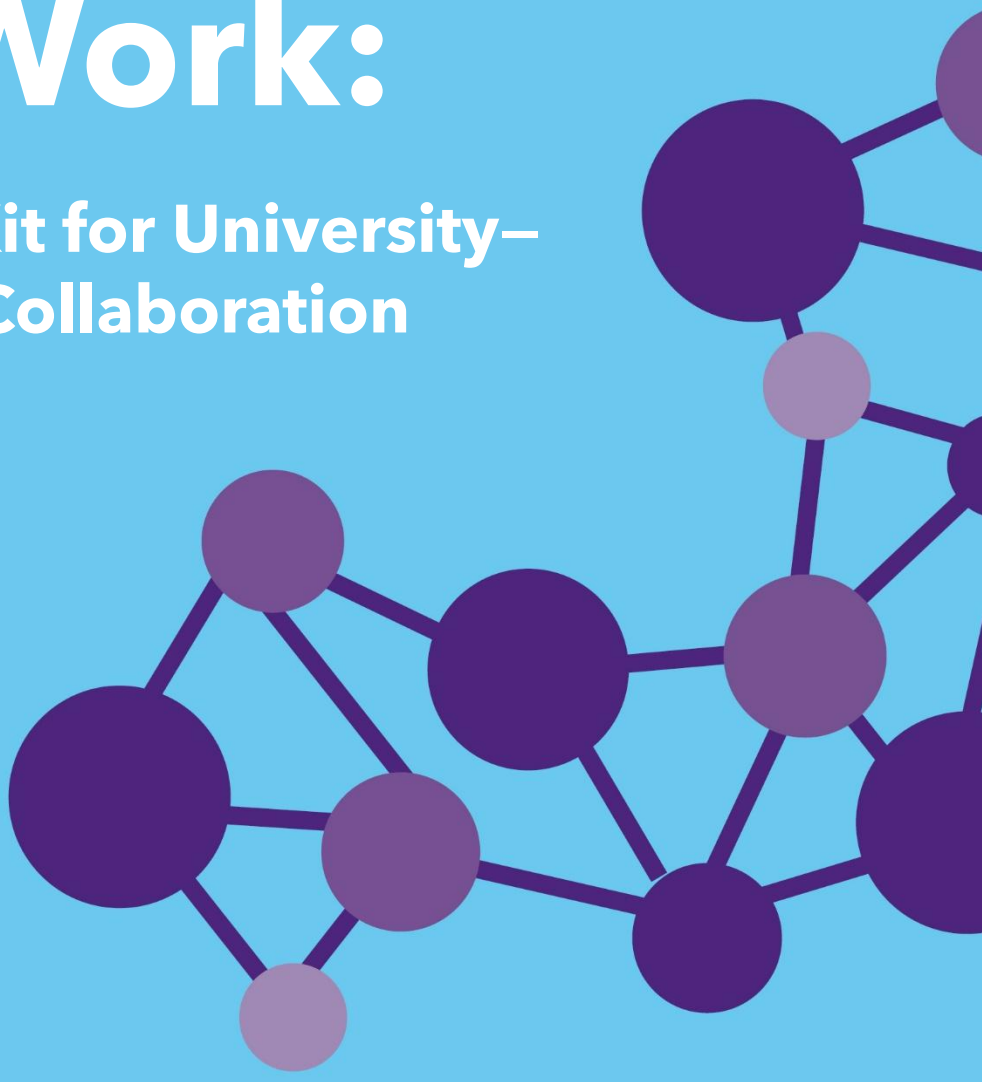
SPACE
Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement

Partnerships that Work:

A Resource Kit for University–Community Collaboration



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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **4**

INTRODUCTION **5**

Community engagement in higher education 5

Why a resource kit for university—community partnerships? 5

Development of the resource kit 6

RESOURCE KIT FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT **7**

Literature review on partnerships 7

Conceptual framework 9

Developing the resource kit: moving from assessment to reflection 10

Resource kit overview 12

RESOURCE 1: PARTNERSHIP PLANNING GRID ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Purpose of the resource 13

How can the resource be used 13

Partnerships planning grid 15

RESOURCE 2: PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT SURVEY ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Purpose of the resource 16

When and how can this resource be used? 16

Structure of the survey 17

Section A: Partnership description template 18

Section B: Partnerships survey template 19

RESOURCE 3: PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE FRAMEWORK ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Purpose of the resource 22

When and how can this resource be used? 23

Partnership dialogue framework 24

RESOURCE 4: SURVEY/DIALOGUE REPORT TEMPLATE ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Purpose of the resource 25

When and how can this resource be used? 25

Report template 26

GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING RESOURCE KIT **28**

Who leads the resource kit process? 28

How to implement the resource kit? 29

Final guidance for getting the best out of the process 30

ANNEXES: TEMPLATES **31**

REFERENCES **32**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the resource kit *Partnerships that Work* is to help universities and communities:

- **Build mutually beneficial partnerships**
- **Reflect on what works and what can be improved**
- **Move from assessment to self-reflection and learning**

Developed and piloted by a consortium of universities and community partners from Belgium, Croatia, Ireland and Spain, the resource kit was created through the Erasmus+ project *SPACE: Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement in Higher Education* (www.community-engagement.eu/space).

