

## 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 user testing to ensure a toolkit satisfies the needs of the end users, and as strategic planning to guide the development of a community-centered leadership course. 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

## 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 over 25 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).

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 third spaces to convene people with chronic illness and disability (Case One) as well as community health leaders from diverse sectors and geographic locales (Case Two). In both cases, the virtual environment facilitated on Zoom brought together stakeholders 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

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**

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 intake meetings that invite new clients to co-design deliverables with us, from needs assessment through marketing and evaluation. 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.

## 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 assemble 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 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.

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-university partnerships to action at different levels of the project's lifecycle.

## Case Description: Feedback Loops in Unique Contexts

### Case One: Feedback Loops as User Testing

To create a culturally responsive dissemination toolkit to support community-investigator writing teams, a feedback loop was implemented from the middle to the end of the project as user testing to identify problems, uncover opportunities, and learn about the intended user's behavior and preferences (Moran, 2019). The feedback loop was implemented in the middle of the project to ensure the toolkit content and design aligned with the needs of the priority audiences and other stakeholders: patients, caregivers, and community representatives, investigators, faculty, and government agency staff.

The purpose of the toolkit was to support improvements in the communication and collaborative design of writing teams focused on a chronic illness, and the toolkit was chosen as an open-

access resource for writing teams to reference as needed. It was important that we included these audiences, specifically patients, caregivers, and investigators, because they would be the main users of the toolkit. The intended users were aware of the testing process, ensuring transparency and encouraging authentic feedback to improve the content and format of the toolkit.

The majority of the content to create the toolkit came from a three-part virtual workshop series on dissemination strategies. Workshop conversations, chat logs, speakers, and evaluation feedback were used to inform the structure of the toolkit, and the feedback loop was implemented on drafts of the toolkit to ensure the content meaningfully reflected what was intended in the workshops and what would be useful to audiences. While there was input provided at more than one stage of the toolkit's production, the feedback loop was implemented toward the middle to end of the project to provide closure to the input collected throughout the process.

Below are the objectives of the feedback loop to improve the toolkit's readability and use:

### Created Rules and Expectations with the Feedback Loop Members

Participants of the three-part workshop series were given discussion prompts and activities to discuss their experiences working on community-investigator writing teams, which inspired candid responses on the exclusivity of academic publishing. Workshop participants were invited to join the toolkit feedback loop. As we did not want to overburden the members who already spent a considerable amount of time participating in the workshops, those who volunteered for the feedback loop were asked to respond to specific and structured prompts after reviewing the toolkit.

### Clearly Stated the Objective and Process

Members attended a virtual meeting where the expectations and process were stated in a presentation format, followed by open discussion with questions and answers. In the virtual third space, facilitators defined the limited scope of the project, which was gathering feedback to develop a toolkit for writing teams. Providing clarity on the process allowed participants to manage expectations regarding the mental and physical labor demanded from the project, which is especially important as most had to balance their ongoing work and research while managing symptoms of a chronic illness from which the toolkit was inspired.

### Communicated that All Feedback Received Won't be Implemented

In the presentation and survey to collect toolkit input, it was clearly stated that all feedback received would be reviewed and considered, but there was no guarantee that it would be

implemented (Dam & Siang, 2023). Academic dissemination processes evoked strong emotions from community partners in particular, and much of the feedback did not exactly align with the scope of the project. There was discussion about the lack of investigator presence and participation in both the workshops and feedback loop, a trend they also noted in academy-centered dissemination projects. As a result, much of the feedback received about the toolkit actually ended up being about external factors that were out of our control and, unfortunately, we were unable to address. However, due to the trust and transparency cultivated with the members, we felt comfortable to express that limitation and move forward with refining the toolkit with the knowledge and power that we currently had.

## Gathered Feedback and Insight in Multiple Ways: Chat Storms, Speaking, Document Comments, Survey Responses

The three-part workshop series served as the foundation for the framing, content, and form of the toolkit. The feedback loop was to ensure that the content reflected what was expressed in the workshop series and that the toolkit would be usable to priority audiences. Toolkit feedback was collected in a variety of ways for maximum feedback potential and to prioritize preferred communication styles. Oftentimes, the loudest person in a meeting holds the most influence; however, considering that most of the participants had a chronic illness, we needed to be mindful of how prioritizing vocal participation affected not just power relations, but also energy levels.

