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Using Social Network Analysis to Study Participation in the Community-University Partnership Megaprojects for Communities

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Abstract

This research studies the participation of community organisations, university faculty, and researchers in a community-university partnership. The goal of this research is to examine the relationship between the participants involved in the Megaprojects for Communities partnership. The focus is on particular themes in participation including group membership and leadership, community representation, relationships of trust, and expectations and interests of members. Data is generated using literature and document reviews as well as interviews and questionnaires. A social network analysis is applied to the data to visual communication and the flow of resources throughout the partnership. Results of the research assist the self-evaluation and reflection for participants of Megaprojects for Communities. They also add to academic literature on participation in community-university partnerships and the aptness of social network analysis to study a distinct form of community collaboration.

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CURA } Community-University Research Alliance
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Executive Summary

How best to analyze and understand the participation of community organisations, university faculty, and researchers in a community-university partnership? This paper proposes a method for examining the relationships between partners in the CURA: Making MegaProjects Work for Communities. Themes explored include group membership and leadership, community representation, relationships of trust, and expectations and interests of members. Drawing from literature and document reviews as well as interviews and questionnaires, a social network analysis is applied to visualize communication and the flow of resources throughout the partnership. Results of the research can help CURA participants to evaluate themselves and reflect on their collective work. This approach can also add to academic literature on participation in community-university partnerships and the aptness of social network analysis to study a distinct form of community collaboration.

Key questions for this social network analysis can include:

1. Which members are most central in the network? Are they instrumental in all activities of the group?
2. Which core network members have links to important resources through their involvement with organizations outside the network?
3. Are critical network ties based solely on this formal relationships, or are there other formal or personal relationships that existed before the CURA and will continue afterwards?
4. Are some network relationships strong while other are weak? Should those relationships that are weak be maintained as is, or should they be strengthened?
5. Which subgroups of network organizations have strong working relationships? How can these groups be mobilized to meet the broader objectives of the network?
6. What is the level of trust among the organisations working together?
7. What have been and what is expected to be the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration? How can benefits be enhanced and drawbacks minimized?
8. Is the network helping to build community capacity?

The combination of quantitative and qualitative social network analysis should lead to interesting conclusions for both the current and future participants of CURA: Making Megaprojects Work for Communities and further reflections on the applicability of this type of analysis to study community participation in planning.

Synthèse

Quelle est la meilleure façon d'analyser et de comprendre la participation des organisations communautaires, des universités et des chercheurs au sein d'un partenariat université-communauté? Cette recherche suggère une méthode pour évaluer l'interaction des partenaires de l'ARUC : Méga-projets au service des communautés. Les thèmes explorés incluent l'adhésion et le leadership des groupes, la représentation des communautés, les relations de confiance et les attentes et intérêts des membres. À partir de la littérature, d'entrevues et de questionnaires, une analyse des réseaux sociaux est réalisée afin d'évaluer la communication et l'échange de ressources au sein du partenariat. Les résultats de cette recherche aideront les participants de l'ARUC à s'auto-évaluer ainsi qu'à réfléchir à leur travail collectif. Cette approche peut également s'ajouter à la littérature académique sur la participation dans les partenariats université-communauté et sur la pertinence d'une analyse des réseaux sociaux pour l'étude d'une forme spécifique de collaboration avec la communauté.

Des questions clé pour cette analyse des réseaux sociaux peuvent inclure :

1. Lesquels des membres jouent un rôle central dans le réseau? Apportent-ils une contribution significative à l'ensemble des activités du groupe?
2. Quels sont les membres du réseau ayant accès à des ressources importantes grâce à leur engagement auprès d'organisations à l'extérieur du réseau?
3. Les liens critiques du réseau sont-ils basés uniquement sur ces relations formelles ou existait-il d'autres relations formelles et personnelles avant l'ARUC qui seront maintenues par la suite?
4. Y a-t-il des différences quant à la force des relations au sein du réseau? Les relations identifiées comme plus faibles devraient-elles être maintenues comme telle ou être renforcées?
5. Quels sous-groupes des organisations du réseau ont des relations de travail solides? De quelle façon ces groupes peuvent-ils être mobilisés afin de satisfaire les objectifs généraux de l'ensemble du réseau?
6. Quel est le niveau de confiance au sein de ces organisations travaillant ensemble dans le réseau?
7. Quelles étaient et quelles sont les prévisions quant aux avantages et désavantages de cette collaboration? De quelle façon les avantages peuvent-ils être accentués et les désavantages minimisés?
8. Le réseau contribue-t-il à bâtir la capacité de la communauté à intervenir sur son environnement?

