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Feminist Research Institute

Environmental Justice
Leaders Program

EJLP: A Case Study of Relationship Building in a Community-University Partnership Program

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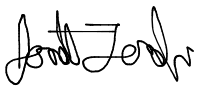

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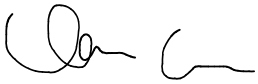

Abstract

This masters thesis project in collaboration with the Feminist Research Institute (FRI) at UC Davis centers their Environmental Justice Leaders Program (EJLP). The mission of the EJLP is to facilitate collaboration between community-based Environmental Justice (EJ) Leaders and UC Davis researchers to benefit both parties' work in the realms of transportation and energy justice. In the program's third cycle, this collaboration has taken the form of eight community-university partnerships across six EJ Leaders and seven UC Davis research partners.

Through program design, implementation, and formative, developmental evaluation, this project has collected data to answer the question of how the EJLP can best go about building these partnerships to match the long-term needs of the EJ Leader participants. Data was captured over the course of the beginning few months of this nine month program through usability observations, a mid-program survey, and semi-structured interviews with UC Davis research partners engaged with EJ Leaders.

Findings suggest that the EJLP is successfully launching these eight partnerships to the benefit of EJ Leaders and their community-based efforts for environmental justice across California. This has been accomplished through an iterative, reflexive, multi-stage approach that leverages theoretical perspectives from feminist science and technology studies, critical environmental justice studies, ontological design and design for transitions studies, and community-based participatory research (CBPR). However, data did not suggest that the program's structure resulted in any change in what participants prioritize when engaging in community-university partnerships. This project also considered the challenges and opportunities of operating the EJLP.

Overall, participants surveyed and interviewed through the course of this research indicated that both the program's structure and the existence of the EJLP are of value to them.

Evaluation data suggests the EJLP could benefit from making more explicit the expectations of all participants, defining key terms that are being utilized, and by integrating more co-creative processes. Recommendations from this study of the EJLP are oriented towards this program as well as how others like it can go about building community-university relationships that better center the long-term needs of community leaders and their organizations.

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Problem Statement

The UC Davis Environmental Justice Leaders Program (EJLP) emerged in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic in an effort to build partnerships between academic researchers and community members working with environmental justice frontline communities. The program is built under the premise that knowledge co-created in partnerships is more needs-based, just, accurate, and better to address our world's uneven problems. This program began in a time of necessary reckoning with public institutions, specifically universities given their historical legacies of extractive practices with under-resourced communities. Institute of Transportation Studies (ITS) researchers Juan Carlos Garcia Sanchez and Terra Arnal Luna created the EJLP in response to a call for institutional researchers to wield their power for social justice outcomes. The intent of the EJLP in the first programmatic cycle was to bring community-based environmental justice leaders together with UC Davis researchers to create research projects focused on transportation and energy issues. The UC Davis Feminist Research Institute (FRI) was brought on to administer and lead the EJLP once it had been formed with the fiscal backing of ITS and the Energy Efficiency Institute (EEI).

Since the beginning of the EJLP, there have been opportunities, challenges, and tensions on anticipated outcomes of the program. In the spirit of reflection and improvement, EJLP found it necessary to evaluate the program's selection process, structure, and goals at the beginning of the third programmatic cycle. Halfway through the EJLP second programmatic cycle, I was hired as a graduate student research assistant to support the administration of the program. After working with FRI for six months, I was invited to collaborate on research in support of the institute. FRI later promoted me to the role of graduate student researcher, entailing the same responsibilities in addition to work on my thesis project centering the EJLP. This project is in partnership with FRI, and was designed in collaboration with their team. Despite ITS and EEI's fiscal sponsorship of the EJLP, neither are involved in this project.

FRI is dedicated to feminist research that is transformative, intersectional, and justice-oriented. Their work at its core questions how knowledge is produced. University research centers at ITS and EEI host a wealth of technical expertise, but can sometimes lack this critical lens of how their knowledge is created. Environmental Justice (EJ) Leaders who are invited to participate in this program offer extensive knowledge and expertise on their communities and the issues they face. These EJ Leaders are also aware of the legacies of harm caused by university researchers, and may bring with them a level of mistrust. The EJLP brings together participants and academics from multiple disciplines with differing theoretical perspectives and approaches to their work. Acknowledging such diversity in thought and academic field demonstrates why a transdisciplinary framework was necessary to make sense of the EJLP.

