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Facilitating Co-Design through Feedback Loops

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Abstract

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) provides nuanced and skilled facilitation to support the third space of community-university partnerships to manage power dynamics and co-create collaborative spaces for productive conversation and problem-solving. CCPH positions the community as the first space, academia as the second space, and the partnership between the two as the third space to advance the partnership. Two case studies explore feedback loops as the generative, reflective, and cyclical mechanism that operates the third space. Feedback loops function differently depending on the context of the partnership dynamic, and these case studies describe feedback loops as responsiveness training to create a trustworthy webinar series, and as strategic planning to guide the development of a university-funded training series. In community-university partnerships, feedback loops can be used to disrupt dominant processes of meaning- and knowledge-making by redefining power dynamics in cross-sector partnerships, enacting diverse ways of knowing and being, modeling collaborative practice and transparent communication, and acknowledging that feedback loops function within their environments.

Keywords: co-design, feedback loops, community-university partnerships, third space, user testing, strategic planning

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Managing Community-University Partnerships

Due to the complexity of community-university partnerships, nuanced and skilled facilitation is needed to support the management of partner power dynamics, team capacity, labor expectations, content expertise, and cultural assumptions. While community partners are experts in how their communities function best, and university partners are experts in conducting research in their field, that combined expertise does not necessarily translate into competence in developing and maintaining partnerships with each other.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) positions itself as the facilitator and mobilizer of community-university partnerships, using a variety of educational and team-building tools to refine and iterate the partnership process. Inspired by community organizer and changemaker adrienne maree brown, the practice of facilitating makes "it as easy as possible for groups of people to do the hard work of dreaming, planning, visioning, and organizing together" (brown, 2021, p. 7). Designing projects that center community needs is time- and labor-intensive and requires several iterations co-designed with community partners. It is especially important to have an external partner facilitate community-university partnerships as "universities are centers of power and privilege" (Stanlick, 2024, p. 151), and negotiating power can be a complicated process.

For almost 30 years, CCPH has facilitated projects between communities and academic institutions that promote diverse representation of research recruitment materials (Finley et al., 2025); gather community perspectives on researchers and research (Skinner et al., 2018); and establish and mobilize effective community-engaged emergency preparedness programs (Cannon et al., 2025). Co-designing has become a natural function of CCPH's operations and offerings.

Co-Design as a Function of Third Spaces

Playing the role of facilitator means that CCPH inhabits and manages a separate space between and surrounding the community-university partnership. Entities like CCPH are a type of "third space" to connect with others, build community, affirm identities, and most importantly, gather community and academic expertise to achieve shared goals. The typical definition of a third space defines the first space as home, the second space as work, and the third space as "one of the physical settings that have throughout history encouraged a sense of warmth, conviviality, and that special kind of human sustenance we call community" (Oldenburg & Christensen, 2025). Among the defining characteristics of third spaces are that they are accessible to people of varying socioeconomic status (low- or no-cost places such as libraries or coffee shops), that they promote open dialogue, and that they foster a sense of belonging (Oldenburg, 1997).

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This case study defines the first space as community, the second space as university, and the third space as the physical and/or virtual convening setting where entities like CCPH operate, where community and university partners can build trust, exchange knowledge, and achieve shared goals. While third spaces play an important role in promoting cross-community dialogue and democratization, they may also risk reinforcing pre-existing social inequities depending on the relative accessibility of the space to people of different ethnicities, genders, classes, and abilities. People living in rural areas, Black and Hispanic people, and those living in high poverty generally have less access to third spaces within their communities (Fullgar et al., 2019; Rhubart et al., 2022).