Cette combinaison d'analyses qualitative et quantitative des réseaux sociaux devrait mener à des conclusions intéressantes pour les participants présents et futurs de l'ARUC : Méga-projets au service des communautés, et approfondir les réflexions sur l'application de ce type d'analyse pour l'étude de la participation des communautés dans les projets d'urbanisme.

Research Problem and Background

There are many advantages to collaboration for community groups and university departments. Partnerships between organisations form because there is a shared interest or overlapping interests that are rooted in the aspiration of community improvement (Baum, 2000). Universities offer resources, skills etc that community groups often do not have. Community groups have direct access and knowledge of local processes that can inform research of university members. The distinct resources and expertise of each group can be shared through a network of collaboration in order to better improve the well-being community members in the end (Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005).

There are two potential fields of learning when examining university-community partnerships (Rubin, 1998). The first looks at the results and asks how university resources were used to meet goals of the community. The second studies the relationship between the partners throughout the collaboration and asks how was practice effective at overcoming challenges that arise when diverse and multiple groups work together? This research focuses on the second type of learning.

Often collaborations are seen as a solution to urban problems without understanding how the partnerships between groups function. People imagine that complex problems can be solved by simply bringing the key players together (Baum, 2000). This assumption overlooks the obvious clashes that occur between groups coming together from diverse working environments. There are fundamental differences between the operations of university academic departments and community organizations. Universities and communities work differently with dissimilar schedules, deadlines and end goals (Dewar & Isaac, 1998). For example, university faculty have obligations to their disciplinary guild and their emphasis is on publications in academic journals (Wiewel & Lieber, 1998). And each community group has their own mandate to operate under. Issues may arise when the two come to operate jointly surrounding divergent interests, practices, confused roles, decision-making, authority, grant management, etc. (Prins 2005). It is important to consider the tensions that can rise between universities and community organizations to improve the relationship and thus be more effective in producing results of the collaboration.

By studying participation of university and community members in a Community University Research Alliance (CURA) project, we can learn how to make university-community partnerships

work more effectively. After each phase of the research project, the partnership can be evaluated to provide reflection and awareness for members throughout the process. This research will focus on the partnership, Megaprojects for Communities, which includes explicit goals for examining the partnership itself. As stated in the final CURA application:

[An objective of the research is] to assess, and identify measures to increase, the capacity of community organizations and other stakeholders to work together toward mutually-beneficial outcomes [including the] analysis of collaborative and participatory interactions within public deliberations, formal partnerships and informal alliances (Bornstein, 2007).

This research provides the foundation for monitoring and evaluating the partnership throughout its duration.

Now, in the first year of the partnership, is an opportune time to assess the community-university partnership, Megaprojects for Communities. The partnership formed around the proposal for a mega-hospital in Montreal. A new campus of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), the Glen Campus Superhospital, is planned to open in 2011. The development will most likely impact the surrounding neighbourhoods in the Montréal boroughs of Notre-Dame-de-Grace, Saint-Henri, and the City of Westmount. In the wake of the proposal for the new hospital campus, a number of neighbourhood organizations joined together in 2001 as an Inter-neighbourhood Coalition to discuss issues surrounding the new development.

In 2004, a partnership agreement was made between nine community groups and the MUHC. A joint housing committee was then formed to collaborate with students at the McGill School of Urban Planning for a Studio 3 project in the fall semester of 2005. The goals outlined in the final studio project became the basis for the CURA application. The goal of the CURA, Megaprojects for Communities, is “to understand how new, large-scale public facilities, or “megaprojects”, can impact communities and the city at large” (McGill University School of Urban Planning, 2008). Together, the neighbourhood groups and the university applied for and received a CURA grant (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), 2008). The application was for a five-year collaborative research program. The final application was submitted in January 2006.