The framework detailed in this project's literature review encompasses feminist, design, critical environmental justice, and community-based participatory research studies. This study contributes to understanding how such bodies of theory intersect with one another, and how anticipated parallels between theory and praxis are not always realized. The latter represented a central challenge for this project and the administration of the EJLP since its inception. Models and theoretical frameworks that detail best practices for community-university relations face challenges upon application. In order to make sense of the program in light of these challenges, and therefore to evaluate and propose recommendations to strengthen it, I found it necessary to interrogate: 1) the power dynamics at play in and surrounding the program, 2) how knowledge is created and whose knowledge is seen as expert/ valid, 3) how should/ if universities should be engaging in community-university partnerships, and 4) how can the design of the program help mitigate some of the negative effects of these partnerships for community partners?

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review weaves together four bodies of theory, including feminist, critical environmental justice (CEJ), community-based participatory research (CBPR), and design studies to make sense of my project with the Feminist Research Institute (FRI) centering their Environmental Justice Leaders Program (EJLP). The resulting framework is transdisciplinary, and makes space for multiple ways of knowing, seeing the world, and addressing relevant issues with multiple perspectives in mind.

The first body of literature I engage with is that of feminist theory, more specifically feminists working within science and technology studies (STS). Feminist theorists are concerned with dynamics of power and how knowledge is produced. Alike to feminist studies, critical environmental justice studies examines power and privilege as it relates to the distribution and procedural injustices of environmental degradation. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) theory engages with issues raised by these aforementioned areas of study within the realm of academic research. To varying degrees, CBPR proposes approaches intent on countering the reproduction of social inequities and oppressions within the processes of academic research grounded in communities most impacted. Lastly, design theory, more specifically ontological design and design for transitions, offers a comparable yet more fluid approach to designing programs and building relationships centering themes found in all of these bodies of theory, Across these bodies of literature, concepts of interconnectivity, solidarity, reflexivity, and reciprocity are emphasized.

These four bodies of literature are interwoven to create a transdisciplinary framework that captures the complex nature of my thesis project. Working within the University of California at Davis (UC Davis) poses challenges as it is an institution like many universities across the

country built within historical legacies of oppression. Through the application of these theoretical lenses, this project may unearth cracks in the academic institution through which a transdisciplinary framework can sprout, grow, and expand to allow for change from within.

Feminist Theory

The umbrella of feminist theory is massive, encompassing a multitude of sub-sections of feminist thought. This literature review is primarily concerned with feminist theoretical findings of Black, indigenous, and STS scholars as the EJLP leadership at FRI applies such findings throughout their administration of the program. Feminist theorists within these subsections focus on a wide breadth of topics, but the two major themes most relevant to this thesis project include power and knowledge.

Power

Patricia Hill Collins coined the term *matrix of domination* to describe a multi-faceted, mutually reinforcing intersection of oppressions experienced by Black women in the United States. However, this matrix is relevant to other groups also, especially those that experience injustice across social institutions or “patterns of intersecting oppressions” (p.xx) as Hill Collins describes. Four major social structures compose the matrix of domination, including white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism. The matrix of domination explains the confluence of oppressions created by social structures that are perpetuated through social systems. Our social institutions have normalized this matrix of domination, meaning certain ways of being are seen as standard within the current systems.

Academia is not immune, and more specifically, academic research norms and culture mirror our social structures and systems. Academic research, especially in the sciences, is often unintentionally exclusionary as a result. Whiteness within the university research ecosystem is

seen as normal due to the engrained system of white supremacy. Scientific research privileges the white body as the default in studies, the white researcher as the standard academic whose knowledge is seen as valid by the academy, more so than others. Settler colonialism is similarly linked in granting power to western science that separates and places the white body at the top of a hierarchy with nature below and separate. The matrix of domination demonstrates that these systems are linked and their impacts build upon one another to oppress. “Claims that systems of race, social class, gender, and sexuality form mutually constructing features of social organization foster a basic rethinking of U.S. social institutions” (Hill Collins, 1990, pg. 228, 1990). What Black feminists are arguing in favor of is a transformation of our current systems, in this case academia, that addresses the ways in which power is organized to construct intersecting oppressions (Crenshaw, 2013; Hill Collins, 2014). This approach is known as intersectional feminism, and “...what makes an analysis intersectional…is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (Cho et.al, pg. 795).

The Feminist Research Institute (FRI) is explicit in defining the feminist research they conduct as intersectional, yet they stand alone in this commitment among the institutional partners involved in the Environmental Justice Leaders Program (EJLP). Those in positions of power are not generally readily willing to critique the systems that grant them such privileges. With the rise in popularity of the Black Lives Matter movement after the public lynching of George Floyd, organizations across the U.S. began adopting diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) plans and policies. The Institute of Transportation Studies (ITS) DEI acknowledgement and commitment does not directly engage with the words “power” or “intersectionality.” ITS is the fiscal sponsor, while FRI leads and administers the EJLP. “‘[Intersectionality] primarily concerns the way things work rather than who people are’” (Cho et. al, pg. 797). The UC Davis researchers who are working in partnership with community leaders are predominantly operating out of ITS, meaning they are not operating within a structure that is

calling upon them to critically engage with the organization of power as it relates to their work. This is a systemic failing, and highlights that FRI and ITS' approach to their work is misaligned, inevitably creating tension throughout the program's process.