Additionally, since most of our community partners are multiply marginalized and face greater barriers to accessing in-person convenings, CCPH uses the virtual space as the third space for most of our projects. Recognizing the unique needs of our partners allows us to create co-learning environments that reinforce the power of third spaces. While the initial scholarship on third spaces focused on physical, neighborhood-based locations, online and virtual spaces have become increasingly popular and relevant, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual spaces can fulfill similar social needs by fostering a sense of community and belonging without regard to physical access barriers (Markiewicz, 2019). When planned intentionally, virtual spaces can transcend geography, disability, socioeconomic status, and other traditional barriers to social and community access. In particular, virtual spaces have been leveraged by people with disabilities and chronic illness in various ways to enhance social connection and self-representation, thereby increasing their visibility and sense of belonging (Ginsburg, 2020). CCPH has utilized virtual and asynchronous third spaces to gather input on a webinar series (Case One) as well as reimagine the client-contractor partnership dynamic (Case Two). In both cases, the virtual or asynchronous environment brought together collaborators who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to interact or contribute their perspectives to the projects being developed. In this sense, the virtual space allows CCPH to engage, amplify, and center the voices of diverse as well as marginalized community members.

Third spaces promote "social connection, but to be truly effective, they require local champions and community-level investment" (Girod & Burrowes, 2024), inspiring the line of inquiry: How does a facilitator of the third space manage power dynamics and redefine the collaborative space for productive and meaningful conversation and problem-solving? Those who facilitate the third space have creative control over what the space looks like and feels like. This includes co-designing rules and expectations, an exploratory atmosphere for the partners, a flexible application of those expectations, and a structure in which the partners can dream, design, and share. The purpose of facilitating the third space for partners is to cultivate a welcoming, creative environment that they do not have the burden of creating for themselves. When this burden is removed, partners can focus on working towards their collective goals. Local champions are

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needed to fund, design, and cultivate the necessary environment for social connection, and those champions must operate within a set of guiding principles.

CCPH's Guiding Principles of Partnership (PoP) serve as the foundation for facilitating the third space through its emphasis on iterative, ongoing, reflective, and critical partnership development. The PoP is 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.

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

The 12 principles guide our engagement and partnership building approaches, from partnership development to dissemination of research. Third spaces thrive and evolve from the relationships that develop within them, which requires intentional direction toward a dynamic that satisfies the needs of each third-space member.

The next section defines feedback loops as an integral structure for third spaces to support generative knowledge-making, while utilizing the Principles of Partnership to build, maintain, and advance the relationships and partnerships within them.

Defining Feedback Loops

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Facilitating the third space to manage power dynamics and redefine the collaborative space for productive and meaningful conversation and problem-solving requires a generative, reflective, and cyclical mechanism. Feedback loops can serve as this mechanism by creating "an environment where change can occur" (Jackson et al., 2018, p. 16)—one that enables the receipt, implementation, and reporting of feedback and the creation of a generative knowledge-making system. Feedback loops enable a loop of communication and adaptability that "collects data but also interprets and utilizes it to make informed changes" (Visible Network Labs). CCPH's feedback loops would be considered a double-loop type of learning (Carless, 2018) because it addresses a specific problem, which is single-loop learning, but within the third space, it also evaluates the way the problem was addressed by challenging the power dynamics of those participating. Furthermore, the function of feedback loops must depend on the project's context, as no intervention is universal; therefore, there needs to be alignment on how and when it's implemented. Part of facilitating feedback loops is knowing when to activate them. This includes pre-implementation and ongoing conversations with the partnership to prioritize intentional design of these sorts of interventions. Feedback loops can be a powerful tool to co-design with intent, which relies on appropriate timing and meaningful contribution by members of the partnership.

Feedback loops are distinct opportunities to build trust, generate insights, and crowdsource solutions through iterative dialogue. CCPH's Principles of Partnership (PoP) reflect the necessary elements to create the structures that advance those objectives. Aside from the feedback loop examples described below, CCPH's prior efforts to facilitate feedback loops include creating educational toolkits informed by the lived experiences of patient populations and curriculum working groups to design a research leadership program for community leaders and organizations. Well-functioning feedback loops have certain characteristics that guide their creation and implementation. Below we describe how each characteristic aligns with a PoP; in practice, the characteristics can overlap with more than one PoP.

A Limited Scope

Feedback loops have an opening and closing. Depending on the context of the situation, the path of the loops may be continuous, but there is always a closing to the loop. There are defined parameters to the loop, and it eventually ends. The scope is limited due to the parameters and works to fulfill the objectives of the loop.