The CURA is has a simple organization structure. The steering committee is made up of twelve people, half from community groups and the other half from universities. There are also five working groups. A coordinator leads the project. It was decided that the coordinator must come from

the community side. To balance this, there is also a lead academic from the McGill School of Urban Planning. The key participants for the sake of this research are formal members of the CURA, including the leadership and the steering committee. The research also includes less formal relationships with members of working groups and other organisations involved in the project.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the participation in a community-university partnership in a mega-project. It will focus on the processes of participation in the Megaproject for Communities CURA. A number of research questions are designed to meet this objective:

1. Who are participants and how can and how do they participate in the project (through decision-making or resource sharing)? How is participation shared between different types of members (ie. university faculty or community leader)?
2. How can a community-university partnership be evaluated? What elements of partnerships are studied?
3. Who are members or participants in the partnership and why are they involved? How did they come together?
4. What is the relationship (formal, informal, trusting, accountable) between participants?
5. How are decisions made in the collaboration? For example, what is the procedure for allocating funding?
6. What are the goals or expectations of the partnership? Do the explicit goals stated in the CURA differ from the implicit goals of the members? Do expectations differ between members?
7. How do the guidelines of the CURA grant facilitate or constrain opportunities for participation of members?

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this proposal and are worth defining now:

COLLABORATION: people coming together to work. Collaboration is used here, as in the CURA, “in the widest sense, from informal alliances among community groups to structured processes of consultation, input and joint decision-making” (Bornstein, 2007).

COMMUNITY: a group of people living in a particular area or sharing a common characteristic.

COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP: an alliance formed between at least one community organisation and one or more university departments to collaborate on a project.

MEGA-PROJECT: are projects that “respond to global competition among cities for investments, knowledge workers, tourists and prestige. They are high-profile and strategic, linked to infrastructure upgrading, tax base enhancement, or ‘imagineering’. Mega-projects can vary in scope and scale, from a major library or hospital to multi-faceted interventions aimed at transforming a district” (Bornstein, 2007).

NETWORK: set of relationships either personal or professional, official or not between people or organisations.

PARTICIPATION: the act of sharing in activities of the group. For example, sharing of resources, expertise, or decision-making.

PARTNERSHIP: a cooperative relationship between individuals or groups who agree to share responsibility in working towards the same goal. For example, a university and community form a partnership to solve an urban problem.

Approach

This proposal is part of the action-based research of Megaprojects for Communities. This approach seeks action or change at the same time as understanding or research. It involves the participants who are impacted by the research, namely the members of Megaprojects for Communities. It also follows an experiential learning approach because it allows partners to examine issues and work through them to ultimately function together more effectively (Reardon, 2000). The influence of this approach is reflected in the results of the research as proposed under Types of Conclusions below.

Comparable Studies

This research draws methodology and themes from the following particular studies:

Baum, H. S. (2000). *Fantasies and Realities in University-Community Partnerships*. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 20, 234-246.

Provan, K. G., Veazie, M. A., Staten, L. K., & Teufel-Shone, N. I. (2005). *The Use of Network Analysis to Strengthen Community Partnerships*. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5), 603-613.

- Reardon, K. M. (2000). An Experiential Approach to Creating an Effective Community-University Partnership: The East St. Louis Action Research Project. *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 5(1), 59-74.
- Throgmorton, J. A. (2003). Planning as Persuasive Storytelling in a Global-Scale Web of Relationships. *Planning Theory*, 2(2), 125-151.
- Wiewel, W., & Lieber, M. (1998). Goal achievement, relationship building, and incrementalism: the challenges of university-community partnership. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 17(4), 291-301.

Literature

The literature surrounding community-university partnerships lends ideas for studying relationships and participation. Valuable research has examined different elements of community partnerships. For the sake of simplicity in this proposal, the different themes are listed in Table 1. Next to each theme are a number of questions that are asked by researchers to examine the topic.

The literature also presents a number of obstacles or “pitfalls” to be wary of when working together. Thank fully, it also provides a number of general recommendations for successful and effective partnerships. Recommendations from past research can guide the evaluation of current and future partnerships. A few prominent recommendations are discussed here.

