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## MPNA-GREEN – UCI Team Science Collaborative: Lessons for Advancing Community-led Goals by Ian Baran

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Team science has been the key method of the UCI-MPNA collaborative, and has provided an infrastructure for multiple projects to flourish at the same time. Team science is collaborative research that brings together researchers from across disciplines and community-based organizations to work together on research projects with a unifying goal. In doing so, it has allowed for mutual collaboration and brought in multiple communities and expertise within the MPNA-UCI collaborative. By using team science, our collaborative has been able to accomplish multiple goals and take on different research paths and responsibilities, all while leading back to the same mission: working together for the benefit of the Santa Ana community.

The Newkirk Research Justice Shop Fellows specifically helped manage the collaborative and provided the infrastructure for information sharing. One way information sharing through a newsletter. In the newsletter the fellows consolidated all of the projects taking place and put them in one accessible space for people to refer to. This document involved direct asks of members, overviews of the different research happening, meeting reminders, a directory of those involved, and gave suggestions and tips around team science collaboration. Having one central place for updates (newsletter) and one central body for facilitating information to the larger collaborative (Newkirk Fellowship), allowed for all of the other bodies of team science to function separately while fundamentally understanding their work as part of a larger whole.

The UCI-MPNA collaborative has built a relationship that is deeper than showing up at meetings or sharing results, but building a relationship on foundations of trust and of importance to the community organization and the community at-large. Core aspects of team science, which have been utilized by our collaborative, includes continual processes of building trust, continual learning, maintaining communication and honesty, respect for multiple viewpoints, and a vision of community-based research that is non-exploitative, able to evolve as a team, and grounded with a core value of socially-just research. Integral to this work is a commitment to the community. While showing up at meetings and analyzing data is important, the perspective and involvement of the community is just as essential to our research process. In our case, the community was brought into the collective by way of community-based organization, MPNA-GREEN, who place the community's research needs at the center of the research in order to guide what needs to be taken on. Their insight focuses the research towards community needs, be it an air monitoring project, an asthma project, work on delaying the City of Santa Ana General Plan, and other needed work. While different collaborative members may engage with the community moreso, depending on their research and volunteer capacity, every collaborative member understands that their work is grounded by the research needs of the Santa Ana community. For our collaborative, much of this has been work around the intersection of Environmental Justice and marginalized communities, specifically issues such as toxic waste and air pollution, the city's commitment to environmental justice, and how these issues specifically have differential effects on the health of already marginalized residents.

(From Collaborative Newsletter)

In order to have a healthy collaborative environment, people within the collaborative need to understand their roles, responsibilities, and ways they can best contribute. This means, coming together with clear expectations around ones' work, and their capacity to do the work. Members of the collaborative come from different departments and are in different positions within their department, therefore each have different levels of capacity and ways to support the work. This means that communication needs to be clear in order to articulate needs and how long it may take to accomplish the task. Through discussion and honesty, members are able to share and take on the work how they can and the collaborative can have realistic expectations. These steps help build and maintain relationships and clarity allows for growing trust and providing a solid ground to work from. Working in collaboratives means accepting that people may come and go, and also the potential for shifting focus as well, but communication and trust allows for the collaborative to keep working towards its goal and evolve however it has to for the benefit of the community whose needs themselves may change.

Team science allows for multiple departments and researchers to come together to facilitate multiple projects that intersect with each other, which in our case work towards advancing the mission of advancing social equity, and in this case environmental justice. In sharing projects, work processes, data collections, findings, grant status, and even ethical frameworks, members build relationships, centered around MPNA-GREEN and advancing justice. Team science involves commitments though, and the need for creating strong infrastructures for involvement and for members to attend to their commitments to the collaborative. The collaborative meetings became a space to problem-solve, troubleshoot, and engage with others doing similar work. The collaborative meetings, though largely held online due to COVID-19, was also a space for relationship building. These spaces brought people into the different research projects and emphasized the research as being centered around alleviating the burdens that are placed on specific communities. Being present at the meetings is important, as it showed ones' commitment to the overall project and allowed for a chance to hear and give feedback about the multiple research projects.