This characteristic aligns with the PoP: The Partnership forms to serve a specific purpose and may take on new goals over time. The feedback loop has a specific purpose—a limited scope—and that can evolve over time through explicit discussion between the partners.

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Rules and Expectations

A structure with set parameters will have rules and expectations for every role to function successfully. Expectations encourage behavior that occurs both inside and outside the space, such as how to participate with respect to confidentiality and other shared values. Additionally, all the feedback loops showcased in the case studies below occurred asynchronously and/or on Zoom, a virtual third space. Since virtual spaces have become normalized since the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been (un)spoken rules for engagement, or Zoom etiquette. Setting up the rules and expectations for the feedback loop was simply added to how we characterized Zoom etiquette for each meeting.

This characteristic aligns with the PoP: The Partnership agrees upon mission, values, goals, measurable outcomes, and processes for accountability. The rules and expectations are decided upon by collective consensus, which can inspire debate and discussion. Ultimately, the group decides how the space manifests respect, trust, and collaboration.

Flexible Application of Rules and Expectations

Depending on the context of the feedback loop, these rules can be co-designed inside or outside the space, with an open understanding of the rules and a transparent protocol for providing feedback to adjust them. Additionally, virtual third spaces allow a multitude of ways to engage and interact with others in the meeting, including using the chat, raising hands, using emoji reactions, and drawing on the whiteboard, etc. Flexibility in engagement increases the options for how someone's voice will be heard, how they make decisions, and how they influence others. Increasing the options for interaction increases the options for negotiating power.

This characteristic aligns with the PoP: Partnerships consider the nature of the environment within which they exist as a principle of their design, evaluation, and sustainability. Each member brings their own lived experience, and this manifests uniquely. Not all feedback loops look the same; however, the approach to assembling a group of individuals with a shared goal may look similar: being accepting of different perspectives and incorporating those differences into the structure of the loop.

An Exploratory, Curious Environment

The purpose of the feedback loop is to cultivate a creative environment to achieve shared goals, so the environment must be exploratory and each participant and facilitator should be encouraged to be and act curiously. This can be achieved through rules and expectations that promote experimentation, freedom to make mistakes, and questioning.

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This characteristic aligns with the PoP: There is feedback among all stakeholders in the Partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the Partnership and its outcomes. Reinforcing trust and trustworthiness throughout the process invites members to feel comfortable to explore, express, and make mistakes. Feeling confident enough to be curious often depends on the dynamics of the space and the people who cultivate it.

A Structure that Isn't Necessary Operated by Either Partner

Feedback loops set the parameters for engagement within the community-university ecosystem. The onus for facilitating the partnership is given to the third space so that community and academic partners can focus on the work, rather than the partnership dynamics. Additionally, Zoom allows the host to mute, modify share settings, and manage breakout participants. These options remind participants that CCPH holds the facilitator role in the third space, which can make interactions and dynamics easier to manage.

This characteristic aligns with the PoP: Partners share the benefits of the Partnership's accomplishments. Although community and university partners do not facilitate the conversation, they still benefit from the accomplishments made within the space. All decisions and consequences are shared by the group.

These are general guidelines for the creation of feedback loops as the essential mechanism to activate third spaces. Each situation and partnership determines how the guidelines manifest. The following section details two contexts in which to implement feedback loops that authentically meet the needs of the users, funders, and partners. These examples showcase how feedback loops can be used to mobilize community-engaged researchers to support community-centered practice.

Case Description: Feedback Loops in Unique Contexts

Case One: Feedback Loops as Responsiveness Training

To create a community-facing webinar series to support community-engaged research (CEnR) teams, a feedback loop was implemented at the beginning of a project to ensure our planning and development processes responded to authentic community needs. We built an eight-part virtual webinar series called Lunch & Learn to uplift the lived experience and expertise gained through different grant-funded CEnR projects addressing health equity. The purpose of the Lunch & Learn was to strengthen community-academic research partnerships with real-world examples and opportunities to practice.

The majority of the workshop topics derived from anecdotal conversations from community and academic partners regarding common challenges in their research and practice. Topics include:

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culturally-responsive dissemination, managing project wrap-up, participatory budgeting, community advisory boards, sustaining partnerships, community-based participatory research, managing project start-up, and qualitative research 101.

