MPA Community Research Lab

Feasibility Study

Fall 2018 MPA Group Capstone

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Gerald G. Fox Master of Public Administration

The Fall 2018 Capstone Team

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THE GERALD G. FOX
MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Executive Summary

The Fall 2018 MPA Group Capstone class conducted a feasibility study for a proposed community research lab within the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Gerald G. Fox Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. The suggestion for a community research lab originated from the MPA department's desire to better fulfill the community service aspect of its mission. The prospective lab would connect faculty expertise with local government and nonprofit needs in the Charlotte region.

The study evaluated the need for an MPA community research lab using several methods. First, the student team conducted an academic literature review of community-based research. An investigation of national and local research labs revealed organizational frameworks for successful labs. Local government and nonprofit managers were surveyed to assess their research and data needs. Key stakeholders were interviewed to identify how an MPA research lab could best serve their organizations.

The findings revealed mixed results on the need for an MPA community research lab. There are ample opportunities for MPA faculty to deepen their engagement with the Charlotte community and their presence would be welcomed by local government and nonprofit leaders. However, the findings did not demonstrate that at the current time the community research lab structure would be the most effective vehicle for that engagement. Barriers to a lab include a disconnect between organizational needs and the academic research process and an unclear niche for the prospective MPA research lab among similar research providers.

Although we conclude that an MPA community research lab should not be pursued at this time, we arrived at eight additional recommendations for the MPA program:

- Increase involvement with existing partners to engage in the community
- Utilize program capstone more extensively
- Increase community-based application in program coursework
- Create a vision and find a potential lab's niche
- Establish leadership and an organizational structure
- Identify stakeholders that are interested in contributing to an MPA community research lab.
- Research and create a strong funding model
- Strengthen community relationships

We are optimistic the conditions for a successful lab can be created in the near future with an appropriate service niche, leadership operational structure, dedicated funding, and institutional support.

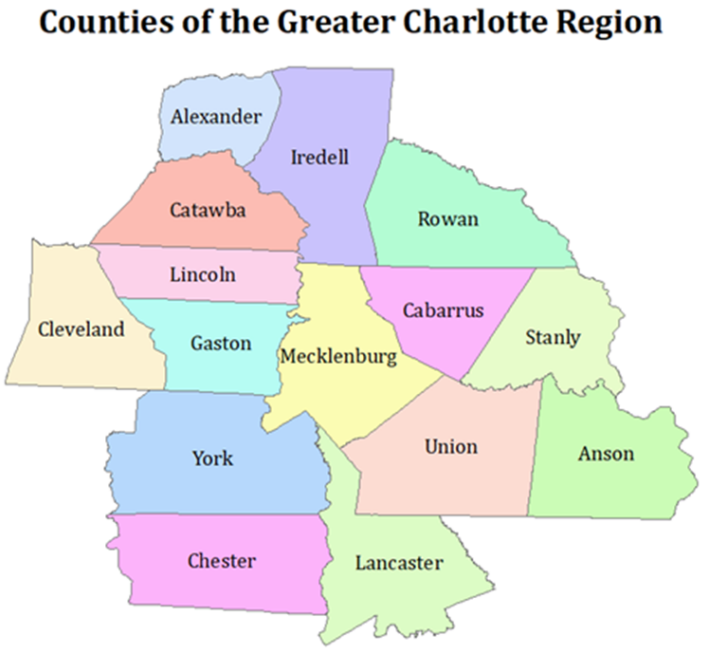
Introduction

Public administration is rooted in serving the public good. Scholars and practitioners seek ways to merge sound policy and management principles with the needs of government and nonprofit entities. These public servants answer the call of their communities through their service in universities, government, and nonprofit organizations.

The will to serve the community has always been at the forefront of the UNC Charlotte Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. Faculty and students have been valuable contributors to the needs of local nonprofit organizations and governments through individual research and semester-long projects. Because the MPA program exists within a constantly shifting environment, MPA faculty suggested assessing a more structured and intentional way of serving the greater Charlotte community by means of a community research lab (see Figure 1 and Appendix A for our definition of community). The MPA faculty selected the MPA Student Capstone Team to determine the need and feasibility of this lab.

Community research labs aim to solve local and regional issues by "bridging the university to the community" through collaborative partnerships between university researchers and community leaders (Weerts & Sandmann, 2016, p. 634). These partnerships build evidence to generate best practices for local governments and nonprofit organizations through data collection, analysis, and experiments. The proposed MPA community research lab would utilize MPA students and faculty skilled in data-based decision-making to solve real-world issues in the Charlotte community.

Figure 1: The Greater Charlotte region



Methodology

The MPA community research lab needs assessment and feasibility study was composed of a literature review, benchmarking of national and campus labs, a community survey, and stakeholder interviews. The needs assessment and feasibility study focused on existing assets, resources, and strengths related to a community research lab, as well as the needs, discrepancies, and gaps that may exist (Engle, 2014). The completion of this study provides the MPA faculty with findings on the need for a lab in the community as well as recommendations on how the MPA program should proceed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review established the theory on community-based research and the use of a community research lab (see full literature review in Appendix F). Academic journal articles provided sound theory regarding the purpose and use of a community research lab.

BENCHMARKING

National and campus labs were examined to understand existing lab structure, funding, and research areas. Figure 2 shows a list of the examined labs.

Figure 2: Summary chart of benchmark labs

Benchmark Community Research Labs	
Category	**Name**
On-Campus Labs	• The UNCC Academy of Research on Community Health, Engagement, and Services (ARCHES) • UNCC Community Psychology Research Lab • UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
National Labs	• Arizona State University Center for Emergency Management and Homeland Security • cityLAB at UCLA • DePaul University College of Science and Health's Center for Community Research • Lab @ DC • Maxwell X Lab • The Florida Center for Community Design and Research (FCCD+r) • The University of Illinois Chicago College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs Research Center (CUPPA) • The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Global Digital Governance Lab • University of California Riverside Center for Sustainable Suburban Development

Methodology

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The MPA Student Team used a web-based survey to learn about community research needs. The survey was sent to 327 community leaders in the Charlotte region, which includes Alexander, Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Chester, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lancaster, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, Union, and York Counties. This method was chosen for its convenience and cost effectiveness (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 353). The survey data collection strategy and survey questions were designed by the MPA student team with input from MPA faculty (see survey instrument in Appendix E). The MPA student team collaborated with the MPA Practitioner Advisory Board, a group of local practitioners associated with the MPA program, to seek feedback on the survey questions. Once the feedback was incorporated and the questions were finalized, the survey was sent to a list of community leaders identified by the client through Google Forms.

Figure 3: Survey recipient details

Survey Recipients	
Category	**Number**
Local Government Managers	29
Nonprofit Managers	28
Government Employees	270
Total Sent	327
Undeliverable	76
Total Received	251

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the breakdown of survey recipients and responses. A total of 327 surveys were emailed, of which 76 were undeliverable, leading to 251 surveys being received by the sample audience. From these, 43 surveys were completed and returned, a response rate of 17%.

Figure 4: Survey response details

Survey Response	
Category	**Number**
Number of Surveys Sent	251
Number of Responses	43
Response Rate	17.13%

Methodology

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Key stakeholders were selected as interviewees by the MPA Student Team and client (see list of interviewees in Appendix C). The interview data collection method and questions were created by the MPA Student Team with assistance from MPA faculty (see interview questions in Appendix D). Interviewees were sent an informational email about the purpose of the interview which included a request for an in-person or teleconference interview.

The MPA Student Team pre-tested the interview questions. Based on the feedback provided, the questions were edited accordingly and sent to all remaining interviewees by email. Interview questions were provided prior to the interview to give interviewees an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the questions. Interviews were carried out in-person, over the phone, and via email. Figure 5 indicates a list of community members that were interviewed by categories.

Interview questions were categorized based on the interviewee being affiliated or unaffiliated with a research lab outlined in Figure 6.