Knowledge

Feminists argue power impacts and is entangled in the knowledge production and legitimization processes. Theorists such as Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding problematize the production of scientific knowledge as it perpetuates a false notion of objective truth. Scientists and researchers who are privileged by structures of power are seen as arbiters of objective truth, meaning they determine what is and isn't objective. Haraway refers to this as "objective power" stating "...science - the real game in town - is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one's manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of very objective power" (Haraway, 1988). It is impossible to remove knowledge from its context of production according to these feminists. Research and change-making are socially situated and replicate the systems/ structures within which they exist unless conscious effort is made to counter this (Liboiron, 2021). To fail to do so is to reinforce the matrix of domination within academia.

Instead, researchers must engage in "passionate detachment" which means they must actively seek out diverse knowledges and readily challenge existing beliefs that organize our society along axes of domination (Haraway, 1988). Situated knowledges, in which feminist objectivity is situated in the communities and in the lived experiences of the subjects, are a result of passionate detachment (Haraway, 1988; Tallbear, 2014; Tuck, 2014; Escobar, 2018; Tonkinwise, 2015; Liboiron, 2021). This approach to knowledge production "...offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions" (Haraway, 1988). To take a feminist approach to

knowledge production is to form more holistic truths that can transform the systems within which they are produced.

ITS researchers are viewed as experts in the eyes of policymakers in Sacramento and within the academic community at UC Davis. Community leaders and experts on transportation and mobility justice are not met with the same regard because of the way in which the research university and systems of governance uphold the idea of one objective truth, with only certain knowledge production processes seen as legitimate. FRI is working to counter this through the leading and administration of the EJLP, in which community knowledge and expertise are centered. The program compensates these EJ Leaders and emphasizes that the relationships being constructed between university researchers and these community leaders are meant to facilitate knowledge exchange. This counters the university paternalistic approach that places scientific researchers at the top of a false hierarchy with objective power over community members.

The feminist perspective on knowledge production parallels and informs ideas uplifted in critical environmental justice (CEJ) studies, community-based participatory research (CBPR), and ontological design and design for transitions theory. The lived experiences of those most subjugated, including community members and residents of environmental justice communities, are seen as experts in their own lived experiences and local ecological knowledge.

Critical Environmental Justice Theory

The modern environmental movement is embedded in the same matrix of domination and western scientific knowledge production processes that feminists critique. Environmentalism has been exclusionary, intentionally or unintentionally, to primarily the detriment of communities of color and lower-income communities who bear the burden of inequitable environmental degradation. Environmental justice emerged from a need to embed social justice within the

environmental movement to counter the ways in which social organization informed by systems of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism continues to generate intersecting oppressions for different peoples. Environmental justice offered "...an alternative framework for environmentalism by moving beyond the class and racial biases in mainstream environmental groups, but also the complicity of regulatory agencies" (Sze & London, 2008, pg. 1334).

Environmental racism and environmental inequality were key concepts brought into the public discourse by the environmental justice movement, yet environmental justice goes further than analyzing race and class to include gender and sexual orientation (Sze & London, 2008). Critical environmental justice studies interweave bodies of theory including critical race theory, ecofeminism, and political ecology, among others (Pellow, 2017). Theorists of critical environmental justice utilize this resulting framework to argue for an even deeper evaluation of environmental issues. They argue that environmental justice should be examined 1) at the intersection of all converging forms of social inequities and oppression, 2) at multiple scales including spatially and temporally, 3) as a product of the social inequity embedded in our current social order, and 4) with the understanding of the indispensability of all human and more-than-human subjects (Pellow, 2017).

Given that critical environmental justice is informed by feminist theory, it makes sense why there is significant overlap in thought between theorists in both fields. This is especially true when considering their perspectives on power and intersectionality. Environmental justice calls for "...a critical analysis of power as it plays out in the (mal)distribution of harms and opportunities related to the environment with special attention to race and class" (Sze & London, 2008, pg. 1348). Feminist theorists argue for the need to examine the organization and flows of power. Critical environmental justice studies and Black feminism both emphasize the importance of intersectional analysis within these discussions of power. The organization of power impacts the politics of visibility (Nixon, 2011) or vision (Haraway, 1988). "Struggles over what will count

as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see" (Haraway, 1988, pg. 587). Haraway and Nixon ask similar questions: Who gets to see the multifold harms caused to communities? Who gets to be an expert witness on this? Whose knowledge on the matter of environmental harm is accounted for and upheld as worthy? Feminists and critical environmental justice theorists acknowledge the influence the organization of power has on knowledge creation and legitimization. Scientific knowledge created within a matrix of domination is doomed to reinforce said matrix.