1. The first recommendation is to balance individual and group concerns (Prins 2005). It is important to recognize and try to balance priorities and goals of individual participants with the greater goals of the partnership to have effective outcomes and to keep members involved. The partnership is formed to advance a communal purpose, but if individuals are not benefiting from the collaboration they may decide that it is not worth the extra time to work collectively. Partners need be aware of what matters to others as well as advocate their own purposes to maintain a productive partnership (Prins, 2005).

2. Second, make known the particulars of the partnership. This recommendation is one of the simplest for further partnerships to follow. Prins (2005), Baum (2000), and Wiewel and Lieber (1998) make the following recommendations regarding transparency for starting successful partnerships:

- Clearly state the purpose of the partnership as well as goals and targets for meeting them
- Match resources such as time, knowledge, expertise, and money to the purposes

	QUESTIONS
GROUP MEMBERSHIP	Who is at the table? Who isn't? How does membership change?
REPRESENTATION	Who or what does an individual formally and informally represent? Who is not being represented and thus left out of the process?
NETWORKS OR RELATIONSHIPS	What is the relationship between partner organizations? What formal or informal links do groups have to others? How does the group function?
DECISION-MAKING	What is the process to make decisions?
POWER	Who has access to power or influence? How is authority dealt with? How is authority of students perceived by community participants?
LEADERSHIP	How is leadership perceived? What is the role of the leader(s)?
EMPOWERMENT	How are members of the community empowered through the process?
EXPECTATIONS	What are expectations of participants, how do they differ, and how can they be met?
RESOURCES	What resources do each representative bring to the group? How are resources shared?
TRUST	Is there trust between the participants and in the partnership? Is trust necessary between members? Are actions based on good faith?
BEHAVIOUR	How does behaviour (listening, inclusion, socialization, learning from others) of members in the partnership change over time?
DIFFERENCES	How are differences such as language, race, socio-economic class, geography, etc. dealt with?
INTERESTS	What or who's interests do individual or groups represent?
PERSPECTIVES	How do members perceive other members, the relationship with them, or the partnership?

TABLE 1: GENERAL THEMES IN LITERATURE ON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

- Decide on membership
- Discover each other's needs and expectations, especially pertaining to their institutional or organizational context
- Settle on how decisions will be made and how authority is assigned
- Identify members' responsibilities
- Make partners accountable to each other

When the particulars are not said flat out at the beginning, confusion or disputes can arise later on over authority, communication and decision-making (Prins, 2005). Often disputes are not about the subject at hand, but about larger issues of balance of power, etc (Prins 2005). Confusion can erode trust between partners and impede the project (Prins, 2005).

3. Allow the partnership to adapt and evolve. The second group of recommendations is meant to resolve ambiguities in understanding, but it is important to still allow for flexibility and change within the partnership (Baum, 2000; Rubin, 1998; Wiewel & Lieber, 1998). During the course of a partnership, members may change and purposes may evolve. New or different implementation strategies or procedures may be discovered and incorporated into the project. It may be difficult to allow for flexibility when there is a separate large funding organisation as is the case with Megaprojects for Communities. Funding partners require partners to be accountable to produce strict results (Baum, 2000). This does not leave room for targets or goals to be adjusted as the project proceeds. Flexibility should be written into a project from the beginning if possible.

4. Finally, Prins (2005) recommends seizing the opportunity to learn more about the dynamic of the partnership if conflict does arise. "Deliberation and a willingness to learn from blunders can help partnership members gain understanding and create procedures that aid communication, inclusive decision making, and informed consent" (Prins, 2005). It can also "grant legitimacy" to the concerns of members and allow them the chance to articulate their point of view (Prins 2005). This is exactly what this research intends to promote without requiring a conflict as instigator. All these recommendations highlight the issues that arise when diverse groups come together. They can be used as a foundation to evaluate a current partnership in order to produce results that help improve the relationships and effectiveness of the group.

Data Collection and Methodology

This research is envisioned as the first phase of a longitudinal study that will evaluate participation in Megaprojects for Communities throughout its duration. Each phase may cover a different combination of elements of participation in partnerships as listed in Table 1 above. This initial phase uses a cross-sectional methodology to examine the position of the partnership and the relationships within it.