Figure 5: Interviewee backgrounds

Interviewee Affiliation	
Category	Number
MPA Faculty	7
Campus & Other Staff	7
Local Government Managers	5
National Research Labs	5
Non-Profit Managers	5

Figure 6: Interview topics

Interview Topic Based On Lab Affiliation	
Affiliated	Unaffiliated
Organization's area of research	Representing local organizations
Organizational structure	Use for an MPA community research lab
Process for project selection	Current research needs and projects
Funding sources	Overall support for the creation of the lab
Research incentives and challenges	

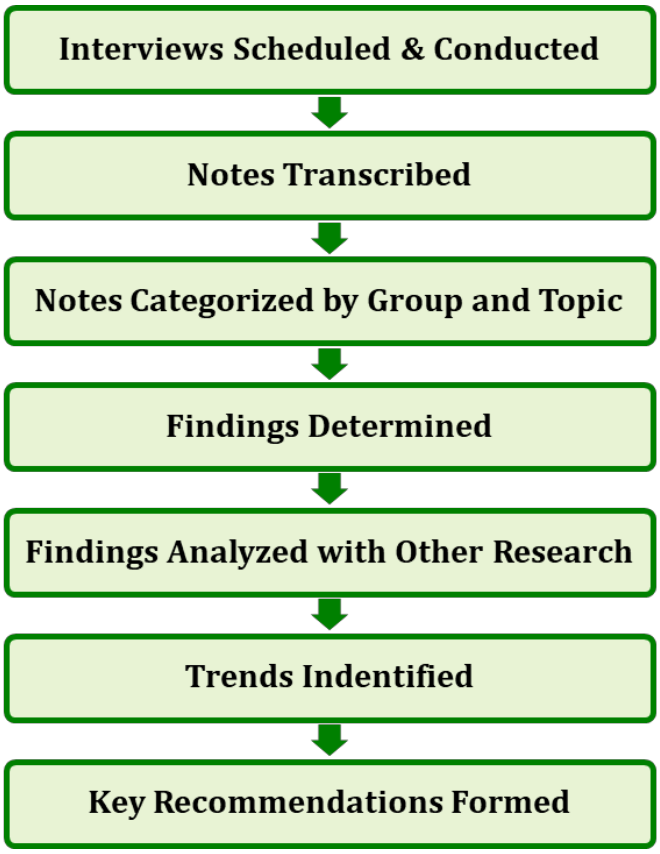
Methodology

Interview notes were collected and transcribed and responses from all groups were categorized in broad topic areas for analysis. After survey and interview data was analyzed, the findings were examined with other labs and literature that was researched. Trends were identified and key recommendations were formed. The interview process is detailed in Figure 7.

METHODS LIMITATIONS

Limitations exist in the survey sample, survey questions, and method of surveying. The survey sample was purposely provided to the MPA Student Team by the MPA faculty and allowed for targeted data collection. Interview limitations exist because interviewees were selected based on expertise in their field rather than a representative sample. Information gathering was limited due to the short amount of time allotted for research.

Figure 7: Interview process



Findings

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual basis for a community research lab found in the literature centered on Community-Based Participatory Research (CPBR). There was also significant literature on the process of setting up a sustainable community research lab.

Community-Based Participatory Research

CBPR supports a "democratic and co-learning approach to research by which members participate as equals, sharing control throughout the research process" (Higgins & Metzler, 2001, p. 490). Participation involves aligning community research with community choice. Involving the community with CBPR requires using understandable communication methods to share knowledge (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008).

CBPR values bridging principle and practice to benefit community research. This connection would involve bringing community and faculty together to solve community issues with research. Public administration implements policy-based community research. This pairing of policy and research is improved when community relationships have trust. CBPR can improve the relationship between the university and the community by involving public input to understanding community needs.

Existing research methods that do not work in conjunction with community needs maintain a power structure that is hierarchical in nature. Empowering communities to draw their own conclusions and aid researchers in reaching conclusions with CBPR tools can change those existing power structures. Community research labs connect communities to higher education professionals and improve the accessibility of information on a community level (Scheifele & Burkett, 2016).

Findings

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability

The nature of CBPR involves the challenges of sustaining relationships, knowledge, and funding (Israel, Krieger, Valholv, et. al, 2006). A reliable funding model that covers start-up costs and operational expenses is essential. Community labs are often organized like non-profit entities but are structured and function like businesses.

Best practices in creating a community research lab involve hosting community informational meetings to assess interest in project planning efforts. The information gained from these meetings can be used to develop revenue generation strategies and a cash flow forecast to determine sustainability of the community research lab. This reinforces the necessity for the MPA program to develop a scope of activities and cultivate community partnerships that can be sustained throughout the life of the proposed community research lab. It was found that this form of research does aid in filling the gap between university and academic research and the needs and issues which are being faced within community. This research method can produce optimal results for both parties. However, this method of research is shown to be labor intensive and constant effort is needed to form new partnerships and relationships and to maintain existing ones.

The literature revealed a large body of knowledge on community-based participatory research that is the conceptual foundation of community research labs. The success of CBPR in creating positive outcomes in the areas it has been used is well-attested in the literature as well.

Findings

BENCHMARKING

Examples of UNC Charlotte campus and national labs were researched to benchmark what funding, structures, and research currently exist. The labs employ part-time and temporary research staff such as graduate assistants and grant-funded analysts. A variety of models are used across the country and in the community. The most common funding structure involves a mixture of federal and local funding combined with grants from foundations. Some organizations receive funding from foundations, but utilize appropriations from the state primarily. A summary of the findings from the UNC Charlotte campus research labs is in Figure 8 (page 13).

BENCHMARKING - UNCC LABS

The following labs are associated with UNC Charlotte and have missions related to CBPR.

The UNC Charlotte Community Psychology Research Lab

The UNC Charlotte Community Psychology Research Lab focuses on community psychology research through applied research and serves the community through consultation services (Community Psychology Research Lab, 2018). The lab relies on a mentor model where students at all levels collaborate with faculty along with community partners. The lab structure consists of faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students who perform work with evaluations of programs in the Charlotte region.

Since there is little to no cost for clients, the lab receives funding for year-long research projects in multi-method evaluation design, implementation plans, or strategic capacity building from established funding sources. Funding comes from the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute of Educational Sciences, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, Mecklenburg County, and the Charlotte Housing Authority.

The UNC Charlotte Community Psychology Research Lab
***Mission**: Our program examines social and community factors that contribute to healthy outcomes in individuals and develops community interventions to create stronger, healthier communities.*

Figure 8: On-Campus Benchmark Labs Summary					
Lab	**Focus**	**Activities**	**Structure**	**Funding Sources**	**Notable Programs**
ARCHES	• Improving health in vulnerable communities and advancing scientific and social research within the fields of health and health-related sciences	• Combines clinical technology, scientific reasoning, community partnerships, and social science to improve community health.	• Within the College of Health & Human Services • Research pipeline: director oversees flexible network of faculty and students	• Federal programs • Local and national philanthropy foundations	• UCity Family Zone - a place-based initiative to address the social determinants of health through community collaboration
Community Psychology Lab	• Community psychology research including social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and international influences that promote positive change, health, and empowerment	• Contracts with organizations to perform community psychology research	• Part of the Health Psychology program • Collaborates with local organizations • Faculty seek grants and perform contractual evaluation services • Graduate and undergrad students assist faculty using mentor model	• Grants from US DoE, Mecklenburg County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and others • Outside agencies fund graduate assistantships	• Evaluation of programs including Bright Beginnings for CMS and Mecklenburg County CARES. • Research surrounding the use of CBPR to examine faculty support.
Urban Institute	• Create solutions to the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the communities the Institute serves	• Technical assistance and training • Public opinion surveys • Research and analysis of economic, environmental, and social issues affecting the Charlotte region	• Research staff, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students • Research decisions are based on research expertise • Pay structure centered on the percentage of time spent on research projects.	• Hard money – direct funding from the state and federal government • Soft money – donations from foundations and clients	• Evidence-Based Policy Making Initiative • Michigan Housing Futures • Inclusive Recovery

Findings

BENCHMARKING - UNCC LABS

The UNCC Academy of Research on Community Health, Engagement and Services (ARCHES)

ARCHES is dedicated to improving health in vulnerable communities and advancing scientific and social research within the fields of health and health-related sciences. The goal of ARCHES is to develop, test, and sustain equitable and effective models of health in all communities (ARCHES College of Health and Human Services, 2018).

ARCHES utilizes CBPR methods for developing and enhancing partnerships within the community and academic settings. Faculty and students work in the Community Action Research Scholars (CARS) or the Camino/ UNCC Communiversity program. CARS promotes healthy behaviors in underserved communities and Camino/UNCC Communiversity creates comprehensive and coordinated training centers focused on promotion of health for vulnerable Latinos and underinsured people (ARCHES College of Health and Human Services).

The UNCC Academy of Research on Community Health, Engagement and Services (ARCHES)

***Mission**: To improve health outcomes and quality of life in vulnerable communities, through community-based participatory research (CBPR) and service-learning activities co-developed with community partners.*

ARCHES is considered a research pipeline. This means that the director of the lab is at the top of the pipeline where there is a fluid and flexible structure of faculty and students who interact in a mentor-like nature, designed to encourage internal collaboration.

Federal programs and foundations primarily compose the funding structure for ARCHES including the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH and other funding programs increasingly recognize the importance of community participation in research as a high priority area. ARCHES also works through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to obtain support for their programs.