The framework was developed through a literature review and identifies **three core dimensions** of successful university–community partnerships:

- **Process:** How the partnership is planned and implemented
- **Ethos:** The values and attitudes that shape collaboration
- **Outcomes:** The benefits for partners and society

The resource kit contains four key tools that can be used separately or as a sequence, and applied at the **individual, partnership or institutional** level:



1. Partnership Planning Grid:

Planning elements to include while planning new partnerships.



2. Partnership Assessment Survey:

Reflecting on existing partnerships using a 1–5 scale under 3 dimensions



3. Partnership Dialogue Framework

Deep dives into community perspectives through focus groups or interviews.



4. Survey / Dialogue Report Template

Summarising results and committing to improve partnerships.

Together, these tools support equitable and sustainable university–community partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement in higher education

Community engagement in higher education can be defined as 'how universities address societal needs in partnership with their external communities' (Farnell et al, 2020, p. 5). Across Europe and internationally, there is growing recognition of the importance of community engagement as a core mission of higher education. Universities are increasingly expected not only to deliver teaching and research, but also to actively contribute to addressing societal challenges in partnership with their communities. In recent years, the policy discourse at the European level — including the European Education Area and the European Commission's evolving priorities — has placed strong emphasis on universities' "service to society" and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Farnell, 2020), and the new European University Initiative has seen a growing number of alliances explicitly committed to community engagement and/or to increasing social impact.

Since 2018, a team of European universities, experts and community partners from 15 countries have responded to this emerging priority through a series of Erasmus+ projects developing tools to support both universities and policymakers to support community engagement. This has resulted in an institutional self-reflection framework supporting universities to identify and assess their level of community engagement (Benneworth et al, 2018; Farnell et al, 2020) and a methodology for action planning for community engagement (Farnell, Cooney Brophy, 2023; Cooney et al, 2024).

A gap that remains, in the European context at least, is a practical tool that can support universities and their community partners in the process of building community-engaged partnerships, ensuring they are effective, sustainable and mutually beneficial. The SPACE project (Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement in Higher Education), funded through the Erasmus+ programme, set out to address this gap. One of its objectives is to support all actors involved in university-community collaborations by developing a resource kit that supports the process of setting up effective partnerships.

Why a resource kit for university–community partnerships?

The purpose of this resource kit is to provide universities and community partners with simple, adaptable and non-prescriptive tools that can be used to:

- **Plan new partnerships:** encourage early dialogue on the expectations, roles, and shared objectives of the partnership.
- **Reflect on ongoing partnerships:** help partners jointly review the functioning of their collaboration, identify strengths and challenges, and agree on improvements.

- **Support institutional learning:** enable higher education institutions, or departments within institutions, to take stock of patterns and needs across multiple partnerships and adapt institutional practices and strategies accordingly.

The resource kit is not intended as a formal assessment tool, nor as a ranking or benchmarking instrument. In line with the ethos of the previous tools for institutional self-reflection and action planning, its focus is on **reflection, dialogue and continuous improvement**. The intention is to support a culture in which partnerships are built on mutual understanding, reciprocal benefits and sustained institutional support — while recognising that community engagement is always context-specific, shaped by diverse institutional missions, partner profiles and societal needs.

The resource kit is designed to be adaptable to different contexts and users. The resource kit users can be:

- **Individuals:** academics and community partners can use the tools to plan and reflect on their specific collaborations.
- **Partnerships and networks:** existing partnerships or even networks of partnerships can use the tools for collective reflection and peer learning.
- **Institutions:** university leadership, community engagement offices or departments can apply the resources to map and analyse patterns across multiple partnerships, informing institutional policies and support structures.

Development of the resource kit

The tools presented in this handbook have been developed, tested and refined through a co-creative process within the SPACE project. Four participating universities — University College Cork (Ireland), University of Girona (Spain), University of Rijeka (Croatia) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) — identified a community-based organisation (and/or a dedicated office within their university with close links to the community) to join the consortium team and to lead a process of developing and piloting the resource kit in their local communities. The team involved in developing the resource kit came from the following institutions: the Institute for the Development of Education (Croatia), The Wheel (Ireland), SOS Rijeka - Centre for nonviolence and human rights (Croatia), Girona, Region of Knowledge Foundation (Spain), the University of Rijeka (Croatia) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium).

After developing the resource kit's framework, each local coordinator mapped community partners, implemented a survey, organised focus groups/interviews and drafted a report on community perspectives on university—community partnerships. This process not only generated rich insights on local good practices and challenges but was also instrumental in 'piloting' the developed resources, demonstrating both their validity and value, and in making final improvements to the resource kit presented in this publication.

The publication is organised as a practical handbook introducing the SPACE resource kit, beginning with the conceptual foundations of university-community partnerships, followed by detailed chapters on each of the four resources, and concluding with guidelines for their application in different institutional contexts.

RESOURCE KIT FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

Literature review on partnerships

The development of this resource kit is grounded in literature on interinstitutional partnerships generally and on university-community partnerships in particular. A desk research review was conducted (Farnell, 2025), aiming to lay the conceptual foundation for developing new resources to strengthen university-community partnerships in Europe. We reviewed 25 publications, including both academic and grey literature, focusing on success factors in both general interinstitutional collaboration and more specifically in community engagement contexts. Our review synthesised three main focus areas:

- General frameworks of interinstitutional collaboration
- Community-based participatory research partnerships
- Service-learning partnerships

This targeted summary presents the key findings from these strands and explains how they inform the design of a SPACE-specific framework.