(From Collaborative Newsletter)

The UCI-MPNA relationship had been established prior to COVID-19. However, COVID-19 did cause a major shift for both the collaborative and the research. At the point of the pandemic starting, there was still 1.5 years left of the grant and MPNA-GREEN was not at their data collection phase for the CARB grant, specifically geared towards identifying the level of air pollution and toxins in the Santa Ana industrial corridor. Therefore, maintaining the collaborative was vital to future success, therefore the collaborative shifted to regular online meetings throughout the pandemic, while some other meetings and workshops had to be cancelled or delayed. With meetings and research being pushed back, it was not until Winter Quarter of 2020 when MPNA was able to do preparatory work for data collection for their grant, however, this was also a time when they took up a battle against the proposed General Plan for Santa Ana. The general plan was problematic because it did not incorporate environmental justice needs and demands into the plan, thus further ignoring and harming residents. However, the collaborative relationship allowed (and continues to allow) for strategizing together, guiding people into action, and further developing ways of engagement based on different knowledges and positionalities. For instance, collaborative members were brought into the process of writing against the General Plan, which allowed MPNA-GREEN more voices and utilize different perspectives that were all able to stand against the General Plan and urge its vote to be delayed until EJ concerns were added in. The other side of the coin is that collaborative members, specifically researchers, gained experience and insight into their role as socially just research and one method of community resistance against (problematic) city council decisions.

Two projects exemplify the collaborative: the Toxic Tour data collection and delaying the Santa Ana General Plan. Both of these projects involved the collaborative, in different, yet overlapping ways and incorporated personal networks as well as the larger Santa Ana community in the action. The Toxic Tours was a way of doing research and activist work around the industrial corridor of Santa Ana. Tours were done for data collection, as part of the collaborative research effort collecting data to show the air pollution and environmental burdens faced by communities that live and work around pollutant industries, and tours were led for council members and other people to engage and highlight the work being done. The Toxic Tour was strategized around specific research outcomes and community needs, i.e. the need to highlight and deal with environmental burdens. One major outcome dealt with educating the immediate community, broader public, and decision-makers on these neighborhood disparities, in order to obtain a goal of action towards an environmentally-friendly Santa Ana. This means, a Santa Ana that is healthy for its residents, as well as a Santa Ana that deals with undoing the multiple structural oppressions and burdens. Importantly, while MPNA-GREEN utilized members of the team science collaborative in different ways (data analysis, outreach, participating in) and all collaborative members were made away of the activities taking place. Therefore, members could also volunteer to take part in organizing, instructing, and collecting data or make call outs to their networks for volunteers.



The Santa Ana General Plan presents a different way in which a team science collaboration plays a role in a larger community effort. As stated above, the community organization was pushing to delay the approval of the 2020 Santa Ana General Plan since it did not contain any references to dealing with Environmental Justice. The organization, along with other progressive organizations in the area, had to act fast in order to push for delaying approval. Through organizing and coordinating actions, there was a need to build a broad coalition of organizations and residents, including the immediate UCI-MPNA collaborative, to push the city government towards the will of the local residents. This involved the collaborative showing up at city council meetings, sending in emails and letters to council members, and strategizing with MPNA-GREEN. In November 2020, MPNA-GREEN was successful in delaying approval of the EJ Plan. Now, the collaborative can play a role in further emphasizing the necessity of environmental justice in Santa Ana, so that the updated general plan will take environmental justice concerns seriously and can be voted on with approval of residents.

A team science approach allowed for community and university collaboration on issues that pertain to the community needs. In doing so, there was an emphasis on building relationships among collaborative members and the community organization. This allowed for holding multiple projects at once, that all pertained to the needs of the community. While each project has different aims, they overlap by being centered on the community organization and community members. In our collaborative there was room for researchers and the community organization to grow in their own skill-building and be a space for learning and growing in university-community relationships. It is extremely important for researchers and academics to engage in team science to undo the exploitative nature of research, and instead, engage in research that supports communities and allows for building new research methods for just research.

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