This research requires a number of different techniques and data sources as listed in Table 2. An initial review of academic literature and documents will inform the foundation of the research and the questionnaires and interviews. Observation of meetings, questionnaires and interviews will provide data on the existing relationships, processes, and expectations of the participants. Interviews will be done with key informants, namely the project coordinator and lead academic, before distributing the questionnaire to the general participants to identify who should be involved and what the major concerns are for participation in the project at the moment. Sample interview questions are listed in Appendix A. The questionnaire is adapted from one presented by Provan et al. (2005) in order to provide quantitative data for the social network analysis. Ideally, all formal and informal members of Megaprojects for Communities will fill out a questionnaire to create a complete vision of the network. A draft of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix B at the end of this document.

RESEARCH TECHNIQUE	OBJECTIVES	DATA SOURCES
LITERATURE REVIEW	To find methods to evaluate partnerships To find pitfalls of community-university partnerships and recommendations to overcome them	Academic literature
DOCUMENT REVIEW	To find explicit goals to study the participation in the partnership	Final CURA application Minutes of past CURA steering committee meetings Participants' resumes
OBSERVATION	To observe decision making processes and behaviour	Future steering committee meetings
QUESTIONNAIRES	To find information about networks, expectations, resources	All members and participants of the CURA
SEMI-STRUCTURED OPEN ENDED INTERVIEWS	To find information about leadership, history, networks, expectations, resources	Key CURA members such as Lisa Bornstein, Lead academic, CURA and Jason Prince, Project Coordinator, CURA Working group on the theme of citizen participation & partnerships

TABLE 2: RESEARCH TECHNIQUES AND DATA SOURCES

Analysis

Social network analysis will be used to examine the data produced through the interviews and questionnaires. The elements of the relationship between the participants that will be analyzed include group membership, representation, leadership, trust, expectations and interests. Results will be both qualitative and quantitative. This type of analysis is selected based on research by Holman (2007) and Provan (2005) who applied social network analysis to the collaboration of community groups.

Social networks center on the relationships between individuals or groups to perceive channels of communication and information sharing. This type of analysis is appropriate for looking at

community-university partnerships because it provides an overall vision of the network and how it functions (Holman, 2007). It is then easy to identify areas of weakness in the network that prevent effective communication and a flow of resources (Holman, 2007; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). An objective vision of the network allows each participant to see and understand the network as a whole instead of simply from his or her own view (Provan et al., 2005). Groups that are not well connected can see how and where to improve connections to take advantage of the network (Holman, 2007). The vision of the network can also be encouraging by showing participants how their participatory efforts are being rewarded (Holman, 2007). The traditional quantitative social network analysis used here will follow the principle text, *Social Network Analysis - Methods and Applications*, by Wasserman and Faust (1994).

Open-ended questions and notes from observed meetings will be analyzed qualitatively, looking for key words and issues that arise. Provan et al. (2005) list eight questions that are pertinent to this research and will help guide the qualitative analysis. The questions listed here are modified to suit this specific project:

1. Which members are most central in the network? Are they instrumental in all activities of the group?
2. Which core network members have links to important resources through their involvement with organizations outside the network?
3. Are critical network ties based solely on these formal relationships, or are there other formal or personal relationships that existed before the CURA and will continue afterwards?
4. Are some network relationships strong while others are weak? Should those relationships that are weak be maintained as is, or should they be strengthened?
5. Which subgroups of network organizations have strong working relationships? How can these groups be mobilized to meet the broader objectives of the network?
6. What is the level of trust among the organizations working together?
7. What have been and what is expected to be the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration? How can benefits be enhanced and drawbacks minimized?
8. Is the network helping to build community capacity?

The combination of quantitative and qualitative social network analysis should lead to interesting conclusions for both the current and future participants of Megaprojects for Communities and further reflections on the applicability of this type of analysis to study community participation in planning.

