthening University-Community Partnerships: UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Strengthening University-Community Partnerships: UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program that is being conducted by Mia Burgess. I am a graduate student in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact me if you have further questions. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Community Development. This research is also being conducted for a client, Phil Bond, Manager, Student Experience Office, University of British Columbia – Okanagan. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers. You may contact Ms. Speers at 250-721-8057.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to assist the UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program to identify ways to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for communities and universities through co-curricular community service learning program student placements. Secondly, this project will identify necessary skills and attributes required of service-learning staff to support strong community-university partnerships.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because it will inform recommendations that can be utilized to assist the UBC-Okanagan to improve the Community Service Learning Program.

#### **Participants Selection**

Mr. Bond has identified you as a partner of the Community Service Learning Program. You are being asked to participate in this study because of your professional expertise, knowledge of community needs and partnership with the UBC-Okanagan Community Service Learning Program.

#### **What is Involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one in-person, 45-minute interview that I will conduct. I will meet with you at your agency. Audio and written notes will be taken.

**Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time required to participate in the in-person interview and adjusting your work schedule to accommodate the interview.

**Risks**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Conflict of Interest**

Your participation or refusal to participate in this research will not impact your ability to continue to partner with the Community Service-Learning Program. It is pertinent to advise you that I am employed by the Central Okanagan Foundation. I coordinate the delivery of Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding received by homeless-serving agencies in Kelowna. I am not involved in granting processes outside of the delivery of the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Your agency may be receiving or applying for funding delivered by Central Okanagan Foundation staff. Your participation, responses, interview answers and any information that identifies you as a participant will be kept confidential from the Central Okanagan Foundation. Your decision to participate or not participate in the study will not **in any way positively or negatively** impact your ability to apply for and/or be approved for grants with the Central Okanagan Foundation.

**Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research are as follows: You will be able to share information about your experiences with the community service learning program and your community's needs. Information gained through this research could enhance the support the delivery of student project placements that better support nonprofit partners delivering services to community members. The project will also contribute to the state of current existing knowledge of university-led service learning programs and community partnerships.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you withdraw from the study your data will be used only if you give permission.

**Anonymity**

Your anonymity will be protected; however, there are limitations to this anonymity. Due to the small sample size of interviews, community service-learning staff may be able to associate your answers to you. Raw data collected will be anonymized and this data will be kept confidential. Interpretation of the raw data will inform a report and presentation that I will provide to the community service-learning program staff about the results of the study.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by the following processes: Data will be stored on a password protected computer and a password protected USB drive.



# **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE: SEMI-STRUCTURED RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

## **CSLP Interview Questions**

### **Interviewee's background**

1. What is your position/role at the agency?
2. What is your agency's mandate and purpose?
3. Why did your agency partner with the CSLP?

### **Benefits, costs and risks**

4. In what ways did the project impact your agency's capacity to undertake its work?
5. What benefits did the partnership with the CSLP bring to your organization and/or to the larger cause your organization works towards?
6. What were the costs of partnering with the CSLP? (eg: human resources, time, monetary investments?)
7. What benefits did the project have for the student participants?

### **Collaboration**

8. How could the CLSP better support your agency in future partnerships?
9. What elements need to be addressed for a partnership to go well? (e.g. MOU, shared vision between party's communication, flexibility, application of resources)
10. How did the CSLP staff collaborate with you to define the roles of the student, UBC-O staff and your agency for the student placement?
11. How should partners be involved in the design of future CSLP projects?

### **Skills and Attributes of CSLP staff**

12. How did the CSLP staff respond to needs and issues that emerged during the partnership (ie: problems with student projects or other challenges)?
13. To what extent did the CSLP possess knowledge and understanding of your agency's needs and your work in the community?
14. What skills could CSLP staff improve upon when working in partnership with community?

### **Concluding remarks:**

15. In addition to any comments above, are there any suggestions you would like to make that would help the CSLP to be a better collaborator?
16. Do you feel I've missed anything significant that should be addressed or would be helpful for the CSLP to know?
17. Are there any relevant documents that you could provide me to help understand your agency and the CSLP partnerships?