However, before launching the Lunch & Learn, our team wanted to ensure these topics responded to authentic needs. We implemented mini virtual and asynchronous feedback loops with intended audiences through surveys and meeting discussions. As a result, we created a trustworthy training model that can be adapted for multiple community-academic research sites and partnerships to promote shared learning spaces that support a diverse range of CEnR practitioners.

Below are the key components of the mini feedback loops that ultimately helped to improve how we as facilitators respond to and integrate feedback from community members:

Clearly Stated the Objective and Process

As CCPH Director of Research and Evaluation Kunga Denzongpa and co-author asks: Why don't we take it back to the community? Part of the power of third spaces is allowing uncertainty and potential discomfort to lead interactions for the purpose of learning and growing. After developing an initial proposal for the Lunch & Learn model based on collected challenges, we asked for feedback on the overall model from community stakeholders. There were concerns that the initial list of workshop topics were too academic and jargon-heavy, which could limit engagement with general audiences. In response, we created and launched a 10-question anonymous survey that was shared through various channels, including the CCPH newsletter, social media, and project network emails. To avoid making assumptions about authentic community needs to engage in the Lunch & Learn, the survey requested insights regarding the workshop titles.

Survey respondents requested subtitles in plain language to help describe workshops focused on advanced concepts such as "community-based participatory research" and "qualitative research." Therefore, plain language descriptive subtitles accompanied the workshop titles on the registration forms to allow participants to make informed decisions on choosing the appropriate workshop to attend.

Communicated Transparency

To practice our mission of promoting health equity and social justice, we had to be mindful of how our projects were being perceived as public perception can influence the willingness of people to engage with our work. Prior to launching the webinar series, we initially titled the series with another term, and used that language to promote registration and attendance a few

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weeks prior. A gracious community colleague informed us that the term has a troubling racial history and connotation in the United States (Jim Crow Museum, 2014). After thanking them for the insight, we changed the name and logo of the webinar series to Lunch & Learn. We also wrote a two paragraph note that explained why the name of the webinar series changed, including helpful links to educate others who may not be familiar with the troubling history, and we included this rationale in every Lunch & Learn promotion for the next few weeks.

The rationale for changing the name derived from our goal to support community and academic partners in conducting equitable community-engaged research and practice, and in order to do so, the shared educational spaces in which we learn from one another need to uphold principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The practice of responding to feedback in a timely manner contributes to the shared understanding of what it means to be fair in achieving health equity and social justice, and our brand continues to cultivate that ongoing conversation with the public.

Offered Learning Key Takeaways and Resources

While striving to build our training infrastructure, we developed a landing page for the Lunch & Learn webinar series that displayed each workshop's key takeaways, recording, and panelist information for attendees to use as a resource for future partnerships and research. This totaled to 41 resources created for attendees.

After each workshop, we uploaded the workshop information and broadly shared it through the newsletter and our social media channels. This served as each workshop's closure by providing recommendations and actionable goals for attendees' research and practice.

Created a Community-Facing Lunch & Learn Series Recap

In addition to supporting community-engaged research practitioners through the Lunch & Learn webinar series, the mini feedback loops we facilitated through surveys, email correspondence, and meeting discussions allowed CCPH to further build and strengthen our training infrastructure so that we can continue to build trustworthy training models.

At the end of the eight-part workshop series, we wrote and designed a series recap disseminated on the CCPH website, newsletter, social media channels, and with partners that detailed attendee highlights and evaluation highlights. From a total of 523 synchronous attendees, 283 (54%) self-identified as coming from academic institutions, 218 (42%) self-identified as coming from community-based organizations (CBOs) and businesses, and 22 (4%) self-identified as coming from government agencies. From a total of 17 panelists, 9 (53%) were from CBOs, and 8 (47%) came from academic institutions. Having a majority of academic partners learn from a majority

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of CBO panelists could inform academic partners' perceptions and understanding of the barriers that community partners face in community-engaged research and practice.