Alike to ecofeminists, critical environmental justice theorists further problematize the social organization that separates humans from the non-human, or more-than-human (Pellow, 2017) world and the land (Sze, 2020;Liboiron, 2021). Both argue this false hierarchy reinforces domination of the more-than-human world.

> "...[Critical environmental justice] views racism, heteropatriarchy, classism, nativism, ableism, ageism, speciesism (the belief that one species is superior to another), and other forms of inequality as intersecting axes of domination and control. That is, these inequalities are mutually reinforcing in that they tend to act together to produce and maintain systems of individual and collective power, privilege, and subordination" (Pellow, 2017, pg.19).

Despite the many parallels between these two bodies of literature, critical environmental justice offers distinct perspectives on what constitutes justice and environmental harms, and how the organization of praxis can lead to tangible outcomes for communities impacted. For example, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* defines the concept of slow violence as "...a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence" (Nixon, 2011, pg. 2). Nixon broadens the scope of what may be considered environmental harms through his consideration of their spatial and temporal characteristics. David Pellow in his introduction to *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* describes this multi-scalar (across spatial and temporal domains) approach as a necessary pillar to critical

environmental justice. This is in response to the environmental justice movement's fixation on what form of justice, distributive or procedural, should be aspirational. "That is, these ideas of justice are important in principle, but *in practice*, they have often meant the inclusion and recognition of EJ community leaders by the state, followed by co-optation and siphoning of grassroots energy away from other key goals, and ultimately achieving relatively little by way of policy changes" (Pellow, 2017, pg.12). Critical environmental justice acknowledges these two forms of justice are important, yet incomplete.

The path towards more holistic justice is through the intersectional, multiscalar, socially situated, and ecocentric application of solutions. Critical environmental justice scholars argue this approach can generate transdisciplinary possibilities (Sze & London, 2008, pg.1346) or "ecotones" within academia where disciplines meet to create space for knowledge that transcends disciplines (Nixon, 2011). Critical environmental justice provides a more robust framework for generating solutions at all levels for the multitude of ways environmental harms exist. However, this alone is still insufficient. "Even if one can successfully integrate political and theoretical projects, great challenges remain in developing and negotiating trusting and productive relationships that can bridge the theoretical and activist worlds and words of environmental justice" (Sze & London, pg.1346). How these spaces for transformative transdisciplinary work are generated is incredibly complex. Although it is informed by the aforementioned theories, understanding this process still warrants additional theoretical concepts from community-based participatory research and design theory.

Community-Based Participatory Research Theory

The EJLP is a case study of how such a transdisciplinary space can be generated through community-university collaboration. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) theory and methodology offer significant insights on building partnerships between academic

researchers and community experts. Unlike the synergies of the previous theoretical approach, CBPR is heavily critiqued by feminist theorists, especially among indigenous feminist scholars. Despite the tension among these bodies of work, the synthesis of these approaches allows for a more robust transdisciplinary framework.

Community-University Partnerships

Universities and academic researchers have an extractive historical footprint in communities which has led to untold harm and mistrust within targeted populations (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Tallbear, 2014). In response to this previous and ongoing track record, academics engaging with community members in mutually beneficial relationships have worked to co-create knowledge and best practices for engagement. Community-university partnerships should have clear mutually agreed upon norms for collaboration from the beginning (London et.al, 2020; Cannon, 2020; Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024). Academic research partners should not only understand, but uplift community expertise and knowledge through meaningful participation in the research process ((London et.al, 2020; Cannon, 2020; Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024; Tallbear, 2014). More community involvement is not universally seen as good praxis. Some theorists argue that academic partners should plan involvement to optimize, rather than maximize community involvement (London et.al., 2020) and ensure the partnership is adding capacity, not diminishing it (Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024). In order for these relationships to endure, they must foster “mutual confidence and trust with a commitment to mutual learning” (Cannon, 2020). This process takes time and is important to get right in order to build a successful project (London et.al, 2020; Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024). Discipline transcendence (Cannon, 2020; Nixon, 2011) is a major theme across both critical environmental justice studies and CBPR.