Findings

BENCHMARKING - UNCC LABS

UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, a part of Metropolitan Studies and Extended Academic Programs, is a nonpartisan, applied research and community outreach center at UNC Charlotte. The Urban Institute seeks solutions to the social, economic, and environmental challenges the community faces. Services include technical assistance, training in operations and data management, public opinion surveys, and research and analysis (UNC Charlotte Urban Institute Department of Academic Affairs, 2018).

UNCC Urban Institute
***Mission**: The Urban Institute seeks solutions to the social, economic, and environmental challenges the community faces.*

The Urban Institute research falls under one director of research and faculty engagement. Staffing includes researchers, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Research decisions are based on the expertise available to address community research needs.

The Urban Institute receives funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Occasionally, the Urban Institute receives private gifts from organizations like Duke Energy. There is a reserve fund that fluctuates between $300,000- $500,000 annually.

The UNCC community research labs employ CBPR in order to fulfill their missions of being involved in the community and doing research in conjunction with them through means such as partnership building and contractual agreements with organizations in the community.

Findings

BENCHMARKING - NATIONAL LABS

Research centers and labs outside of the local area were investigated. A summary of their information is found in Figure 9 (pages 18-19).

Arizona State University Center for Emergency Management and Homeland Security

The Arizona State University (ASU) Center for Emergency Management and Homeland Security aims to produce research and best practices for the fields of emergency management and homeland security. They address ongoing risk reduction challenges. The ASU lab regularly works within the areas of:

- Planning
- Community development
- Government
- Defense
- Human welfare
- Climate change adaptation
- Hazard mitigation
- Measuring community resilience

The lab has two co-directors, two faculty positions, and two research assistant positions. The lab is funded through FEMA, Homeland Security, and grants. Examples include:

- Opioid App project funded through the ASU Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions
- Statistical Testing of City Resilience project funded by the ARUP Group (engineering and design group) and Rockefeller Foundation
- Hazard Mitigation in Louisiana project funded by the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

Findings

BENCHMARKING - NATIONAL LABS

cityLAB at UCLA

The cityLAB at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) explores the challenges that face the 21st century metropolis through research and design. This lab studies how to expand the capacity for cities to grow while still being livable, sustainable, and beautiful.

cityLAB primarily focuses on design research through collaboration with architects, who use real world and academic expertise. The lab refers to itself as the bridge between architecture, policy, and planning.

cityLAB consists of three full-time employees, including the director, associate director, and one other staff person. In addition to the three full-time staff, they also rely heavily on students to assist with their research and projects.

cityLAB is funded through grants that are associated with specific projects and partnerships with national foundations such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The lab receives a small amount funding from the university for three full-time staff positions and overhead costs.

DePaul University College of Science and Health's Center for Community Research

This research lab provides a permanent space for external research projects. In doing so, they help solve social and urban problems in the greater Chicago area while cultivating mentoring relationships with students at the university.

Faculty and students, both undergraduate and graduate, conduct the community research for the lab. All research projects are funded through external sources such as grants. Organizations which have provided funding for past projects include:

- The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
- National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
- National Institute of Drug Abuse
- National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities

Figure 9: National Benchmark Labs Summary					
Lab	**Focus**	**Activities**	**Structure**	**Funding Sources**	**Notable Programs**
Arizona State University Center for Emergency Management and Homeland Security	• Producing research and best practices for the fields of emergency management and homeland security	• Addressing risk reduction challenges from social, economic, environmental, cultural factors	• 2 co-directors, 2 faculty, 2 research assistants	• FEMA • Department of Homeland Security • Grants (foundations, governmental)	• Opioid Crisis App • Hazard Mitigation in Louisiana • Measuring Resilience.
cityLAB @ UCLA	• Exploring the challenges that face the 21st century metropolis through research and design	• Collaborate with architects and policy makers to create solutions for current urban problems	• 3 full time employees: director, associate director, staff and some graduate students	• University funding • Grants from partners	• Development of Accessory Dwelling Unit best practices • Affordable housing work
DePaul University College of Science and Health's Center for Community Research	• Helping solve social and urban problems in the Chicago area and cultivating relationships with students at the university	• Provides space for external research projects and houses research projects for Psychology and related disciplines	• Faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students	• External grants specific to particular projects	• Youth Tobacco Access Prevention • Children and the Media
Lab @ DC	• Addressing community needs and improving service delivery with evidence from academic and industrial research	• Collaborate with City agencies to implement best practices in everyday policy and programming	• Within City Admin's Office of Budget and Performance Management • Requests come from agencies in district • FT research and analyst staff	• Started with foundation grant • Funded mostly by local donors	• TANF documents best practices • Analysis of policy body camera impact in DC • Improving rodent control with predictive modeling
The Florida Center for Community Design and Research (FCCD+r)	• Address urban challenges related to the built environment	• Design expertise, technical assistance, applied research, and community engagement services	• 3 full-time employees, director, and research staff	• Funded mostly by partners • Some university and grant funding	• Assessing Vulnerabilities from Climate Change • Community and Economic Development Plans

Figure 9: National Benchmark Labs Summary					
Lab	**Focus**	**Activities**	**Structure**	**Funding Sources**	**Notable Programs**
Maxwell X Lab	• Behavioral science and evaluation to improve policy and program outcomes	• Identifies, intervenes, implements and measures social science and behavioral research with experiments and insight from the partners	• Within Maxwell School at Syracuse University • 2 FT Faculty and Staff • Occasional use of graduate students	• Partners fund research • University funds staff salary	• Socioeconomic trends analysis in New York • 311 use analysis in Evanston, IL • Program evaluation for Early Childhood Alliance
The University of Illinois Chicago College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs Research Center (CUPPA)	• Current urban policy issues • Policy and civic engagement • Urban transportation • Community livability and vitality	• Houses 9 centers to implement multi-disciplinary scholarship with resources from education, research, and service to aid in policy solutions.	• Includes 9 labs with specific focuses • Faculty members, staff, and personnel	• Foundations • Trusts • Government departments	• Helping people with disabilities find housing • Better urban transportation • Helping law enforcement with community policing
The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Global Digital Governance Lab	• Develop innovative theory and practice to advance good digital governance	• City &collaborative governance • Social media adoption and e-participation • Big data/open government	• Director, associate director, assistant professor, students, research fellows, international students visiting	• Grant funded	• Nebraska Rural Transit Project • Social Media for Emergency Mgmt. • Technology enabled Collaborative Public Governance
University of California Riverside Center for Sustainable Suburban Development	• Creating sustainable suburban communities through examining the connections between the economy and social well-being	• Examining and addressing community gaps through research	• Director, associate director, one staff person	• External grants • Government agency funding • Donations	• Walkability studies and audits • Workforce analyses

Findings

BENCHMARKING - NATIONAL LABS

Lab @ DC

Lab @ DC's mission is to work alongside District of Columbia agencies to address community needs and improve services through a tailored design approach with evidence found in academic and industrial research. Its focus on "evidence-based governance" ensures that evaluations and experiments are utilized in practical ways to improve District services.

The Lab is a part of the City Administrator's Office of Budget and Performance Management. The Lab is staffed by a team of researchers and analysts with educational backgrounds and research experience. Staff members are full-time government employees with their salaries paid by local funds. Research requests originate from agencies within the District.

Past projects have included work on the 911 nurse triage line, police body cameras, affordable housing, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) policies. The Lab was created with a $3.2 million grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. This foundation has also funded other similar research labs in Rhode Island, Michigan, and Texas. Within the next year, the lab will be funded completely by local dollars.

The Florida Center for Community Design and Research (FCCD+r)

This research lab is a statewide research lab that partners with public and nonprofit organizations to "assist the citizens of Florida in the creation of more livable and sustainable communities." The lab provides "design expertise, technical assistance, applied research, and community engagement services in Florida's growing communities to address urban challenges related to the built environment" (fccd+r, 2018).

The FCCD+r lab currently has three full-time faculty dedicated to research. The faculty seek out the assistance of other faculty conducting research as well as graduate students from other departments within the university. The four areas of the lab are Design Technology, Urbanization and Resiliency, Urban Design and Community Health, and Community Engagement.

Findings

BENCHMARKING - NATIONAL LABS

FCCD+r is currently partnering with Hillsborough County Solid Waste, and Tiny Homes for Veterans who are homeless. Partners fund faculty, staff, and students to complete research. Partnerships and publications of research allow the lab to compete for large research grants. In addition to funding from grants and contracts, other funding comes from sponsorships and the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and various towns and cities from across the country and the globe.

Maxwell X Lab

The Maxwell X lab is a research lab housed within the Maxwell School of Syracuse University that partners with public and nonprofit organizations using behavioral science and evaluation to improve policy and program outcomes. This lab identifies, intervenes, implements, and measures social science and behavioral research by using field experiments and insights from the partners (Maxwell X Lab, 2018).