In addition, we included a section in the series recap that described process improvement outcomes from learning how to be responsive to feedback, which included: responding to community needs in terms of how we changed the name and revised the workshop titles and subtitles; investing in interpreters that came from learning that our YouTube Spanish interpretation videos had over 500 views as of January 2024; co-creating communities of practice to maintain the momentum that the Lunch & Learn cultivated; building and standardizing compensation processes for panelists; and building additional resources.

Synthesizing the Feedback Loop

For almost 30 years, we have built strong relationships with both community and academic partners, which accounts for the high quality of feedback that we received for each workshop evaluation as well as the mini feedback loops in the beginning of the project. Because we consider ourselves community-centered practitioners, we thrive on the opportunities to assess whether we are still making the appropriate decisions for promoting and facilitating community-engaged research. Changing the webinar series name to Lunch & Learn demonstrated to our audiences that we take advice and feedback seriously. As facilitators of the third space that invited that feedback, we made an active effort to align not only our products as community-centered, but also our processes.

This case study was audience-facing with two mini feedback loops to inform how the rest of the webinar series would be implemented. The following case is developer-facing with a series of check-in meetings with a university faculty member serving as feedback loops. The faculty member contracted us to deliver a community-engaged research training series for interested undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty.

Case Two: Feedback Loops as Strategic Planning

To create a community-engaged research training series for a university, CCPH implemented a string of feedback loops with the university faculty member who contracted our services. The purpose of the training series was to support students and faculty interested in and already invested in community-engaged research, specifically addressing how to navigate equity-driven practice that has and currently is being attacked by anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) sentiment (The Leadership Conference, 2025). Framed as preventive planning for future and current practitioners, the training series was meant to inspire attendees to seek creative solutions to dwindling federal funding through coalition building and partnerships.

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Below are the objectives of the feedback loop that contributed to the development of the training series:

Designed Community Agreements

As part of our funder/client protocols, we preface initial negotiations with our highly collaborative approach to avoid making assumptions about the intended audiences and to cater our approach to real-time needs. This includes receiving feedback on the design, topics, facilitation, and evaluation approaches through the lifecycle of the project, which frames the experience as a partnership instead of a traditional client-contractor dynamic. The purpose of approaching our client partnerships this way is to share decision-making as well as accountability. When we both perceive an issue to be solved, we both need to contribute the time and capacity to achieve shared goals. The third space that we cultivate through this preface supports our mission for promoting community-centered practice in both our processes as well as our products.

Gathered Feedback in a Variety of Ways

We met synchronously with the university faculty member 13 times and asynchronously through email from April 2024 through February 2025 to collaborate on the three scheduled sessions regarding registration language, evaluation metrics, session topics, panel questions, and panelist suggestions.

As a partnership, we were able to utilize each other's expertise to deliver the three training sessions. CCPH provided technical expertise in community-engaged research and partnership training whereas the university faculty member provided important context into institutional barriers that students and faculty face when it comes to securing funding for their community-engaged research. The insights shared further informed our approach to the training sessions.

Delivered Three Training Sessions

Based on the faculty member's interests as a professor, colleague, and mentor to community-engaged scholars, the three main session topics and formats were:

1. A 90-minute interactive equitable partnerships workshop focused on power and resource structures, mutually beneficial relationships, and cross-sector collaboration.
2. A one-hour panel discussion that asked for the community-engaged research perspectives from community partners, faculty members, and an undergraduate student.
3. A two-hour collaborative grant writing strategies workshop that identified types of community-engaged grants and strategies to engage community partners.

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The training sessions built off each other to create a narrative of establishing a foundation for community-engaged research, learning from practitioners in the field, and describing approaches to partner with communities on funded research projects.

Reported Evaluation Data

After each scheduled training session, we held a debrief session with the university faculty member to discuss the evaluation feedback for the purpose of informing the next training session. Our collaborative process contributed to attendees' self-reporting that the training content would be useful to their work: 82% agree for Equitable Partnerships, 100% agree for the panel, and 100% agree for Collaborative Grant Writing.