Refusing Research

Indigenous feminist scholars, such as Eve Tuck, oppose these practices to argue that communities should refuse to engage in research partnerships if certain conditions aren't met. Overall, the current systems structuring research are not reflective or reflexive enough according to Tuck. There are motivations researchers may have that don't align with the needs of community members (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Academic researchers too frequently ask the oppressed to speak solely about their pain, with the result that "communities are left with a narrative that tells them that they are broken" (Tuck & Yang, 2014). This story of oppression is then co-opted as the "subaltern" narrative, misread and misrepresented by academics claiming to understand the experiences of the oppressed more so than those with lived experiences of said oppressions (Tuck & Yang, 2014). CBPR is not above this when academic researchers are working with communities, emphasizing stories of loss and pain, and mistelling these narratives for their own scholarship (Tuck & Yang, 2014). As previously stated, research and change-making are socially situated and replicate the systems/ structures within which they exist unless conscious effort is made to counter this (Liboiron, 2021). CBPR practitioners must therefore engage in continuous critical reflexivity, and remain clear in their intentions on working in partnership with community members. Tuck argues there are forms of knowledge the academy is undeserving of receiving, and research isn't always the intervention that is needed for a community. Centering the needs of the community members, understanding and uplifting their expertise, and opposing co-opting of communal knowledge, especially traditional ecological knowledge, are a few essential acts academic researchers must embody for community members to consider engaging in research (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

Research as Liberatory

Academic research may still allow for liberatory outcomes. Indigenous feminist scholars argue for different approaches to research that speak to the challenges that have arisen from CBPR projects. Kim Tallbaer critiques CBPR as a methodology that has uplifted the idea of "giving back" to community, rather than a co-creative, relational approach. In reference to community-university collaboration, Tallbear says "It is also helpful to think creatively about the research process as a relationship-building process, as a professional networking process with colleagues (not "subjects"), as an opportunity for conversation and sharing of knowledge, not simply data gathering" (Tallbear, 2014). According to Tallbear, this process is akin to "Sampalataya" meaning act of faith, and in the context of research it signifies working with, standing with, supporting and critiquing to uplift all partners in the research process. Co-creation (Creger, 2020; Tallbear, 2014) from the very beginning is of importance here. This challenges the power of the university researcher in their position determining the level of community engagement for a research project. Chicanx CBPR scholars have exemplified this approach of "standing with and speaking as faith" (Tallbear, 2014) where community partners are included from the very beginning (Deeb-Sossa, 2019). Eve Tuck uplifts the concept of desire-centered research, as opposed to the traditional emphasis on pain and loss within a community's diverse history.

Critical environmental justice scholars argue that research can be liberatory, in the sense that it can help support movements advocating against environmental degradation in communities impacted. The most impacted communities are the least likely to see in-depth scientific studies done that will benefit or help co-power them in their fight against slow violence (Nixon, 2011). A benefit of CBPR projects is the power and legitimacy within systems of governance a university researcher can leverage to support their community partner's scientific findings, lived experiences of environmental harms, and calls to action directed at

decision-makers. In the same vein, David Pellow's critical environmental justice scholarship calls for a multi-scalar approach, meaning that action must be taken at every possible level through processes that present more agency to community leaders. "My argument… is that EJ and other social movements would be best off articulating, developing, and supporting practices, relationships, and institutions that deepen direct democracy - without strict concern over whether the location of such practices and relationships is inside or outside of state institutions - because such processes are more likely to be supportive of environmental and social justice" (Pellow, 2017).

This liberatory potential of CBPR is possible if guided by the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. It Is unclear how that might be accomplished within a university system that upholds extractive, exploitative practices when working with community members and the more-than-human world. These research projects therefore need to account for these challenges and struggles from the beginning when they are being developed. This is therefore a question of design.

Design Theory

The final theoretical branch within this framework is design theory, specifically ontological design. There is significant overlap between this body of literature and those previously outlined above, and yet it offers a great deal to this framework. Integrating perspectives from design scholars helps to synthesize and account for the grounded challenges of community-university partnership building relevant to this case study. Scholars including Arturo Escobar and Cameron Tonkinwise offer ways in which feminist and CEJ studies concepts might be realized in praxis through CBPR methodology.

Arturo Escobar coined the term Ontological Design in the book *Designs for the Pluriverse* to describe the situated nature of the designer. Design, from his perspective, is the

interaction between understanding and creation. It alters society and vice versa for “it inaugurates a set of rituals, ways of doing, and modes of being” (Escobar, 2018). In other words, design designs. This concept mirrors the important theme of reciprocity in indigenous feminist theory. It is not possible to separate the designer from the designed as they are interconnected. This idea of the situated designer aligns with the concept of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988). Both reject decontextualization of the producer, whether that be the materials-oriented designer or the conceptual university researcher. They argue against the modernist idea of one central truth, in favor of what Escobar refers to as the pluriverse, where multiple realities exist simultaneously (Escobar, 2018).