At the level of interinstitutional collaboration, the widely cited framework by Mattessich et al. (1992, 2001, 2016) synthesises 20 success factors for interorganisational collaboration, structured into six domains. It remains one of the most comprehensive and validated frameworks for understanding collaboration success factors and forms the foundation for many partnership assessment tools used internationally. The following table summarises these domains:

Table 1: Summary overview of Mattesich and colleagues success factors for collaboration

CATEGORY	OVERVIEW OF KEY SUCCESS FACTORS
Environment	History of collaboration, legitimacy in community, favourable political and social climate
Membership characteristics	Mutual respect, cross-section of members, interest alignment, compromise, shared stake
Process and structure	Multiple layers of participation, flexibility, clear roles and guidelines, adaptability, open communication

CATEGORY	OVERVIEW OF KEY SUCCESS FACTORS
Communication	Frequent, open communication; established informal relationships
Purpose	Concrete goals, shared vision, unique purpose
Resources	Sufficient funding, staffing, and leadership

Source: Authors, based on Mattessich et al. (2001)

At the level of specific partnerships in the field of community-based participatory research (CBPR), Brush et al. (2020) identified success factors that overlap significantly with Mattessich et al., but also introduced complementary elements particularly relevant to university-community partnerships, such as:

- Recognition and management of **power imbalances**
- Embracing **cultural differences** and worldviews
- Awareness of partners' **institutional pressures** and constraints
- Inclusion of **partnership outcomes** as a success factor

These elements reflect the particular dynamics of university-community contexts, where disparities in institutional size, resources and knowledge production traditions are often present.

At the level of service-learning, the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) developed by Clayton et al. (2010) and further developed by Kniffin et al. (2020) defines the success factors of service-learning partnerships between universities and community partners. The framework leans on previous literature on the attributes of transactional and transformational relationships (Enos & Morton, 2003) and the relationships literature applied to civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Overall, there is a close correspondence between the factors identified in the TRES framework and both the CBPR partnerships and general collaboration factors of Mattesich et al. Two domains, however, are new: how the partnerships impacts **'sense of self'** of partners and assessing the level of overall **partner satisfaction** with the partnership.

The existing literature provides a rich and validated knowledge base for understanding both the general and specific factors influencing university-community partnerships. However, our review also identified gaps that justify **developing a new framework** within the SPACE project:

- **European higher education context**: In many countries, community engagement remains an emerging or peripheral institutional priority, requiring tools that can support partnerships still in early stages.
- **User-friendliness and accessibility**: Existing tools like MAPS or TRES II can be complex, lengthy or research oriented. There is a need for a practical, participatory tool that can be applied easily by practitioners and community partners.
- **Collective insight from diverse contexts**: The SPACE project brings together universities and partners from Belgium, Croatia, Ireland and Spain. The development of the framework draws on this collective

experience and local dialogue with communities, ensuring its relevance and usability across geographical contexts.

The resulting SPACE framework aims to balance **rigour** and **simplicity** — rooted in the findings of available literature, and inspired by previous tools, but fully adapted to the realities of practitioners working to build university—community partnerships in European higher education.

Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, the SPACE project team developed its own conceptual framework of success factors for university—community partnerships. The core structure was inspired by Gray's (1989) influential work on collaboration in which three stages of collaboration were defined: Preconditions, Process and Outcomes. The SPACE framework, however, slightly adapted these into the following three core dimensions:

Table 2: Summary overview of SPACE conceptual framework for university—community partnerships

DIMENSIONS	SHORT DESCRIPTION	OVERVIEW OF SUB-DIMENSIONS
Process	The way the partnership is planned and implemented.	Goal setting, decision-making, communication and interaction, resource allocation, managing disagreements, defining partner responsibilities.
Ethos	The attitudes and values that characterise the partnership	Mutual trust and openness, acknowledgement of differences, recognition, tolerance for uncertainty, commitment and responsibility.
Outcomes	The results of the partnership.	Mutual benefits for all partners, societal value, institutional sustainability, overall satisfaction of partners.

Source: Authors

In comparison to Gray's model of collaboration, the SPACE framework thus retains the core dimensions of Process and Outcomes, but introduces an additional dimension of **Ethos**. This addition reflects the specific characteristics of university-community partnerships, where differences in resources, organisational cultures, power dynamics and motivations between universities and community partners play a critical role in shaping the partnership's quality and development.

On the other hand, while **Preconditions** are recognised as important contextual factors that influence partnerships, the SPACE framework does not include them within the core analytical model, since they often lie outside the partners' immediate sphere of influence. Nevertheless, Preconditions are still included as an integral part of the resource kit as part of the **reflective dialogue process**, allowing participants to consider these external factors when discussing partnership strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Developing the resource kit: moving from assessment to reflection

The resource kit presented in this handbook is the result of a year-long co-creative development and piloting process undertaken within the SPACE project. Led by the Institute for the Development of Education (Croatia), the process involved discussion with representatives of four universities — University College Cork (Ireland), University of Girona (Spain), University of Rijeka (Croatia) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) — who then engaged directly with over 50 community partners to apply, test and refine the resources developed.