Synthesizing the Feedback Loop

The purpose of the feedback loop in this project was to make sure we were creating the appropriate environment for intended attendees to feel comfortable contributing and learning in the training series. Based on insights gathered from the feedback loop, the implemented changes to the training series included focusing on alleviating fears of budget cuts, funding cuts, and overall divestment in community-engaged initiatives focused on social justice and systemic change. The approach was to advocate for coalitional relationships and creative partnerships so that attendees can still pursue the work they want to do, but through different pathways.

The strategic planning feedback loop frames the process and environment—shifting the focus to a process-oriented approach. This feedback loop activates the benefits of the third space by facilitating an intentionality in the development of the training series that is responsive to a variety of learning approaches and lived experiences.

The main difference between the responsiveness training and strategic planning feedback loops was that the responsiveness training loop was audience-facing—focusing more on products perceived and therefore engaged with— and the strategic planning loop was developer-facing—focusing more on the process of catering learning experiences for intended audiences by reimagining the dynamics of our relationship with the university faculty member.

Additionally, the mini feedback loops for the responsiveness training were brief and relied on clear messaging that asked the public what we needed in exchange for essentially nothing. The quality feedback relied on our reputation as a community-centered organization. The feedback loop for the strategic planning case was more in depth, longstanding, and prioritized the mutual gain that came from the client-contractor partnership.

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Disrupting Dominant Processes for Meaning and Knowledge Making

Third spaces inherently function to build trust, affirm realities, and exchange knowledge. As a team that works closely with both community and academic partners, CCPH recognizes that third spaces are a productive venue for shaping partnerships through feedback loops that serve as both product and process. As a product, feedback loops cultivate credibility and relationships with intended audiences and users. As a process, feedback loops prioritize the functioning of the third spaces by reinforcing a space where trust and accountability can be built and thrive.

Aligned with CCPH's mission for community-centered, culturally responsive practice, facilitating co-design through feedback loops promotes a shared leadership model that disrupts dominant, hierarchical processes of meaning and knowledge-making. This model works by prioritizing relationships, sharing power, building capability, and using participatory means (McKercher, 2025). Well-designed feedback loops create an environment that:

Redefines the Power Dynamics for Cross-Sector Partnerships

Through adaptive facilitation and mediation, power dynamics can be managed in feedback loops to encourage shared leadership, active listening, reflective thinking, and patience. Co-constructed agreements or expectations can serve as powerful framing approaches to rework and redefine power dynamics in cross-sector partnerships. Third spaces can be powerful conduits for feedback loops because their intention is to bring in different perspectives to build familiarity and community. Through that intention, third spaces can redefine power dynamics for partnerships who may have never had the opportunity to partner with one another. It is the shared, co-learning environment of a third space that promotes the ability of cross-sector, cross-disciplinary, cross-industry partnerships to see themselves and others as they are. As already stated, the name change of the Lunch & Learn webinar series came from an unsolicited email from a community partner. Although it was unsolicited advice, it prompted a necessary change on our part. If our goal is to be community-centered and welcoming to a variety of audiences, it is important that we acknowledge the advice as integral to the co-learning environment we have been promoting.

Enacts Diverse Ways of Knowing and Being

As community-engaged facilitators, we recognize and champion expertise beyond what is gained through formal education. We prioritize knowledge from oral tradition, lived experiences, and ways of knowing that may appear alternative to the dominant culture or norm. Reimagining the client-contractor partnership disrupts traditional models of that relationship that positions the client at the top of a hierarchy to a shared space where both clients and contractors are responsible for the success of the work. This speaks to the flexible application of rules and expectations that is necessary in functioning feedback loops powered by third spaces. Although

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the traditional model may be normalized, it goes against our values and practices. Enacting diverse ways of knowing and being requires that we align our values to both our processes and products.