Ontological design argues that design is inherently a context-based process that is informed by lived experiences and already existing design itself. Embodiment (Escobar, 2018; Haraway, 1988) and practices (Tonkinwise, 2015) of the everyday are representative of how design continually impacts the designer and the layperson. In order to design for the desired future, or in the words of Cameron Tonkinwise “design for transitions”, designers must act from the presence of what is wanting to emerge from a situated perspective. “Any innovation must adapt to existing skills and meanings or assist in the development of new ones to be incorporated into everyday life” (Tonkinwise, 2015). These are what result in practices. Escobar similarly argues “[n]ew embodied routines slowly become collective, eventually transforming social consciousness and institutional structures” (Escobar, 2018).

This is not a linear process; instead, it occurs in multiple stages and scales as what is designed in turn designs us back. Reflexivity is essential as design as a process is “coming to understand by making changes” (Tonkinwise, 2015). “The multi-stage quality of it means that after each accomplishment, the way forward needs to be re-evaluated because unanticipated consequences will have arisen” (Tonkinwise, 2015). Design and feminist scholars alike emphasize the ever changing dynamic nature of action-oriented processes. This is in conflict with CBPR as practitioners call for clear, structured guidelines and objectives for partnerships. If

this approach were to be integrated with CBPR, it would allow for the opening of a multitude of possibilities, but not definitive solutions. This approach is necessary in the face of 'wicked-problems' that will never cease to exist. The crossroads where these problems intersect with the structures reinforcing power, profit, and privilege is both a place of danger and possibility (Sze, 2020; London & Sze, 2008). Futuring is the ideation phase of creating these possibilities for the future, while dreaming forward is the active process of realizing these futures. In order to engage in the processes of futuring (Escobar, 2018) and dreaming forward (Sze, 2020), designers and practitioners must reject the business-as-usual approach that has "defutured" in favor of designs capacity to future (Escobar, 2018).

The EJLP faces wicked-problems both within and outside the context of the university. Each EJ Leader is engaging in relationship building with academic research partners that have varying positionalities, approaches, and experiences working with communities. Research partners represent a diversity of backgrounds and disciplines, working within research institutions that uphold different theoretical approaches to knowledge production. In addition, this program is operating within a university system that replicates social structures and systemic power imbalance that cannot be addressed through a nine-month program. The issues these EJ Leaders are working to address are rooted in these same forces through other social institutions. This theoretical framework attempts to account for this complexity.

Research Questions

- What is the context within which the EJLP is working to build community-university partnerships?
- How can the EJLP help build relationships between EJ Leaders and institutional researcher partners that will aid their community-based efforts for environmental justice outcomes in California?

- What is the effectiveness of the program design collaboratively created between myself and FRI leadership in facilitating relationship building?
- What are the challenges and opportunities to do so?
- In what ways are selected best practices for community-university partnerships relevant and usable within this program?

Methods

The methodological approach was an iterative, reflexive, multi-stage plan of action that was continually negotiated throughout the project while in dialogue with the staff at FRI (Rollins et.al, 2019). The central goal of this project was to help FRI as they worked to address challenges of previous years, including tokenization and lack of clear expectations of participants, through programmatic design and evaluation. Given the competing timeframes of the masters thesis versus the EJLP, this research is limited in scope to evaluating the beginning of relationship formation between EJ Leaders and their UC Davis research partners. The aims of this study were as follows: 1) build a program structure that could facilitate the initial relationship building to allow for knowledge exchange between EJ Leaders and their university research partners, 2) evaluate this program structure to determine the success of stated objectives, and 3) implement selected community development best practices that aligned with a feminist theoretical approach throughout the program to overcome the challenges faced in previous programmatic cycles.

EJL Program Design

The program structure was created by myself with continual feedback from Dr Sarah McCullough and Dr. Mayra Sánchez Barba at FRI. It began with a detailed schedule (Table 1) for the first few months of the program with activities and modules, their purpose, and target objectives, as well as a draft narrative structure with foundational principles and programmatic

values (Appendix A) that already guide the EJLP. Modules were similar to workshops that would help facilitate knowledge exchange and the successful initiation of the partnerships. There were to be three modules including 1) a session between each EJ Leader and their UC Davis research partner, 2) an orientation on academic systems' historical legacies of oppression, and 3) a collaborative workshop with EJ Leaders and their UC Davis research partners on best practices for conducting community-based participatory research. The first of the three modules was specific to each partnership in development, so each EJ Leader was to meet individually with their UC Davis research partner. This meant that the first module would occur several times as there are six leaders. The latter two modules were meant to occur collectively with all of the community and university participants. The proposed program structure also contained activities that could be taken to ensure EJ Leaders and UC Davis researchers were well-informed about one another before engaging in their first partnership meetings. Below is a table describing the initial schedule in the draft program structure for the EJLP.