A defining feature of the SPACE resource kit is its orientation towards reflection and learning rather than evaluation and judgement. This approach is grounded in the experience of the previous work of the project team (through Erasmus+ projects such as TEFCE and SHEFCE), which recognised the following key principles of any tool to support universities and/or policymakers in the area of community engagement in higher education:

- **Context-specific application:** Partnerships operate within different institutional, national, and sectoral contexts. The resource kit does not promote a single model or benchmark, but instead offers structured questions that can be adapted to local realities.
- **Indicators as dialogue starters, not scores:** While the survey, which is a central to the resource kit, uses a 1–5 scale for each sub-dimension, these are not designed to produce rigid scores or rankings. Instead, they serve as prompts to guide meaningful conversations within partnerships.
- **Multiple entry points:** The tools can be used at different stages — during partnership planning, mid-course reflection, or retrospective review — and at different levels: individual partnerships, faculty or department-wide reviews, or institutional mapping exercises.
- **Joint ownership and co-reflection:** The most valuable use of the resource kit is when university and community partners reflect together. The emphasis is on shared learning, not top-down evaluation.
- **Supporting institutional learning:** Insights gathered through the process can also help inform institutional leaders about systemic patterns, capacity-building needs or areas for improvement in university policies and practices.

The value of placing dialogue, partnership and flexibility at the centre of the SPACE resource kit was confirmed both by participating universities and by the community partners involved, as illustrated by the testimonial below (while remaining mindful of how the application resources can still be further improved).

Testimonial of community partner from Cork, Ireland

'Participating in the university-community partnership survey and dialogues was an invaluable opportunity to reflect on the depth and quality of our collaboration. It reinforced the idea that every voice in the partnership holds equal importance—each perspective contributes to shaping a more inclusive and effective initiative. The "nothing about us without us" principle was a fundamental guide throughout our discussions. By engaging in open dialogue, we could highlight the real needs, challenges, and aspirations of the communities involved. This experience reaffirmed that true partnerships require equity, accountability, and a commitment to listening, learning, and working together to achieve lasting impact.'

'No changes are needed in the way the surveys or dialogues were conducted, as the process was well-structured and effective in encouraging meaningful discussions. However, one area for improvement would be to increase representation from more diverse groups. Expanding participation to include a wider range of voices, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalised communities, would ensure that the insights gathered reflect the varied experiences and perspectives within the partnerships.'

For a more detailed insight into how the resource kit can result in valuable insights on good practices and challenges, along with proposals on how to further improve university—community partnerships, reports on the surveys and dialogues held with communities in Brussels, Cork, Girona and Rijeka are publicly accessible on the web platform www.community-engagement.eu.[1] Readers are encouraged to explore these reports to see how the process unfolds in practice and to gain concrete examples of how the resource kit supports reflection and improvement.

[1] Direct link to reports: www.community-engagement.eu/space

Resource kit overview

The following sections of the handbook will introduce the specific tools included in the resource kit, along with practical guidance for their use.

- **Resource 1: Partnership Planning Grid** – A reflection tool to help partners design new collaborations by jointly addressing key elements of partnership structure, values, and expectations.
- **Resource 2: Partnership Assessment Survey** – A structured self-assessment instrument allowing partners to evaluate the quality and functioning of an existing partnership.
- **Resource 3: Partnership Dialogue Framework** – A set of guiding questions to facilitate in-depth discussions among partners, exploring strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement.
- **Resource 4: Survey/Dialogue Report Template** – A reporting format to summarise survey findings and dialogue conclusions in a structured way, supporting institutional reflection and follow-up action.
- **Guidelines for applying resource kit** – Practical instructions on how to organise, adapt, and apply the full resource kit in different institutional and partnership contexts.



RESOURCE 1: PARTNERSHIP PLANNING GRID

Purpose of the resource

Establishing a successful university–community partnership requires early reflection on how the partnership will be designed, implemented and sustained. Often, many challenges in partnerships emerge unintentionally, often because of lack of initial clarity or unspoken assumptions between partners.

The Partnership Planning Grid is designed to support university staff and community partners in reflecting on the structure, expectations and values of their proposed collaboration before **the partnership is launched**. It provides a structured conversation starter that allows both sides to discuss potential areas of misunderstanding or imbalance and to define shared priorities and approaches.

The grid draws directly on the three core dimensions identified through the SPACE project fieldwork and literature review:

- **Process**: how the partnership is planned and implemented;
- **Ethos**: the values and attitudes that characterise the partnership;
- **Outcomes**: the intended benefits and sustainability of the collaboration.

By exploring guiding questions in each area, partners can address potential risks, enhance transparency, and build the foundations for mutually beneficial collaboration.

How can the resource be used

The Partnership Planning Grid is most effective when applied **early in the partnership development phase** — whether during initial communication, meetings co-design workshops, or negotiations around a funding application or institutional agreement.

It can also be used as a **mid-course review tool** for existing partnerships that wish to pause and jointly reflect on whether their partnership model still aligns with evolving needs.

The grid can be applied in various formats by various users:

- **Individual level:** As a simple checklist for internal preparation.

- **Partnership level:** As a joint agenda for structured dialogue between partners; as a facilitation tool for partnership-building workshops or co-creation meetings.
- **Institutional level:** As a planning template for designing partnership agreements and memoranda of understanding.

Importantly, the grid is intended to **prompt reflection and dialogue** rather than produce definitive answers. Each partnership will find different areas more or less relevant, depending on context, type of collaboration, and prior experience of the partners involved.