The Maxwell X lab currently uses faculty and students at Syracuse to research, execute, and track the field experiments. With only two full time staff persons, graduate students are recruited to help with research projects. The lab's current partners include the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion, the City of Syracuse, Early Childhood Alliance, Family Planning Service Clinics, and the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York Beespace.

Partners fund the parts of the research projects they are contracting, while the University of Syracuse funds staff salaries. Those external partners also work with the lab to scout out other external funding sources such as grants. However, the main source for funding comes from the university and the fees which are charged in exchange for services.

Findings

BENCHMARKING - NATIONAL LABS

The University of Illinois Chicago College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs Research Center (CUPPA)

The CUPPA has nine labs with distinct focus areas. These focus areas include:

- Public safety and justice
- Government finance
- Race and public policy
- Policy and civic engagement
- Survey research
- Urban data visualization
- Urban transportation,
- Community livability and vitality
- Promoting and creating great cities

The facilitators for each of the individual labs are specified faculty members and other personnel such as student aids. The CUPPA's research centers also assist local authorities in their community policing and problem solving efforts.

Local authority funding includes:

- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Woods Fund, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- Rockefeller Foundation
- Chicago Community Trust

Government funding includes:

- Department of Transportation
- National Institute of Health
- National Science Foundation
- Department of Justice

Findings

BENCHMARKING - NATIONAL LABS

The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Global Digital Governance Lab

The mission of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Global Digital Governance Lab is to develop innovative theory and practice to advance good digital governance. There are three broad research areas the lab focuses on smart city and collaborative governance, social media adoption and e-participation, and big data/open government. The staff consists of a director, associate director, and assistant professor. Students, research fellows, and international students visiting are also involved with the Global Digital Governance Lab.

Because they are a global research lab, they have cultivated partnerships with organizations around the world. Partnerships include the Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Taiwan Electronic Governance Research Center, and various U.S. and U.N. partners. Research is funded through grants, including the University of Nebraska System Science grant, Urban Research Grant award, and the Faculty Research International Grant award.

University of California Riverside Center for Sustainable Suburban Development

The mission of this lab is to conduct and disseminate research regarding social, environmental, and transportation system issues. The lab aims to create a sustainable suburban community through examination of connections between the economy and social well-being. The lab considers a sustainable suburban community to be one in which there is equitable distribution of resources.

Current projects include examining and addressing gaps in the Santa Ana River Trail, the walkability of Riverside communities, and solar power growth. The organization is led by a director and associate director, who also work with one staff person specifically dedicated to the lab. This research entity receives its funding from grants and governmental agencies such as the California Department of Transportation, the Riverside County Transportation Commission, and the Riverside County Department of Health, and private donors.

The national labs occupy niche areas, allowing them to distinguish their work in their respective community by conducting high quality and specialized research.

Findings

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Research Needs

Survey findings show that the most important areas of research are demographics, community development, human resources, and planning. Other selected research needs are in Figure 10.

Survey respondents mainly use internal staff for their research needs, but some supplement with external research partners. The findings also show that the upper-level managers typically conduct the internal research for the organization (Figures 11 & 12).

Figure 10: Survey respondent research areas

Respondent Research Areas	
Category	Number
Demographics	8
Community Development	7
Human Resources	7
Planning	6
Best Practices	5
Benchmarking	5
Public Opinion	5
Housing	5
Economic Development	4
Other	4
Transportation	3
Local Government Issues	3
Program Evaluation	2

Figure 11: Internal vs. external research

Who Does Research?	
Category	Number
Internal Staff	20
External Providers	11
Both Internal & External	12

Figure 12: External research providers

External Research Providers	
Category	Number
Private Consultants	13
Other Universities	4
State & Local Agencies	4
Urban Institute	3
Centralina COG	2
Other	3

The survey included a section for open-ended comments, including the following:

"I suspect my organization would take advantage of this kind of resource if offered but can't speak on behalf of it."

"I feel a research lab would be a wonderful resource."

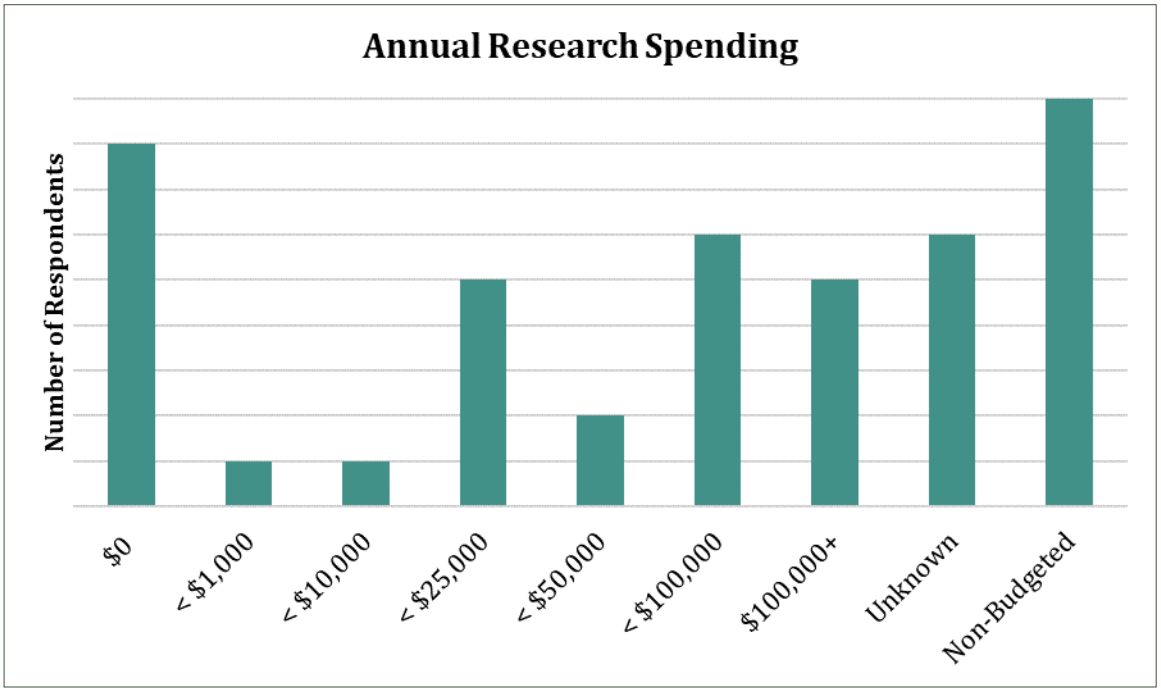
Findings

COMMUNITY SURVEY

For those respondents who listed external research providers, over half used private consultants. Other external research sources mentioned by respondents included the Urban Institute, state and local agencies such as the NC League of Municipalities, the Centralina Council of Governments, and other regional universities.

Nearly 40% of respondents reported that funds were either not expended or budgeted for research. In the survey, non-budgeted is defined as spending money on research but not allocating it as a line item in the budget. For example, some organizations considered research to be included in staff salaries or contracted for it on an as-needed basis. The next largest category of respondents budgeted no money for research. For respondents who provided amounts, the most spent between $50,000 and $100,000 on research annually, followed by an equal number who budgeted between $10,000 and $25,000 and greater than $100,000. Figure 13 depicts research expenditures for the survey respondents.

Figure 13: Annual budgeted amounts for research for survey respondents



Findings

COMMUNITY SURVEY

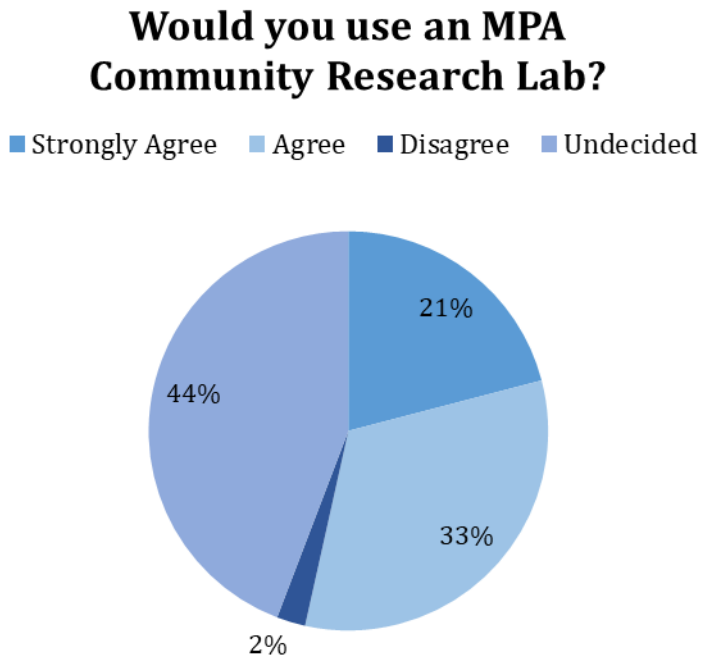
The survey also assessed respondents and their organizations current areas of research. Two-thirds of the data suggests that respondents analyze demographic data. More than half of the respondents use data gathered on best practices, budgets and financial analysis, and program evaluation. Few respondents use trends and policy research, while fewer respondents use field experiments. Approximately half of respondents indicated additional resources would be beneficial to improving community engagement and outreach. The survey highlights the divide between optimal levels of data collection and research and the level currently being achieved.