Models Collaborative Practice and Transparent Communication

Partnerships are shown how to model collaborative practice and transparent communication so they can practice this independently. It's often easier to write about transparency and effective communication than to practice it. These feedback loop examples were emotionally and mentally difficult to achieve, specifically in creating the collaborative client-contractor partnership we created in the strategic planning case. Regardless of the type of partnership or collaboration, collaborative practice and transparent communication require forethought, intentionality, ongoing practice, and follow-through. The act of creating the conditions for this type of collaboration made us question our own collaborative practices with future clients/funders and how deeply steeped they were in dominant modes of meaning-making that prioritized hierarchy, titles, academia, etc., in ways that could be seen as undermining our mission of creating community-centered co-learning spaces. However, meeting with a client at least 13 times to create and deliver three training sessions requires more time, labor, and capacity than we originally anticipated. This case served as a thought-provoking lesson in streamlining processes to avoid burnout before the project even begins by balancing responsive practices with capacity-informed boundaries.

Acknowledges that Feedback Loops Function in the Context of their Environments

As already stated in both case studies, the feedback loop has its own limitations and does not pretend to be able to change systems. The feedback loops activate the power of the third space to connect with others, build community, affirm identities, and most importantly, gather community and academic expertise to achieve shared goals. Within the confines of the third space, all this can happen. However, it is a microcosm of disrupting dominant processes of meaning-making and knowledge-making. In the responsiveness training case, we delivered a successful webinar series due to our amazing supporters and colleagues who pushed us to be community-centered. The quality of the relationships within the feedback loop is a direct reflection of the relationships cultivated prior to members joining, and the responsibility for expanding that power lies with members to share and implement it with and for other cross-sector partnerships.

Implications for Practice

Feedback loops have potential applications beyond the case examples presented here, with implications for community and academic partners as well as clients and facilitators. At the partnership level, feedback loops could be leveraged to support the creation of equitable, shared

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leadership models. Negotiating power in community-university partnerships is a complicated process with numerous challenges. Introducing feedback loops into partnership planning processes can support community partners in addressing power dynamics by providing a structured, intentional, and facilitated third space. In addition, feedback loops can be useful for evaluating collaborative efforts among multiple partners to ensure that the work is responsive and aligned with the project's goal and scope. At the facilitator level, these preliminary case studies can support the uptake and adoption of feedback loops that meet the needs of their partnership contexts. Facilitators can leverage the third space to ensure equitable inclusion and participation in feedback loop processes.

Virtual Third Space Limitations

While virtual spaces can play a powerful role in increasing engagement of diverse and marginalized communities in feedback loops, they are not completely accessible to all. Equipment and technology can be costly and difficult to navigate for some. Indeed, disparities in access to technology and technological skills, known as the "digital divide," have been shown to affect virtual learning and engagement outcomes, especially for those in rural areas or with low socio-economic status (Christanti et al., 2024). As a small non-profit, CCPH does not have the budget to provide resources such as computers and internet to our participants. In addition, not everyone may have the privacy or extra time in their day to participate in a virtual convening. Our virtual third space was created in response to participant and facilitator locations, capacity to travel and participate, and budgetary constraints. As previously stated, the success of feedback loops must be responsive to many different factors and must make sense to those participating.

Meeting Evolving Needs

Additionally, there may be instances in which all third space conditions for engagement are ideal for a feedback loop, but evolving external factors may jeopardize those conditions. This serves as a reminder to maintain flexibility not only in planning feedback loops but also in how facilitators respond to unsolicited advice, demanding timelines, or unexpected concerns.

Evolving the Feedback Loop

An opportunity to improve the feedback loop is to lengthen the time the feedback loop exists and makes decisions, from designing the curriculum and implementation to evaluation and follow-up a year or two later. This would, however, transform the short-term feedback loop into a long-term governance model (Ubri et al., 2025) that co-creates and directs the sustainability of the project; this is dependent on funding, capacity, and relationship-building.

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Community-academic partnerships play a pivotal role in advancing community-engaged research and interventions but often face challenges managing power dynamics. CCPH leverages the partnership as a third space where community and academic partners can participate in facilitated co-design of processes and products to accomplish shared goals. Feedback loops are iterative, bidirectional approaches that can be implemented within third spaces to advance equitable collaboration among participants. The case studies presented here provide examples of successful and thought-provoking applications of feedback loops, but much of their potential remains unexplored. Feedback loops should be further explored as a strategy to redress power imbalances and promote equitable community-academic partnerships.

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