## Provided Updates While the Team Revises the Toolkit

Weekly email updates were provided to feedback loop members on the progress of the toolkit revision, but additional drafts were not distributed. We received feedback in waves, which complicated the revision process. However, a flexible application of rules and expectations of the feedback loop allowed us to re-center and modify how often we accepted feedback, especially from participants managing symptoms of a chronic illness. Collaborative processes are more time-consuming, but we honored each piece of feedback within the scope of our work because a toolkit that meaningfully speaks to the needs of the priority audiences will be appreciated and used.

## Reported Implemented Changes

Changes were reported to members through a brief slide presentation highlighting the suggested changes and how they were applied, which was appreciated.

## Synthesizing the Feedback Loop

Based on insights gathered from the feedback loop, the implemented changes to the toolkit included adding interactive writing spaces for the reflection questions; using plain language for accessibility; shortening sections and sentences for overall readability; and tailoring certain sections for specific audiences, such as research investigators and caregivers. The user testing feedback loop was meant to refine the ongoing process to ensure end-user satisfaction—shifting the focus to a product-oriented approach. However, the needs of the intended users, patients, specifically, shifted due to investigators’ poor attendance to attend the workshop series that informed the toolkit, and low participation in the actual feedback loop. They questioned if investigators would even read and incorporate toolkit approaches in their writing teams, but unfortunately, implementation and investigator buy-in weren’t included in our scope of work. This brings up the concern of whether the toolkit would be considered a success if it attempted to solve a problem that wasn’t even being labeled as a problem yet.

While the feedback loop our virtual third space facilitated was started and completed on time and on budget, and met all original objectives, the evolving needs of the participants and external factors limited how the feedback loop could operate, which will be discussed further in the limitations section. Despite this limitation, facilitating the feedback loop in a virtual third space that values transparency, honesty, and community enabled those involved to feel comfortable communicating their overall discontent with the writing teams—a valuable insight we might not have received in settings not designed for social connection. Although we were unable to control factors outside the feedback loop, the vulnerability cultivated within allowed us to be transparent about our own limitations as facilitators. The power of the third space depends on what’s cultivated within it and may be limited by those constraints.

The following case focuses on securing buy-in at the beginning of a project to ensure that the ongoing development process meets certain goals made by a curriculum working group for a leadership course.

## **Case Two: Feedback Loops as Strategic Planning**

To create a multi-module leadership course to support community leaders and organizations to conduct health research, a feedback loop was implemented at the beginning of the project during strategic planning to ensure the workshop series aligned with community-identified needs.

The purpose of the leadership course was to support research interventions that address local, urban, and rural health priorities, and to provide partial financing for current or new community-engaged projects that utilize the lessons of the course. Course participants were identified through a regional coalition of community leaders and organizations with whom CCPH had a prior established relationship. Due to this relational foundation, the feedback loop was implemented at the beginning of course planning as part of the ongoing partnership. Members of

the coalition are invited and encouraged to participate in various coalition-related activities, and the leadership course was another effort to continue cultivating a generative relationship.

Below are the objectives of the feedback loop to frame the leadership course:

### Convened Three Virtual Meetings

To accommodate different schedules and locations, the feedback loop met virtually via Zoom for three 90-minute sessions. Each session built on an iterative feedback process (Contreras-Pérez et al., 2025) by recapping discussions, defining terms, answering questions, and reporting on what would be implemented in the final course. Most of the participants lived and worked in rural areas, and there was not an equitable way to choose an in-person location, so convening in a virtual third space was the most accessible to promote active participation in an exploratory, curious environment where participants wouldn't have to worry about traffic, travel costs, babysitting, etc.