Partnerships planning grid

DIMENSION / SUB-DIMENSION	GUIDING QUESTIONS
1. PROCESS	**Does the partnership provide space for all partners to meaningfully influence the planning and implementation of activities?**
1.1. Strategy/goal-setting	How can you ensure that the partnership goals are co-created by both the university and community partners?
1.2. Decision-making	How can you ensure that community partners have meaningful influence over decisions and role definitions?
1.3. Communication and interaction	How will you establish regular, structured, and meaningful communication between all partners?
1.4. Resources (time, expertise, funds)	Can you balance resource contributions to ensure they are proportionate to the benefits received?
1.5. Disagreements in the partnership	What mechanisms will you use to acknowledge and constructively address disagreements?
1.6. Partner responsibilities	How will responsibilities be clearly defined and agreed upon by all partners?
2. ETHOS	**Is the partnership underpinned by attitudes and values that encourage all partners to feel heard, included and recognised?**
2.1. Mutual trust	How will you build and maintain trust between all partners?
2.2. Openness and participation	How can you actively involve community partners in decision-making to ensure equal participation?
2.3. Acknowledgement of difference	What mechanisms will you use to recognise and address differences in resources, needs, and motivations among partners?
2.4. Recognition	How will you ensure that community partners receive appropriate recognition and visibility for their contributions?
2.5. Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty	How will the partnership remain flexible and open to adapting in uncertain situations?
2.6. Commitment and responsibility	How will you foster joint commitment and responsibility among all partners for the success of the partnership?
3. OUTCOMES	**Will the partnership result in positive and sustainable benefits to all involved?**
3.1. Mutual benefits for partners	What kind of benefits will the partnership deliver for both the university and the community partners?
3.2. Value for beneficia-ries and/or society	What kind of value will the partnership deliver for beneficiaries and broader society?
3.3. Institutional sustainability	Can you ensure institutional support to sustain the partnership over time?
3.4. Overall satisfaction	How will you assess whether all partners feel satisfied with the outcomes of the partnership?



RESOURCE 2: PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Purpose of the resource

While the Partnership Planning Grid is primarily forward-looking, the Partnership Assessment Survey allows existing partnerships to **critically reflect on how the collaboration is functioning in practice**. It provides a tool to assess both strengths and challenges, based on the experiences of those directly involved.

The survey instrument enables universities and community partners to jointly explore how the partnership is performing across the key dimensions of **process, ethos, and outcomes**, using a simple scoring system combined with qualitative reflection. By using this survey:

- Partnerships can identify areas that may require adjustment or improvement.
- Community partners have a voice in shaping the evaluation of the collaboration.
- Universities leaders can gain insights across multiple partnerships and use data to inform policies, resource allocation or capacity building.

The survey is **not designed as a ranking or benchmarking tool**: users are not encouraged calculate aggregate scores and compare these with other institutions, but rather to use the collected data to identify areas of good practices and/or of potential concern, and as a basis for further dialogue with community partners.

When and how can this resource be used?

The Partnership Assessment Survey can have several uses:

- **Individual level:** The survey is primarily intended for use by partners, rather than individual use. Nevertheless, if a partnership does not have the time or capacity to apply the survey, its use at the individual level could provide a useful critical reflection to advocate improvements in the partnership.
- **Partnerships/networks:**
    - Mid-way through ongoing partnerships as a reflective “health check”.
    - At key milestones, such as end-of-project evaluations or renewal of partnership agreements.
    - In preparation for structured dialogue sessions (focus groups or interviews) to deepen the reflection.

- **University:** Across multiple partnerships, to gather an institution-wide overview of strengths and recurring challenges.

The survey itself can be completed individually (by one or more representatives from each partner organisation), or collaboratively (through joint discussion and consensus scoring).

The ideal application involves both: the completion of a survey (a rubric encouraging respondents to reflect on different aspects of their partnerships); follow-up structured dialogue sessions to interpret results and discuss concrete actions.

Structure of the survey

Section A: Partnership Description

Before completing the assessment, respondents are asked to briefly describe one partnership in which they are involved, the community organisation involved, the objectives and key activities conducted (research, teaching, service-learning, knowledge exchange, etc.) and the roles of different partners. This contextual information helps situate the assessment and allows partners to reflect on a concrete collaboration rather than engagement in general.

Section B: Partnership Survey

Respondents are then asked to reflect on their experiences in that specific partnership by completing a rubric organised according to the three core dimensions of Process, Ethos and Outcomes, each with several sub-dimensions.

Respondents are invited to reflect on each sub-dimension by reading descriptors of different 'maturity levels' of partnerships and selecting the one that best reflects their own experience (e.g. the extent to which partner roles are clearly defined). The proposed levels range from Level 1, as a low/limited level, to Level 5, as a high/exemplary level.

It should be noted that the suggested levels are intended to support reflection rather than measurement. The highest level (5) may not always be realistic or necessary, depending on the nature of the partnership.

Section A: Partnership description template

1. KEY DATA ON COMMUNITY PARTNER ORGANISATION		
Name of your organisation:		
Briefly describe your organisation (goals, main activities and size of organisation) – 150 words		
How does your organisation collaborate with the university? (Mark all fields that apply with an "X")	*We are a partner on one initiative/joint project with the university*	
	We are a partner in more than one initiative/joint project with the university	
	We are involved in working groups and advisory bodies of the university	
	Other – please specify_____	
2. DESCRIPTION OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP		
Title of partnership		
Objective of partnership (1-2 sentences)		
Main activities of partnership – 200-400 words		
In what year was the partnership launched?		
Web link about partnership (if applicable)		
3. ROLES OF UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY PARTNER IN THE PARTNERSHIP		
Describe the main role of community partner (your organisation) – 100-200 words		
How does your organisation contribute to the partnership? (Mark all fields that apply with an "X")	*Knowledge and expertise*	
	Organisational support (staff time and office resources)	