Lastly, Figure 14 displays that over half of those surveyed "strongly agree" or "agree" that they would be interested in using an MPA community research lab as defined in the survey. Notably, 44.20% of respondents answered "undecided." This sentiment indicated in the "undecided" response rate was also echoed in interviews.

"[Using a lab] depends on the timing and what form the lab would take on"

The survey included a section for open-ended comments. Some of the comments that were submitted included the following:

Figure 14: Lab interest survey responses



Local organizations had a need for data, but not necessarily research, in the MPA faculty's interests. Over 75% of organizations perform research internally, while over 50% use external providers with a wide range in how much agencies spend on research. There are many well-known labs, but many respondents were interested in an MPA lab.

Findings

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

MPA Faculty

Faculty provided insight into their academic research and research interests. They described their research as evidence-based and corresponding to their individual specialties, which determines their research projects. Funding sources for faculty research are derived from grants or institutions. A summary of stakeholder interviews, including those from the faculty, is found in Figure 15 on page 30.

The faculty did not share much information on appropriate incentives. The interviewees identified a disconnect between community needs and the research process itself. This was described as the greatest challenge to an MPA community research lab. The faculty are inclined to produce publishable research which may not be congruent with community needs. Therefore, having to create publishable academic material could make it difficult to serve the community.

Ultimately, the faculty were willing to participate in an MPA lab if one is created. Currently, there is no consensus on the direction or structure such a lab would assume. Accordingly, there were differences among the faculty on the overall need and purpose of a community research lab.

Campus labs and other staff

The labs on campus typically have a flexible team of faculty/staff and make use of graduate and undergraduate students. For these campus labs, projects are often funded by clients, grants, or funds from the state or federal government. The actual projects worked on is not determined by individual preference but by responding to community needs and staff competencies. Campus lab representatives expressed a mixture of opinions regarding the creation of an MPA community research lab. While they recognize the constant need in the community for applied research, one interviewee advised:

"Don't show up in the community already loaded with what you want to do. Show up to the community with open hands. It's the long game not the short game."

The campus labs and staff interviewees are already involved in community and applied research. Therefore, respondents expressed ambivalence regarding the potential MPA community research lab. The staff at existing labs recommended the best approach to getting involved in community research is to partner with other labs on campus.

Findings

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

National Labs

In addition to the information which was gathered regarding national labs in the literature review, several key takeaways were found from the interviews, including plans for funding and developing a niche. Those interviews occurred with Arizona State University's CRED Lab, Lab@DC, the University of South florida's Florida Center for Community Research and Design, Syracuse University's Maxwell X Lab, and the University of Los Angeles's cityLAB. Interviewing staff at these labs showed that the establishment of goals, a mission, and a niche, combined with networking and university support, are the most critical aspects of creating a community research lab. The majority of projects range from 6 months to 2 years with project funding coming from grants, the university, and sponsors. These labs also have a small number of full-time staff and researchers.

A key takeaway from the ASU CRED lab interview was their issue with cash flow. A majority of their funding is comprised of soft money. This can cause issues with payroll and overhead costs. It was indicated that ASU CRED makes a concerted effort to plan projects and timelines to avoid having diminished funds. An interesting finding from the Lab@DC signified that they are migrating to becoming completely funded by the city of Washington, D.C. This migration causes most of their work to be in conjunction with city departments and city issues. Other labs that were researched and interviewed are housed in universities and receive their funding from various sources.

As depicted in the literature review of the labs and national lab interviews, a niche in the community or within a subject area was common, allowing for labs to target their expertise to specific groups or subject matter. By aligning themselves with a niche, labs were able to target specific funding for to their areas of interest. In theory, such a strategy would allow for a more directed approach to securing funding.

Findings

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Local Stakeholders

During interviews with local government managers, executive directors, planners, and nonprofit administrators, the MPA Student Team learned more about potential interest in the lab. Individuals from several organizations revealed that their staff conducts research with outside consultants. Community stakeholders from the local government and nonprofit sectors faced issues concerning data maintenance, procuring funding, and economic development. The interviews revealed that these stakeholders were conducting data analysis rather than academic or evidence-based research.

"At its very base, I don't ever look at creating a program in a community without understanding what's been done before and what there is to do."

A key takeaway from the local stakeholder interviews was the clear interest in a MPA community research lab and the services a lab could provide but a lack of commitment to further involvement due to existing constraints. Local government stake-holders and nonprofit stakeholders expressed concern regarding cost as a limitation for their participa-tion in a MPA community research lab. Additionally, research partnerships with established institutions gave local stakeholders pause as well, indicating hesitation to introduce a new research player to the community. As the literature review supported, stakeholder interviews reiterated the need to pinpoint a niche focus for a community research lab to define. It is important to maintain a coherent identity, which delineates the MPA community research lab from other labs on campus and in the community (Scheifele & Burkette, 2016, p. 8).

"If faculty are choosing the projects they are interested in for their own benefit and interest, it is not really a community lab [from the perspective of a nonprofit organization]."

Findings

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Figure 15: Stakeholder interview summary chart

Stakeholder Interview Take Aways	
Categories	Take Aways
MPA Faculty	Faculty attitudes are highly supportive of the need for both increased community involvement and opportunities for experimental research, but uncertain whether an MPA lab can accomplish both goals. While all faculty believe they have valuable expertise to share, they are cautious about balancing the additional responsibilities of a research lab with their existing duties. For an MPA Lab to proceed, a strong framework to manage the conflicting demands between the academic research process and the needs of outside organizations is essential. The faculty would like to be involved in gaining more formal recognition of their existing community connections.
Campus Labs & Other Staff	Campus labs and other staff interviewees shared the importance of being reactive and conducting research that fits community needs. Their programs use research to benefit faculty projects, to help teach students, and respond to the needs of funding sources. Their main challenge in these activities is working within University regulations governing their conduct.
National Labs	The national labs were all small staffed. Majority of the labs can collapse and expand their researchers as needed for each project. Projects can last from 6 months to 2 years and are mainly contract based. Therefore, the majority of the funding is from the partners with the lab to complete a project.
Local Government & Nonprofits	Government attitudes can be described as supportive of the need for a community lab and opportunities to apply research to issues they were facing. However, this interest was rooted in a desire for the lab to help the organizations increase capacity and cut costs, that overshadowed needs for tested research. Since this does not align with the clients desire to obtain funding to support the lab, a funding structure would need to be created that does not rely solely on organizations payment for services. Nonprofits frequently use outside sources for research. These nonprofits expressed the need for collaborative data storing. Nonprofit managers expressed hesitation about the cost of using a potential lab and maintaining their relationships with existing research partners.

Recommendations

The MPA student team generated nine recommendations following the analysis of our research and data. Recommendations one through four address the present context of the MPA program by providing additional ways to further community engagement and meet community needs. Recommendations five through nine pertain to future development within the MPA program, outlining the steps necessary to create the proper conditions for a community research lab.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The ideal conditions for an MPA community research lab are not present at this time

While there is a recognized need for more research assistance in the community, the analysis and discussion of the data collected through surveys and interviews indicate that an MPA community research lab is not feasible at this time. Figure 19 outlines the criteria gathered from interviews and prior research on other similar labs across the US. This chart highlights the gap between ideal and present conditions that must be addressed before an MPA community research lab can be successful.

Figure 19: Conditions for a successful community research lab

Present Conditions	Ideal Conditions
• Lack of broad-based and deeper MPA ties to the community.	• Connections to organizations and existing community research labs.
• Uncertainty of what kind of niche this lab could fill.	• A clearly defined research niche.
• Conflicting interests and priorities regarding expectations of a community lab by faculty.	• Faculty are committed to the lab mission and build capacity by involving graduate students.
• Funding sources are currently unknown. Suggestions include foundations, grants, contracts, and community partners.	• Established relationships with foundations and funding sources that would enable a steady flow of revenue.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Increase involvement with existing partners to engage in the community.

The MPA Student Team found that there is an opportunity for community research through partnerships with existing labs.

A community partnership or partnerships with labs on campus such as the Urban Institute provides an opportunity to connect graduate level resources to solve community needs and problems. Partnering presents an opportunity to work more efficiently and to match the strengths of UNC Charlotte MPA faculty with other local labs that cannot meet demand.