Table 1. Draft Proposed Structure for EJLP - Schedule

Type	**Audience**	**Topic**	**Purpose/ Rationale**	**Objectives**
Informational Activity	UC Davis Researchers	Community Partner Backgrounds	University researchers should familiarize themselves with their community partner's history, local context, and priorities before beginning work together (Creger, 2020)	University researchers will - Establish an understanding of their partner's work, general priorities, and geographic context
Informational Activity	UC Davis Researchers	Decoding research language and jargon	To give the leaders a guide for the acronyms and jargon that may be new concepts	University researchers will - Develop a working document of terms and acronyms for their leader to reference throughout their time together
Informational Activity	EJ Leaders	University Research Partner Backgrounds	Develop a baseline understanding of whom they will work with	Leaders will - Come prepared to their first meeting with their institutional partner

				- Have thought of preliminary questions for researchers
Module 1	EJ Leaders + UC Davis Researchers	Introductions	Establish a deeper understanding of each other's work, how they will communicate, and how they define equity and mutuality	University researchers and community leaders will - Gain an understanding of each others' expertise and experience in their fields through discussion/ Q&A - Develop a mutual understanding of respectful, dignity centered communication - Designate a point of contact within the UC Davis partner's lab or research center - Discuss and create a shared definition of equity and mutuality that they can refer back to - Schedule their next meeting
Module 2	EJ Leaders + UC Davis Researchers	Asking Different Questions in Scientific Research	Orientation to the University's Harmful Historical Legacy in Communities	University researchers and community leaders will... - Gain a deeper understanding of how historical legacies of scientific research have exploited and harmed communities around the world - Apply this understanding to current university practices and norms - Collaboratively discuss how participants might overcome some of these barriers and challenges
Module 3	EJ Leaders + UC Davis	Community-Based	Emphasize best practices for engaging	University researchers and community leaders will

	Researchers	Participatory Research (CBPR) Best Practices	in community-based research partnerships	- Develop a deeper, shared understanding of best practices for conducting CBPR - Collaborate to strategize and problem solve through hypothetical, common CBPR challenges
Follow-Up Partnership Meeting	EJ Leaders + UC Davis Researchers	Continuation of co-development of equity-focused norms and expectations for the program's duration	Establishing shared norms, expectations based on their shared definition of equity and best practices from CBPR. Determination of wants/ desires and establish understanding of capacities	
Administrative	FRI	MOU/ Contract detailing results from their past meeting	Accountability measure, informing FRI of the various agreements reached between all partners	

The narrative structure included in the draft program structure was inspired by the Center for Cultural Power's Constellations Fellows Program (Fellows, n.d.). This narrative structure was informed by my own understanding of FRI's work and the body of Feminist Science and Technology Studies (STS) readings their team recommended I reference. The purpose of these components of the draft program structure was to make explicit the intentions and theoretical framing of the EJLP for current and future participants. These initial deliverables were drafted to align with best practices outlined in the literature on community-engaged and/or -driven research for transdisciplinary and environmental justice outcomes (Arnstein, 1969; Cannon, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024; Creger, 2020; London et.al, 2020; Nixon, 2011).

Praxis does not always align with theory though. FRI was unable to implement a number of the best practices outlined above due to time constraints, lack of capacity, limited resources, and lack of organization. Dr. McCullough said that the draft narrative structure was a useful

guiding tool for internal contemplation, but not one that could be created without collaboration with ITS and EEI, the fiscal sponsors of the EJLP. The draft program structure was likewise received as overly ambitious and unlikely to succeed in the given timeframe before the EJ Leaders arrived for their first visit in May. FRI is a relatively small university research center with two full-time staff and a handful of student employees working at or less than 50% appointment. This has posed an ongoing capacity challenge for the institute. Overall, the first iteration of the draft program structure and the methodology proposed was seen as well-intentioned but strategically incompatible with the realities of the EJLP. This required a reimagining of the program and evaluation design methodology to better fit the needs of FRI while still allowing for the answering of the central research questions. The table below summarizes the resulting schedule that represents the intersection of the selected best practices and what FRI was able to undertake given the aforementioned constraints.

Table 2 - Final Structure for EJLP - Schedule

Type	Audience	Topic	Purpose/ Rationale	Objectives
~~Informational Activity~~	~~UC Davis Researchers~~	~~Community Partner Backgrounds~~	~~University researchers should familiarize themselves with their community partner's history, local context, and priorities before beginning work together (Creger, 2020)~~	~~University researchers will - Establish an understanding of their partner's work, general priorities, and geographic context~~
~~Informational Activity~~	~~UC Davis Researchers~~	~~Decoding research language and jargon~~	~~To give the leaders a guide for the acronyms and jargon that may be new concepts~~	~~University researchers will - Develop a working document of terms and acronyms for their leader to reference throughout their time together~~
~~Informational Activity~~	~~EJ Leaders~~	~~University Research Partner Backgrounds~~	~~Develop a baseline understanding of whom they will work with~~	~~Leaders will - Come prepared to their first meeting with their institutional partner - Have thought of preliminary questions~~