Section B: Partnerships survey template

DIMENSION 1: PROCESS (The way the partnership is planned and implemented)					
Sub-dimensions	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**	**Level 5**	**Achieved level (1-5)**
1.1. Strategy/goal-setting	Partnership goals are defined by the university, and do not consider community partner goals.		Partnership goals are defined by the university, but include inputs from community partners.		Partnership goals are jointly defined by both university and community partners	
1.2. Decision-making	The partnership is led in a top-down manner by the university, with little space for community partners to take part in decision-making.		The partnership is led by the university, but community partners are regularly consulted to influence its development.		The partnership works on a participatory basis, with community partners playing in equal role in decision-making.	
1.3. Communication and interaction	Partners do not meet and communicate enough, resulting in disengagement from the partnership.		Partners meet and communicate regularly, resulting in satisfactory cooperation.		Partners meet and communicate regularly and frequently, resulting in a high level of engagement in the partnership.	
1.4. Resources (e.g. time, expertise, funds)	Community partners invest more time and resources than is appropriate considering the benefits of the partnership.		Community partners invest significant time and resources in the partnership, but with a satisfactory level of mutual benefit.		The benefits of the partnership outweigh the resources invested by community partners.	
1.5. Disagreements in the partnership	Disagreements between partners remain unnoticed and/or unacknowledged.		Disagreements between partners are acknowledged and partly managed, but underlying issues remain unresolved.		Disagreements are openly discussed and become a catalyst to generate new possibilities for the partnership.	
1.6. Partner responsibilities	The division of responsibilities between the university and community partners is not defined clearly enough.		The division of responsibilities of between the university and community partners is satisfactorily defined.		The division of responsibilities between the university and community partners is clearly defined, including responsibilities for each task.	

2. ETHOS (The attitudes and values that characterise the partnership)					
Sub-dimensions	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**	**Level 5**	**Achieved level (1-5)**
2.1. Mutual trust	There is insufficient trust between the university and community partners.		There is sufficient trust between the university and community partners.		There is full trust between the university and community partners.	
2.2. Acknowledgement of difference	There is no specific acknowledgement in the partnership that community partners have different resources, needs and motivations compared to the university.		Differences in community partner resources, needs and motivations are acknowledged, but not enough is done to address identified challenges.		The partnership critically discusses differences in partner resources, needs and motivations, and takes steps to mitigate those differences.	
2.3. Recognition	Community partners are not provided with adequate recognition (formally or informally) for their role in the partnership		Community partners are provided with informal recognition for their role in the partnership, and with some degree of formal recognition.		The partnership is provided with high-level, formal recognition for its achievements, and community partners are highlighted in this recognition.	
2.4. Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty	Uncertain situations and ambiguous processes are the source of dissatisfaction and disagreement among partners.		The partnership shows some flexibility and adaptability in handling uncertainty, but there is preference for predictable and well-defined processes.		The partnership works intentionally in a flexible and exploratory way, embracing ambiguity and uncertainty as a basis for defining new solutions.	
2.5. Commitment and responsibility	Most partners do not demonstrate sufficient commitment and responsibility, which damages the partnership.		Some partners do not demonstrate sufficient commitment and responsibility, but the partnership remains stable.		All partners demonstrate clear commitment and responsibility, making the partnership highly cohesive.	

3. OUTCOMES (The results of the partnership)					
Sub-dimensions	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**	**Level 5**	**Achieved level (1-5)**
3.1. Mutual benefits for partners	The partnership prioritises benefits for students and the university, and not for the community partners.		The partnership prioritises benefits for students and the university, but community partners also benefit.		The partnership prioritises equal benefits to all involved partners.	
3.2. Wider societal value beyond partnership	The results of the partnership have limited or no benefit beyond the involved partners.		The results of the partnership provide some value to external stakeholders or communities.		The results of the partnership generate significant and meaningful benefits for wider society.	
3.3.Institutional sustainability	The partnership is a one-off initiative and there is no indication of its continuation and sustainability.		The partnership is sustaining its activities, but primarily due to individual drive rather than institutional support.		The partnership is long-standing and there is institutional commitment by all partners to ensure resources to sustain it for the foreseeable future.	
3.4. Overall satisfaction	Community partners are dissatisfied with this partnership.		Community partners are satisfied with this partnership, but improvements could be made.		Community partners are completely satisfied with the partnership.	

Are there any other challenges or strengths of the partnership that have not been covered in the topics above? ***Please describe these below.***



RESOURCE 3: PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE FRAMEWORK

Purpose of the resource

While the Partnership Assessment Survey provides a valuable snapshot of how partnerships are functioning, its true value lies not in producing scores or averages, but in **stimulating critical reflection and structured dialogue**. The survey serves as an initial indicator of where partners perceive strengths and challenges; the Dialogue Framework builds on this by creating space for deeper conversations about *why* certain challenges arise, *what* drives successes and *how* partnerships can be improved.