Interviewees with existing labs expressed interest in partnering with the MPA program. As one interviewee expressed,

"I just think we are missing a real opportunity in this university by not figuring out how to tap into the teacher-student expertise from that relationship they have."

Partnering with the Urban Institute can also provide incentives for faculty to become involved in publishable work. Another interviewee commented,

"I think it is a sweet spot for faculty-publishable and meaningful research-and for students, a learned experience in something applicable in the real world."

The concern of duplicative work was found in interview responses such as,

"You also do not want to do something that another local research provider is doing. There would need to be a lot of collaboration… It may be a matter of connecting [with them]."

For partnerships to be successful between MPA faculty and existing labs on campus, there must be a reliable stream of communication of research projects between labs. Collaboration must be prioritized to best meet the needs of the community.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Utilize program capstone more extensively

By better utilizing the capstone project and increasing community-based coursework, the MPA program would be promoting the research ability of MPA faculty and students to the community. The current graduate "capstone" classes provide a valuable service to local organizations and governments. The MPA program should further engage in the community by expanding the reach of the MPA group capstone class. Currently, the MPA group capstone course conducts research for one organization per semester, but the research capacity may be underutilized. By dividing the class into groups and providing partnerships with more than one organization per semester, the class could address greater community need. Projects for the class are proposed to professors frequently, and thus increasing the capacity of the class to conduct meaningful community research would better reflect the program's mission of service to the community. This may require additional faculty involvement in the capstone course, with a minimum of one advisor per student team.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Increase community-based application in program coursework

Another way for the MPA program to employ its resources further is through practical coursework. MPA faculty should consider offering more courses focused on community-based applications. Current courses like *Human Resources, Grant Writing, Program Evaluation, Project Management,* and *Urban & Community Development* teach graduate students how to work with local nonprofits and government entities to address their needs. More courses should include a community-based application component where students use the skills learned in the course to tackle projects that perform research on community needs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations (5-9) describe the necessary steps suggested if and when the MPA program decides to establish a community research lab.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Create a vision and find the lab's niche

All of the national and local labs that were used for benchmarking have statements which concisely define their purpose, and we recommend that UNC Charlotte do the same. A vision statement will help the program define the direction and objectives of the lab. The MPA program should focus on retaining an identity that allows the MPA community research lab to stand apart from other labs on campus (Scheifele & Burkette, 2016, p. 82).

Multiple interviewees emphasized the importance of finding a niche for an MPA community research lab. For example, one interviewee said,

> ***"Number one, other people are doing this sort of work; an MPA lab would have to have a clearly defined mission (niche) and good marketing in order to make it work."***

Furthermore, since it was determined that the community needs may not align with current faculty needs, there is additional concern that a niche is lacking. Creating a vision and a defined niche mitigates the issue of entering the community with purely academic goals.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Establish leadership and an organizational structure

After the vision and niche for a MPA community research lab has been decided, key leadership should be established. These individuals will be responsible for governing the activities of the new lab.

First, a champion should be identified to lead lab efforts and continue to market the lab to an identified audience. Second, a board of directors should be formed which would be tasked with big picture items such as strategic planning. Third, a decision about the distinct structure of a lab needs to be discussed and agreed upon. This structure should specifically state if there will be full time employees or existing faculty to fulfill duties and responsibilities of the lab. Additionally, research should be conducted in order to shed light upon what types of governing committees should be formed, separate from the basic hierarchical structure of the lab.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Identify stakeholders that are interested in contributing to an MPA community research lab

In addition to leaders within the MPA program, a strong stakeholder base is also crucial in CBPR. Wallerstein & Duran (2008) acknowledge that there is no guarantee that community members will have interest or enough energy to contribute to research. The MPA community research lab needs strong interest and commitment from community partners in order to succeed.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Research and create a strong funding model

More research is needed to determine the proper type of funding for the lab. It is our recommendation that this research be conducted after there is a proposed direction that the program desires to take with the lab. Knowing the purpose of the lab and its proposed research areas will assist in determining possible funding streams. Research on national and campus labs found that there is a variety of available funding. Those sources and mechanisms should be looked at more closely in an effort to find what could be the best fit for a lab in the MPA program.

Examples of funding sources include national governmental organizations, state level organizations, local organizations, and funding directly associated with universities which, in some cases, house the research labs. Most labs have a mixture of funding sources which makes the funding models for most of the labs somewhat complex. Comprehensive research will be critical in determining what would be the best fit for a MPA community research lab funding model.

It is important to note that our survey findings suggest that a fifth of Greater Charlotte community organizations (~21%) do not have a set amount of funds dedicated to research. This demonstrates potential difficulties in funding research for an MPA community research lab.

MPA faculty that were interviewed also believed that the current MPA community research lab scope may have difficulties receiving grant funding. If the scope of research is too narrow, funding may be hard to find and apply for. If there is no niche, foundation funding may also be hard to receive. Thus, the determination of the program's mission and vision as a first step remains imperative. After the proper research has been conducted, a formal funding model can then be produced.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Strengthen community relationships

In order to secure consistent participation, ensure funding, increase program visibility, and establish itself in the community, a concerted effort will need to be undertaken in order to build community relationships. The role of the MPA program must be clarified so students and faculty can gain recognition and build a reputation that lends itself to facilitated partnerships at the time that an MPA community research lab becomes feasible. We propose some form of communication bulletin such as an email blast, hosted web page, or social media to display research and projects on which faculty and students are working. In doing so, the quality work produced by the MPA department will become more visible and will allow those in the community to see potential ways in which they might be able to utilize a lab. We found that some labs obtained their funding directly from their client projects, and these projects had come from relationships built in the community.

Community relationships have been invaluable in the case of the CRED lab at the University of Arizona. The director has been involved in the creating and maintaining relationships with community and governmental organizations. This structure allowed for repeat assignments with community partners, and also allowed the lab to showcase their work to potential future clients. cityLAB UCLA has also maintained strong relationships with the City of Los Angeles to allow for collaborations in research and application of best practices in affordable housing.

Conclusion

During the process of conducting a needs assessment and feasibility study, there were several key insights which were made apparent. First, our study of labs both at UNCC and nationally, proved that they are effective tools to help bridge the gap between university and academic style research to the needs of the communities in which they are located. Second, we found that there are research needs in the greater Charlotte region which are going unmet by current research entities and labs. Third, our study of local and national labs revealed that there are multiple characteristics which successful labs have in common. However, not all of those characteristics are present here in the MPA Program at this time which would make the formation of a community research lab within the program ill advised at this time. As a result, the MPA Student Team determined that it is not currently an appropriate time for an MPA community research lab. Data suggest expanding the MPA program's network of connections and facilitating partnerships will improve the feasibility of a future MPA community research lab.

In conclusion, the research along with data that the MPA student team analyzed revealed that community research labs have immense potential, that there is a need in the Greater Charlotte region for research, and that there are steps that can be taken in order to further the mission of the MPA program in the community and lay groundwork for a community research lab in the future.

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Appendix A

Glossary

This glossary clarifies several key terms used throughout the report.

Community:
A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.

Community Research Labs:
As defined by the Maxwell lab, a community research lab partners with the public and nonprofit sector to build evidence for what works. Maxwell's community research lab leverage data collection and analysis techniques and where possible randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to intelligently design and rigorously evaluate everything they do. Together these powerful techniques allow practitioners to work with the Maxwell School to improve outcomes cost-effectively and understand the precise impact of each change.

Community Based Participatory Research:
Community-based participatory research is a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish comprehensive participation by parties affected by the researched issue. This includes community members, representatives of organizations, and researchers. This collaboration in all aspects of the research process aims to improve health and well-being through taking action, including social change (Viswanathan et al., 2004).

Greater Charlotte Region:
For the purposes of this class, the Greater Charlotte region refers to the following counties in North Carolina: Alexander, Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, and Union; and in South Carolina: Chester, Lancaster, and York.

Stakeholder:
A person with a special interest or concern regarding a topic or action, especially a business. For the purpose of this study, the stakeholder group consists of MPA Faculty, local governments, nonprofits, and UNC Charlotte.

Appendix B

Scope of Work

MPA Research Lab Feasibility Study Scope Statement

Gerald G. Fox MPA Program
UNC Charlotte
Fall 2018

Background Statement:

The mission of the Gerald G. Fox MPA Program is to "provide education and training for the public and nonprofit sectors, conduct scholarly and applied research to advance the field of public administration, and serve the community." One way this mission is achieved is through the required capstone course, *Advanced Seminar in Public Management Problem Solving (2743).* Upon revisiting the MPA program mission, the faculty contemplated the implications of "serving the community." This question prompted faculty to explore additional ways that students and faculty could fulfill the tenets of the mission, specifically, exploring the concept of a community research lab. With the help of the Advanced Seminar in Public Management Problem Solving (6187) MPA student team, an assessment of the need and feasibility of an MPA community research lab will be conducted.