Types of Conclusions

The final written report will include three types of conclusions. First, recommendations will be made for CURA to improve the existing relationships in the partnership based on the results of the research. Of course, detailed results of the network will be made available for members for their own reflection and conclusions as well. Hopefully the results can be incorporated into discussions of progress and of the partnership in an annual workshop of Megaprojects for Communities. Second, general conclusions or lessons learned for future use of network analysis of community-university partnerships will be presented based on this research and the results of the literature review. Finally, suggestions for subsequent phases of research to examine further aspects of the partnership will be made.

Research Contribution

The results of this research will add to literature on best practices for successful community-university partnerships. It will build on the small amount of existing literature that applies social network analysis to community collaboration. It differs from existing literature because it involves a partnership surrounding the development of mega-project instead of focusing on low-income housing, as does most research on community-university partnerships. This research also fills some of the objectives laid out in the CURA application surrounding the evaluation of participation in the partnership.

Timetable

Ideally, the examination of the partnership between the community and university groups should have begun at the start of the partnership and should follow through in a longitudinal study until after the completion of the CURA project. Unfortunately, this type of study involves large commitment from a researcher. In order to make the study feasible, the research can be split into phases of cross-sections that examine the relationship at points in time. Together, results of subsequent phases can be reviewed to understand more of how the relationship and the partnership are evolving over time.

This research proposal specifically deals with the first phase, which is meant to establish the roots of the partnership through network analysis. The first phase of research should be conducted

over the summer (May to August) of 2008, including data collection, analysis, and a final report.

Key dates and tasks for the proposed research are outlined in Table 3 below.

PHASE	DATE	TASK
	July 2007	Year one of the CURA starts
I	April 2008	Develop the research proposal
I	May to June 2008	Perform data collection
I	July 2008	Complete analysis of data
I	August 2008	Prepare final written report
II	May to August 2009	
III	May to August 2010	
IV	May to August 2011	
V	May to July 2012	Evaluation of first four phases of research
	July 31, 2012	Deadline for the CURA

TABLE 3. KEY DATES AND TIME FRAMES FOR RESEARCH

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Appendix A: Sample Semi-Structured Interview

1. How did you become involved in the Megaprojects for Communities?
2. What role(s) do you play? ie. leadership role, research, management, communications, conflict resolution, etc.
3. Who do you represent in the partnership?
4. What is your interest in being part of the project? What do you hope to accomplish with the partnership?
5. What are your expectations of the partnership? What are your expectations of the other partners? The universities? The community groups?
6. According to you, what expertise and resources do participants bring (or you expect them to bring) to the project?
7. What are areas of conflict that you have already experienced or that you foresee in the partnership?
8. What will make the partnership a success?

Appendix B: Sample Questionnaire

Name: _____

Organisation: _____

Date: _____

Please check the benefits and drawbacks that your organisation has experienced, expects to experience or does not expect to experience throughout the involvement with Megaprojects for Communities.

	ALREADY OCCURRED	EXPECT TO OCCUR	DO NOT EXPECT TO OCCUR
Benefits			
Acquisition of additional funding or resources			
Acquisition of new knowledge or skills			
Building new relationships helpful to my agency			
Heightened public profile of my organisation			
Enhanced influence in the community			
Other benefits (please list other major benefits):			
Drawbacks			
Takes too much time or resources			
Loss of control/autonomy over decisions			
Strained relations with my organisation			
Difficulty dealing with partners			
Not enough credit for my organisation			
Other drawbacks (please list other major drawbacks):			

Please fill out the following section. Check the box next to each organisation that you are linked through either through shared information or resources. Then circle one number from 1 to 4 gauging the quality of the relationship with that organisation.

ORGANISATION	TYPES OF LINKS (CHECK THE BOX IF YOU HAVE THIS LINK)		RELATIONSHIP QUALITY (Please circle) 1 = poor, little trust 2 = fair, some trust 3 = good, trust 4 = excellent, high trust
	Shared information	Shared resources	
Organisation A			1 2 3 4
Organisation B			1 2 3 4
Organisation C			1 2 3 4
Etc.			1 2 3 4
			1 2 3 4
Other organisations: (please list and respond as above)			
			1 2 3 4
			1 2 3 4
			1 2 3 4
			1 2 3 4

Please answer the following questions:

What motivated you to become involved in Megaprojects for Communities?

What is your interest in the partnership?

Who does your organisation represent?