### Diversified the Feedback Loop to Include Coalition Members, Faculty, Leadership, and Educational Consultants

Inspiring discussion and debate were critical to the development of the leadership course, so faculty members from the local university and educational consultants were invited to serve as feedback loop members. Both parties have longstanding relationships with the coalition, which greatly supported the group's welcoming dynamics. Diversifying the feedback loop demonstrated that our curriculum decision-making process did not prioritize only academic-based curriculum development. Since the intended learner populations consisted of rural community leaders and organizations, that population should also be reflected in the feedback loop.

### Designed Community Agreements

CCPH often begins longer interventions, such as a workshop series, with a brief activity to create community agreements at the start of the first session. Community agreements are flexible expectations that each member intends to fulfill for the other members throughout the intervention, and they are read aloud at the beginning of each session, with an invitation to revise them when necessary. The purpose of designing community agreements is to ensure that we, as facilitators, do not assume everyone has the same definition of 'research' or 'rigor.' When different populations partner with each other, it's important to invest time learning how common terms manifest differently in our lives so that we can move forward in the project with transparency and understanding.

## Gathered Feedback in a Variety of Ways

Each feedback loop member was encouraged to raise questions and concerns at any point during the presentation. CCPH rarely lectures; rather, we encourage discussion through questions, pauses, and polls. Similar to the user testing feedback loop, being flexible in how participants participate increases opportunities for authentic feedback because the third space does not prioritize only dominant forms of communication styles.

## Reported the Implemented Changes

At the beginning of each session, CCPH described implemented changes to the leadership course as a result of the previous session. The purpose was to make sure each member is aware of how CCPH interprets discussion topics and how that manifests pedagogically.

## Synthesizing the Feedback Loop

The purpose of the feedback loop in this project was to make sure we were creating the appropriate environment for coalition members to feel comfortable contributing and learning in the course. Based on insights gathered from the feedback loop, the implemented changes to the course included community partners having the institutional knowledge and vocabulary to advocate for decision-making roles in their research partnerships, and learners explaining and applying topics in a peer learning setting. 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 intentionally diverse working group that is responsive to a variety of adult learning approaches and lived experiences.

The main difference between the user testing and strategic planning feedback loops was that the latter was developed from an already strong relationship between the facilitators and members, as most of the feedback loop members belonged to a coalition that CCPH managed for a few years. This longstanding relationship ensured a deeper understanding of the group's needs.

## 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 process and product. As a process, feedback loops support the functioning of third spaces by cultivating and reinforcing a space where trust can be built and thrive. As a product, third spaces train community-university partnerships to engage and eventually conduct their own feedback loops to continue shared leadership practices.

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. Community-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. However, navigating power dynamics only works with participants within the feedback loop. As already stated in the user test case study, certain external factors negatively affected the group's dynamics. Due to our limited scope, we were not able to address those external factors with the members, which affected how we could facilitate the feedback loop and gain the insight we needed to deliver a toolkit that spoke to the evolving needs of the members.

## 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. Diversifying the curriculum working group to include a variety of changemakers was hoped to address the misperception that academic knowledge is the most rigorous. There are many ways to define the world, express ourselves, and describe how our lives manifest to each other, and incorporating as many perspectives as possible demonstrates how community-centered our curriculum development processes are, specifically when the intended learners are rural community leaders and organizations. Aligning our practices with what we hope to produce is an important aspect of the Principles of Partnership that inform our projects.

## 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 co-learning virtual third space in which the feedback loop could be conducted. 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 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. By attempting to model collaborative practice and transparent communication, we found that our own practices were less collaborative than we expected. The user test feedback loop served as a thought-provoking exercise in pivoting by understanding our own limitations as facilitators and expressing them in a project beyond our scope of work.

## **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. 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 facilitators and educators. At the partnership level, feedback loops could be leveraged to support the creation of equitable, shared 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 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 participants respond to the conditions you have customized for them. For example, while the toolkit was created on budget, on time, and met all stated objectives, evolving needs of the patient audiences encouraged us to look beyond the confines of the virtual third space for answers and potential partnerships to ensure that answering their evolving needs could fall within the scope of the project.

## 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 dissemination. This would, however, transform the short-term feedback loop into a long-term governance model (Ubri et al., 2025) that co-creates the curriculum and directs the sustainability of the leadership course; this is dependent on funding, capacity, and relationship-building.

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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