Institutions such as Maxwell X Lab at Syracuse University, UCLA's cityLAB, the John Glenn Institute of Public Affairs at Ohio State University, and others operate labs that engage with the community and conduct research. Resources at the graduate level can be applied to solve community needs and problems. Community research labs bridge communities with higher education professionals and improve the accessibility of information on a community-level.

Faculty and administration of the MPA program elected to contract with the UNCC MPA Student Team to conduct a feasibility study with major components of this study including stakeholder interviews and reviews of similar labs. These steps are critical because stakeholder insight will focus the needs assessment and comparative analysis of university-operated labs which will contribute to the feasibility report.

This document outlines the scope and process to be completed as part of the agreement and includes a description of tasks to be completed, a timetable for completion, and an outline of project deliverables.

Appendix B

Scope of Work

Goal:

The UNCC MPA Fall 2018 Student Team will conduct a needs assessment and subsequent feasibility study to provide the MPA faculty with a report containing recommendations to identify the need for a community research lab and the role that such a lab would play in local governments and the nonprofit community of the greater Charlotte region.

Tasks:

The tasks that have been identified as essential for successful completion of this project are outlined below. Adjustments may be made to the following items that may not be realized at the onset. Thus, the dates for deliverables and revision of action items are subject to change as agreed upon between the MPA Student Team and the client.

- Research similar labs across the country and in the community
- Develop a survey and interview for primary stakeholders including MPA faculty, local government and nonprofit leaders, and stakeholders in existing community research labs.
- Identify the need for a community research lab
- Determine the feasibility for a community research lab

Client Responsibilities:

- Communicate with and respond to the MPA Fall 2018 Student Team as necessary.
- Provide clear expectations regarding essential components of the final report in a timely manner.
- Deliver data pertinent to project completion as requested--including stakeholder list.,

Appendix B

Scope of Work

Limitations:

The time frame to complete the project based on the UNCC Charlotte Fall 2018 academic calendar is limited with a final completion date of December 19, 2018.

Purposeful samples allow for the collection of specific data on a target population by carefully selecting people based on characteristics that reflect the population in focus. Although the community list used included administrators that could provide valuable feedback, bias may exist since the community list already existed for another purpose. The survey questions may also be of concern because the survey list overrepresented planners in its sampling frame. The priorities revealed may be representative of planners, but not as representative of nonprofit and governments overall.

Survey questions created were pretested by only a handful of people. For this reason, additional issues in terminology or question options may still exist. Additionally, the method of using a web-based surveys was chosen for its convenience and cost-effectiveness, but web-based surveys are known to have response rate issues when they are not combined with other modes of surveying (Newcomer et al, 2015, p. 353).

Limitations also exist in the interview methods chosen. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and via email. Having a variety of methods each interviewer can choose from can yield results that are unintentionally bias to that method. These results are also not reliable for comparison between each survey (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 354). Bias may also be present in the interview findings due to the variability of those who conducted the interviews. The time constraints on interviewing people as well as nonresponse rates posed additional limitations on the interview data collection process. These variations in communication methods and experience level in interviewing may have some effect on interview findings.

Other limitations may stem from the scope of work, which was broad with the intent of eliciting feedback of initial interest and use of an MPA community research lab. Had there been more definition in the scope, interview questions could have probed more specific responses. This was expected as the research performed in this study is preliminary in nature.

Appendix B

Scope of Work

Deliverables and Schedule:

The following schedule defines the estimated timetable for project task completion. Dates are subject to change based on client needs and requirements of the MPA Student Team.

Deliverables	Date
1. Scope of Work and Stakeholder List	September 12, 2018
2. Draft of Presentation, Needs Assessment, and Feasibility Study—Draft to Client	November 7, 2018
3. Presentation, Needs Assessment, and Feasibility Study- Final to Client	November 28, 2018
4. Final Presentation to Community and Client	December 12, 2018

Provider/Client Sign-off:

Robert L. Austin

Emily Scott-Cruz

UNCC Representatives

September 13, 2018

Date

Dr. Tom Barth

MPA Faculty Representative

September 13, 2018

Date

Appendix C

List of Interviewees

National Labs

1. Joseph Boskovski: Managing Director and Co-Founder, Maxwell X Lab at Syracuse University
2. Karissa Minnich: Operations Analyst, Lab @ DC
3. Taryn Sabia: Director, Florida Center for Community Design and Research at the University of South Florida
4. Dr. Michele Walsh: Team Lead, Community Research, Evaluation, and Development Team at the University of Arizona
5. Gus Wendel: Assistant Director, cityLAB UCLA

Campus Labs and UNC Charlotte Staff

1. Dr. Jim Cook: Director, UNC Charlotte Community Psychology Lab
2. Dr. Mark DeHaven: Director, UNC Charlotte ARCHES
3. Diane Gavarkavich: Director of Research Studies, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
4. Dr. Cherie Maestas: Director, UNC Charlotte Public Policy PhD program
5. Jeff Michael: Director, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
6. Dr. Steven Rogelberg: Director, UNC Charlotte Organizational Science
7. Dr. Lori Thomas: Director of Research and Faculty Engagement, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
8. Curt Walton: Interim Associate Provost, UNC Charlotte Metropolitan Studies

Appendix C

List of Interviewees

MPA Faculty

1. Dr. Joanne Carman: Associate Professor, UNC Charlotte Department of Political Science and Public Administration
2. Dr. Jacqueline Chattopadhyay: Associate Professor, UNC Charlotte Department of Political Science and Public Administration
3. Dr. Suzanne Leland, Professor, UNC Charlotte Department of Political Science and Public Administration
4. Dr. Zachary Mohr: Assistant Professor, UNC Charlotte Department of Political Science and Public Administration
5. Dr. Sarah Pettijohn: Assistant Professor, UNC Charlotte Department of Political Science and Public Administration
6. Dr. Jaclyn Piatak: Assistant Professor, UNC Charlotte Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Greater Charlotte Nonprofit Organizations

1. Robert Bush: President, Arts and Science Council
2. Carmen Blackmon: Executive Director, Above and Beyond Students
3. Adelaide Belk: Assistant Vice President of Community Impact and Special Initiatives, United Way of Central Carolinas
4. Brian Collier: Executive Vice President, Foundation For The Carolinas
5. Calvin Cupini: Citizen Science Program Manager, Clean Air Carolina
6. Charles Thomas: Director, Knight Foundation

Area Government Entities

1. Kevin Ashley: Planning and Neighborhood Development Deputy Director, City of Concord
2. Dena Diorio: County Manager, Mecklenburg County
3. Kim Eagle: Assistant City Manager, City of Charlotte
4. Rebecca Hefner: Data and Analytics Manager, City of Charlotte
5. Jim Prosser - Centralina Council of Governments Interim Executive Director

Appendix D

Interview Questions

National Research Labs

1. What is your role at _____ and how long have you worked here?
2. What kind of research is done at your lab? Do you have a particular niche?
3. What is the organizational structure here? (researchers, staff, students etc.)
4. How do you find clients?
5. How do you prioritize projects?

    **If this question does not result in a response, ask:*

6. What are the top three issues that your lab deals with?
7. What is the typical turnaround for projects?
8. What are the sources of your funding? (sustainable and recurring funding, grants etc.)
9. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

UNC Charlotte Campus Staff A (Affiliated with a Lab)

1. What is your role at ____ and how long have you worked here?
2. What research do you/your organization perform? Do you have a particular niche? How do you make your research and role stand apart from other similar organizations or labs?
3. What is the organizational structure? (researchers, staff, students etc.)

    A. How are employees within the structure incentivized? (maybe upward movement with-in the organization or pay increase as a result of published research)

4. When you conduct research, who are your partners?
5. How do you determine what projects you research?
6. What are the sources of your funding? (sustainable and recurring funding, grants etc.)
7. What have been your greatest challenges as a research lab? Successes?
8. Do you think an MPA Community Research Lab could be valuable? If so, how exactly?
9. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Appendix D

Interview Questions

UNC Charlotte Campus Staff B (Not affiliated with a lab)

1. What is your role at _____ and how long have you been in this position?
2. Do you or could you use research in your role? Please explain. If so, what is the end goal of your research?
3. Are you currently using a lab or another partner to conduct research?
4. Do you see a MPA Community Research Lab playing a role in the community? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
5. Would you support an MPA Community Research Lab? (funding, leadership, etc.)
6. What challenges do you anticipate for creating an MPA Community Research Lab?
7. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Nonprofit/Government

1. What is your role at _____ and how long have you been there?
2. Do you have dedicated research staff at your organization?