The Dialogue Framework encourages partners — particularly community partners — to go beyond scoring and to reflect on the underlying factors that shape the partnership experience. It draws directly on established literature in community engagement, which highlights that both drivers and obstacles to partnership quality emerge at different levels:

- **Individual level:** Personal commitment, enthusiasm, trust, and relationship-building often form the foundation for effective collaboration. However, misunderstandings, miscommunications, and interpersonal challenges may also emerge as barriers.
- **Organisational (institutional) level:** University and community organisations' internal policies, procedures, leadership support, and resource availability significantly influence the success or failure of partnerships. Community partners themselves also face resource limitations, organisational constraints, and internal priorities that can affect partnership dynamics.
- **Broader societal level:** External conditions such as national policies, higher education funding models, political climate, economic trends, or local governance structures create enabling or constraining environments for community engagement. These factors often fall outside the direct control of partnership actors but nonetheless shape the partnership context.

The Dialogue Framework helps bring these different levels into the conversation, allowing partners to clarify which challenges are within their control, which require institutional change and which may reflect broader systemic issues.

When and how can this resource be used?

The Dialogue Framework is most logically applied **after completion of the Partnership Assessment Survey (Resource 2)**, as a follow-up reflective process. Having said that, if time and resources are limited for applying the survey and analysing results, this resource can provide a good discussion framework within a meeting or workshop.

The Dialogue Framework can be applied in the following ways:

- **Individual reflection**: Any person involved in a partnership may use the dialogue questions to reflect critically on factors influencing the partnership in their specific context. This can generate insights even when formal group dialogue is not possible.
- **Partnership-level dialogue:** Partners involved in a specific collaboration can jointly reflect on strengths and areas for improvement. The added value of the framework is that it allows partners to distinguish:
  - What *we* as partners can change;
  - What requires *institutional* action;
  - What reflects *external constraints* beyond our immediate influence.

  This distinction often helps reduce blame, defuse disagreements, and focus on actionable areas.
- **Institutional or network-level dialogue:** Discussions with a group of multiple community partners can provide a broader assessment of institutional challenges and help universities better understand systemic barriers that may affect many partnerships. This can feed into institutional strategy development or capacity building efforts.

Partnership dialogue framework

FOCUS AREA OF DIALOGUE	DIALOGUE QUESTIONS
Individual level	• How would you assess the quality of individual interactions with your contacts at the university? (E.g. to what extent is the communication and cooperation with your university partner contact constructive and fulfilling for all involved)? • If your interactions are not always positive, what aspects are problematic? • To what extent would you say personal interactions influence the quality of the partnership between your organisation and the university?
Organisational level	• Clearly, personal interactions play a key role in shaping the dynamics of partnerships. Based on your experience, however, could you describe how the organisational characteristics of the university influenced the quality of the partnership, either in a positive or a negative way? • And how did the characteristics of your own organisation influence the quality of the partnership?
Social level	• Apart from individual and organisational efforts, how have broader influences — such as social or political climate, economic situation or cultural context — influenced your university-community partnership? • Feel free to focus on positive or negative influences in this context.
Final reflection / recommendations	• If you could suggest the top three actions that the university could take to improve university-community partnerships, what would they be? (They do not necessarily need to be realistic!)



RESOURCE 4: SURVEY/DIALOGUE REPORT TEMPLATE

Purpose of the resource

This resource serves as a structured reporting template for documenting the results of the university-community partnership self-assessment process. It synthesises both quantitative findings from a survey and qualitative insights from a structured dialogue (focus group or interviews) with community partners. The purpose of the resource is twofold:

1. To streamline results of surveys and dialogues, providing institutions with concise critical reflections on their partnerships with communities.
2. To identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement in order to improve their engagement practices and policies.

As emphasised earlier, the results of the report are not for the purposes of benchmarking university performance. Rather, the emphasis is on self-reflection, shared learning and fostering mutual understanding between universities and their community partners.

When and how can this resource be used?

The report template can be applied in the same diverse way as the previous resources:

- **Institutional or network level (macro)**: to evaluate the overall landscape of community partnerships across a university, identify systemic strengths and weaknesses, and inform strategic planning.
- **Faculty or department level (meso)**: to support units that work with external stakeholders in better understanding and improving their collaborations.
- **Individual project/partnership level (micro)**: to enable specific partnerships to reflect on their performance, promote dialogue among partners, and develop shared recommendations.

The report template itself can be used after a partnerships survey and/or dialogue takes place, whether at the start, mid-term or post-project phase.

This report is ideally completed by a trusted, neutral figure (e.g. a community liaison officer or external facilitator), though other university staff can also effectively lead the process if trust is established.

Report template

Each report produced using the template follows the structure below:

REPORT SECTION	GUIDELINES FOR REPORT DRAFTING
Title	Proposed report title: *Community Perspectives on Partnerships with Universities: Survey and Dialogue Report – [Institution/City]*
Introduction	Briefly covers: the context of the partnership assessment and the rationale for the survey and dialogue; overview of local implementation (e.g. number of organisations contacted, number participating).
University–Community Partnerships Survey	**a. Survey Overview** • Description of the survey structure (two sections: case study and assessment rubric) • Number and type of respondents • Explanation of sampling and outreach process • Breakdown of organisational types and types of collaboration
	b. Survey Results Summary Narrative analysis of each of the three dimensions: • *Process* • *Ethos* • *Outcomes* Key highlights from each sub-dimension, supported by: • A **bar or stacked column chart** (e.g. showing % of respondents scoring 1–2, 3, 4–5 per sub-dimension) • (Optional) Detailed average scores in an annex
Community Dialogues: Mapping Factors that Shape Partnerships	Presents qualitative insights structured into four thematic areas. Each area should include: • **Good practices**: representative quotes or generalised findings • **Challenges**: critical feedback and structural obstacles Thematic areas: • **Factor 1: Individual factors** (e.g. interpersonal trust, continuity, communication styles) • **Factor 2: Institutional factors – university** (e.g. procedures, structures, values, responsiveness) • **Factor 3: Institutional factors – community partners** (e.g. capacity, agency, alignment) • **Factor 4: Broader societal factors** (e.g. funding systems, political climate, cultural distance) **Optional:** Include a section for *Other findings* if relevant themes emerge (e.g. student involvement, curriculum integration)
Lessons Learnt and Ways Forward	This section synthesises the key insights from both the survey and the dialogue. It should include: **a. Lessons Learnt** • Summarise enabling factors and areas of progress