   If questions seem redundant or you need to dig deeper, ask:

   A. How do you acquire information when needed for a project?

   B. What are the 3 top issues that your organizations deals with (instead of what research they need or look for)
2. What types of research do you use at your organization or in your role? (formal or informal)
3. What types of research could you benefit from that you do not currently have access to?
4. Are you currently using a lab or another partner to conduct research? If so, what entity do you use and what is the cost to your organization?
5. What is an example of a project for which you've needed outside research?
6. Are there obstacles preventing you from requesting more assistance with research needs?
7. Do you see a MPA Community Research Lab playing a role in the community? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
8. Would you use an MPA Community Research Lab? Why or why not?
9. Would you need an ongoing stream of research assistance or would shorter time windows for assistance work for issues facing your organization?
10. Is there anyone else we should talk to?
11. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Appendix D

Interview Questions

MPA Faculty

1. What is your research specialty in the MPA program?
2. Who are some of your current and past research clients?
3. Are you interested in participating in an MPA Community Research Lab? If so, how would you balance your research efforts for this lab with your current projects?
4. What incentives would you require to participate in the research lab?
5. What kind of structure do you envision for a lab?
6. What possible challenges do you anticipate?
7. Do you think there is a need in the community for such a lab? Why or why not?
8. Is there anything else I should know?

Appendix E

Community Survey Questions

1. Do you have an interest in using a community research lab? (yes/no)
2. What kind of research do you think would be most beneficial for your organization? (text box)
3. Who conducts research for your organization, internally and/or externally?
4. Approximately how much is spent or budgeted for internal and/or external research?
5. What data do you currently analyze? Check all that apply.
    a. Performance measures
    b. Program evaluation
    c. Budgets and financial analysis
    d. Policy analysis
    e. Field experiments
    f. Demographics
    g. Community engagement/outreach
    h. Trends
    i. Best practices for emerging issues
    j. Other (fill in blank)
6. Which areas do you feel additional resources would be most beneficial in your work? (Check 3)
    a. Performance measures
    b. Program evaluation
    c. Budgets and financial analysis
    d. Policy analysis
    e. Field experiments
    f. Demographics
    g. Community engagement/outreach
    h. Trends
    i. Best practices for emerging issues
    j. Other (fill in blank)
7. Would you be interested in a follow-up interview? If so, please enter your name, or n/a if not interested.
8. Additional comments (Optional question, rest are required).

Appendix F

Literature Review

Research conducted at universities aims to solve real-world problems, yet there is often a barrier between communities that are studied and researchers themselves. According to Weerts & Sandmann (2016), traditional views of scholarship preserve restrictive definitions of research (p. 633). Until principle and practice are bridged, the benefits of research involving communities is limited. Through a practice dubbed "boundary-spanning," research universities can create a "bridge from a university to the community" (Weerts & Sandmann, 2016, p. 634). Connecting communities and universities becomes especially prudent in the field of public administration. Public administration comprises implementing policy based on research into communities. The greater the trust that exists between communities and public administrators, the more likely policy will be effectively implemented. One tool to improve the relationship between the community and public servants is community-based participatory research (CBPR). Through CBPR, policy can more completely reflect community needs as identified by academic researchers.

Community-Based Research

CBPR requires time and collaboration. Kapucu (2016) observes that most CBPR has been applied in the sciences and has yet to truly be integrated in policy and public administration research. The driving force behind CBPR is the merging of research, action, and education. Cornwall & Jewkes (1995) identified that the difference between participatory and conventional research lies in the power dynamics involved and takes professional, political, and personal challenges "beyond the production of information" (p. 1667). CBPR methods support a "democratic and co-learning approach to research by which members participate as equals, sharing control throughout the research process" (Higgins & Metzler, 2001, p. 490). CBPR connects communities to higher education professionals and improves the accessibility of information on a community-level. Institutions such as Maxwell X Lab at Syracuse University, cityLAB UCLA, and the John Glenn Institute of Public Affairs at Ohio State University use their labs to engage with the community and conduct research.

Appendix F

Literature Review

Participation involves a facet of activity and choice. Taking a theoretical approach to the subject of CBPR, Wallerstein & Duran (2008) considered theories of political economy to enhance the understanding of CBPR. CBPR removes technical linguistic choices and democratizes knowledge by communicating it precisely and understandably, which in Foucault's understanding of knowledge as power would lead to a sharing of such power (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Similarly, the Freirian approach to power involved greater literacy efforts arising from a belief that people could change the course of history. Putting theoretical concepts into practice stands as the final step of CBPR.

Community-Based Research Labs

The implementation of CBPR can be observed in the creation of community research labs. The community research lab proposal puts CBPR into practice and will perform interdisciplinary, democratic research. Scheifele & Burkett (2016) describe the creation and maintenance of such community labs, reviewing the successes and challenges of labs as well as the ways to overcome those challenges. In this current study regarding the need for and feasibility of a UNC Charlotte MPA Community Research Lab, these considerations are critical for whether such a lab would serve the Greater Charlotte region as the best conduit for public engagement and policy research. The following paragraphs detail the traditional structure, governance, and funding of community research labs. Additionally, subsequent recommendations are provided to UNC Charlotte MPA faculty regarding whether a community research lab would be beneficial to the program and community.

Since there are numerous activities that define the scope of a community research lab, pinpointing those activities is one of the first steps in the process of establishing a lab. Although not mutually exclusive, many labs concentrate on research projects while others support a variety of educational and artistic activities. It is important that, when determining a need for this lab, UNC Charlotte retain a level of focus to maintain a coherent identity which will delineate the MPA community research lab from other labs on campus (Scheifele & Burkette, 2016, p. 82).

Appendix F

Literature Review

Establishing regulations and governance proves a second critical element in establishing a community lab. Community labs traditionally develop a core group of people with a shared interest who organize themselves in a hierarchical fashion. A Board of Directors is established to oversee strategic and succession planning. Establishing an Executive Committee that oversees daily operations is also important. Developing organizational responsibility and governance through foundational documents and bylaws must be completed in the early stages of lab creation (Scheifele & Burkett, 2016, p. 82). Documents such as memorandums of agreement or memorandums of understanding with community stakeholders define one's rights, roles, and responsibilities. The establishment of foundational governance documents eliminates chaos and disruption when policies change, during the transition of leadership and staffing, and when resource allocation issues arise. As operational demands increase, it is important that the organizational and staffing structure are revisited to maintain performance and prevent programming delays. Establishing regulation and governance is essential when creating community research labs and implementing CBPR as a research method.

Benefits of Labs

CBPR is a type of community research that gathers information in a distinct manner. Rather than viewing the community as a physical setting, CBPR views the people themselves as community, engaging them in the research process. This approach to community research stands out in refreshing contrast to "traditional top-down research approaches" (Minkler, 2005). The reason CBPR is such an effective method for adding value to community work is because it promotes entering into a community and utilizing their resources and strengths. Collaboration with partners and creation of an environment that supports co-learning is integrated at all phases of the research, from the development of a research question, to the research instruments, to the collection and analysis of data. When done correctly, CBPR involves sharing knowledge and experience to develop measurements that allow projects to become more effective (Visanathan, Ammeran, Eng, et. al, 2004)

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Literature Review

Challenges of Labs

The nature of CBPR involves the challenges of sustaining relationships, knowledge, and funding (Israel, Krieger, Valholv, et. al, 2006). Because it is a descriptive and contextual form of research, some critics claim that CPBR is not conducive as a research method because of the time and resources it takes to perform the research. This reinforces the necessity for the UNC Charlotte MPA Program to develop a formulaic scope of activities and cultivate community partnerships that can be sustained throughout the life of the proposed community research lab.

CBPR involves a high degree of clarity and openness. Delineating when and where community members have a place and opportunity to contribute to research is one of the difficulties faced by community research labs. Wallerstein & Duran (2008) acknowledge that there is no guarantee that community members will have interest or enough energy to contribute to research. Even when participation is achieved in a community, it is often unreliable. Empowering communities with the tools to draw their own conclusions and aid researchers in reaching conclusions can shake the foundations of the existing power structures as well, which may not appeal to those existing power structures. If there are fears of losing control by using the method of CBPR, then the benefits of it will not be fully received (Macaulay & Nutting, 2006, p. 5). The altered power dynamics ultimately prove to be both an advantage and a challenge in CBPR. Communication barriers must be approached tactically in order to truly gain the multiple perspectives that CBPR can offer (Macaulay & Nutting, 2006, p. 4). There is a gap in literature regarding the long-term sustainability of CBPR.

Funding

A reliable funding model that covers start up costs and operational expenses is essential. Community labs are often organized as non-profit entities but are structured and function like businesses. Best practice in creating a community research lab involves hosting community informational meetings to assess interest in project planning efforts. The information gained from these meetings can be used to develop revenue generation strategies and a cash flow forecast, such as generating income through membership fees, donations and grants, thus determining if the funding structure/source will sustain the lab.

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