	• Highlight elements of trust, co-creation, student engagement, or inclusive research methods **b. Ways Forward** • Identify areas requiring improvement • Reflect on issues like visibility of structures, transparency, or mainstreaming engagement **c. Considerations for different stakeholders** • University management • Academic staff • Community partners Each sub-section can offer practical recommendations tailored to the roles and responsibilities of these groups.
Annexes	Includes: • The full rubric with level descriptors for each sub-dimension • A table of average scores per sub-dimension • (Optional) Detailed data tables or methodological notes

GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING RESOURCE KIT

This chapter provides final guidance for institutions or networks wishing to apply the resource kit. It is not a blueprint but a set of practical reflections to help implement the process successfully and meaningfully.

Who leads the resource kit process?

While the framework is designed to be flexible and adaptable, certain roles are key to its success. The leadership structure can vary depending on the level of implementation:

Institutional level (Macro)

- **Led by:** Rector's office, engagement unit or civic engagement officer. The process must be university led, since it is focused on making improvements.
- **Recommended team:** A core facilitator from the university, supported by a community liaison or experienced external facilitator for neutrality.

Department/faculty level (Meso)

- **Led by:** Head of department or faculty engagement lead.
- **Recommended team:** Academic or professional staff member, with the support of a student or community partner as co-facilitator.

Partnership Level (Micro)

- **Led by:** Partnership/project coordinator, engaged academic or staff member.
- **Recommended team:** A small coordination team from both university and community sides.

Tip 1: The process works best when participants see it as a **developmental tool**, not an evaluation. This must be reflected in how it is introduced and led.

Tip 2: Data collection and dialogues should be led by a neutral, trusted individual – which could be an engagement officer, a student, or a community partner, depending on the context.

How to implement the resource kit?

A. Preparing the ground

- Use trusted contacts for outreach. Avoid centralised mass emails.
- Aim for a diverse sample of community partners (NGOs, public bodies, long-term and newer partners).
- Translate materials where needed into local languages (even with AI tools and proofreading).
- Plan the timeline early. Structured dialogues require scheduling well in advance.

B. Administering the survey

- Use a Word format (or editable PDF) rather than online tools for qualitative depth.
- Ensure anonymity and clarify that the data will be pseudonymised.
- Consider following up with calls to encourage completion.

Trick: Treat the survey as a self-reflection tool, not a measurement tool. Avoid the "assessment" mindset by focusing on qualitative feedback and dialogue.

C. Organising the dialogue sessions

- Format: Focus group of 6–7 people (more than one group if needed). Alternatively individual interviews can also be used.
- Duration: 90–150 minutes, including intro and wrap-up.
- Use guiding questions from Resource 3, separating questions into individual, institutional (university and community), societal dimensions.
- Record the session with prior consent; transcribe with AI tools if budget is limited.
- Take great care to ensure anonymity and clarify that the data will be pseudonymised, since live discussions may touch upon sensitive subjects.

Tip: Let participants react to the survey results as an entry point. Present average scores visually (e.g. % in levels 1–2, 3, 4–5).

Final guidance for getting the best out of the process

- **Emphasise shared learning, not performance.** Frame the entire process as mutual exploration to strengthen collaboration.
- **Use neutral facilitators where trust is a concern.** A student, engagement officer, or respected community partner can play this role.
- **Make space for disagreement.** Don't shy away from complexity - divergent views can lead to new insights on how to address certain challenges.
- **Acknowledge informal partnerships.** Not all strong partnerships are highly structured - flexibility matters.
- **Build follow-up into the process.** Invite participants to review the final report. Offer to keep them informed or engaged in future reforms.

Final insight: The goal is not to score partnerships, but to uncover the conditions that enable or constrain their quality—and to act on them together.

This concludes the SPACE resource kit handbook for university-community partnerships. The proposed survey and dialogue process is not a fixed procedure but a reflective exercise that can be tailored to institutional contexts and embedded within broader strategies for community engagement. Its success depends not on perfection, but on **openness, humility and commitment to learning together**.

ANNEXES: TEMPLATES

This resource kit is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 International License and its annexes will be freely available via www.community-engagement.eu for all individuals, partnerships and institutions eager to improve their partnerships.

Templates for the following resources presented are available:

Resource 1: Partnership planning grid

- Grid in Word format

Resource 2: Partnership assessment survey

- Survey and case study template (Word format)
- Analytical template for survey results (Excel format)

Resource 3: Partnership dialogue framework

- (Not applicable - no templates necessary)

Resource 4: Survey/dialogue report template

- Report template (Word)

The templates above are available in the online folder at the following direct link:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1w05Rbb2zXPbV2w5zwQ9ER4E_uqvAHCrG?usp=sharing

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Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement

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