				~~for researchers~~
Module 1	EJ Leaders + UC Davis Researchers	Introductions	Establish a deeper understanding of each other's work, ~~how they will communicate, and how they define equity and mutuality~~ and assess if this is a good fit for the two of them	University researchers and community leaders will - Gain an understanding of each others' expertise and experience in their fields through discussion/ Q&A - ~~Develop a mutual understanding of respectful, dignity centered communication~~ - ~~Designate a point of contact within the UC Davis partner's lab or research center~~ - ~~Discuss and create a shared definition of equity and mutuality that they can refer back to~~ - ~~Schedule their next meeting~~
Module 2	EJ Leaders + ~~UC Davis Researchers~~	Asking Different Questions in Scientific Research	Orientation to the University's Harmful Historical Legacy in Communities	University researchers and community leaders will... - Gain a deeper understanding of how historical legacies of scientific research have exploited and harmed communities around the world - Apply this understanding to current university practices and norms - Collaboratively discuss how participants might overcome some of these barriers and challenges
Module 3	EJ Leaders + UC Davis Researchers	Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)	Emphasize best practices for engaging in community-based research partnerships	University researchers and community leaders will - Develop a deeper, shared understanding

		Best Practices		of best practices for conducting CBPR - Collaborate to strategize and problem solve through hypothetical, common CBPR challenges
Follow-Up Partnership Meeting	EJ Leaders + UC Davis Researchers	Continuation of co-development of equity-focused norms and expectations for the program's duration	Establishing shared norms, expectations based on their shared definition of equity and best practices from CBPR. Determination of wants/ desires and establish understanding of capacities	
Administrative	FRI	MOU/ Contract detailing results from their past meeting	Accountability measure, informing FRI of the various agreements reached between all partners	

Informational activities were cut from the schedule. Module 1 was simplified to tackle solely the goal of determining if the match between EJ Leader and UC Davis researcher was compatible. During each of the meetings for module 1, participants shared their professional backgrounds, what they could offer to the partnership, and what they hoped to gain from working with their counterparts. The aim of module 2 was to offer transparency to the EJ Leaders as they enter this process fraught with challenges typically exploitative of their expertise and labor. Module 2 no longer included participation from university research partners. Dr. Jonathan London led module 3 which was intended to be a session between the EJ Leaders and their university research partners. The objectives of module 3 were the most explicit, as Dr. London aimed to outline best practices, opportunities, and challenges for both community partners and university researchers when working on community-based participatory research projects.

Evaluation Design

A formative evaluation approach was utilized at first to assess the usability of the modules, their effectiveness at facilitating the beginning of the community-university partnerships, and if there were downstream effects (Rollins et.al., 2017) that impacted individuals' behaviors when working within these partnerships. Formative evaluation is typically conducted by an individual involved in a program and carried out for the purpose of improving said program during its development (Rohanna, 2021). This approach typically begins in the early stages of a program's implementation (Alkin & Vo, 2018) and may lead to a final summative evaluation, yet some evaluators argue that this process is ongoing (Rohanna, 2021; Alkin & Vo, 2018). Rohanna makes the point that "programs aimed at improving particular societal problems can rarely afford to remain static" (2021). This approach seemed most appropriate for a program tackling issues of environmental justice.

Usability testing was chosen as a methodology to determine the utility of the modules and if the objectives of each module were attainable and successfully reached. This methodological approach is intended to help enhance participant experience when engaging with a programmatic or educational resource. The intention of utilizing usability testing is to render such resources more usable to facilitate the desired program outcomes (Koundinya et.al., 2017). Usability testing was to occur during each iteration of module 1 (introductions) where EJ Leaders met their university research partner one-on-one or in a pair, in addition to modules 2 (asking different questions in scientific research) and 3 (CBPR best practices) that occurred as singular events with the initial intention of having all participants in attendance. An observation prompt was created by myself detailing the following aspects I hoped to record:

- Evidence of mutuality and collaboration
    - Body language and proximity of participants to one another
    - Topics of conversation, tone, informal language

    - Energy level of participants
    - Level of engagement
- Feedback on the program
    - Questions or concerns raised during the meeting regarding the program
    - Relevance to participants needs/ wants
- Conversation including verbal phrases, tone of voice
- Changes in understanding over time regarding community-university partnerships

During the modules, the usability testing observation prompt was utilized to capture data on how participants were engaging with one another. This was an adapted tool to leverage given that the program shifted from structured modules with explicit objectives to more fluid introductory sessions. Usability testing is most successful when specific objectives are explicitly outlined (Koundinya, 2017). An alternative approach was needed to uncover themes arising that relate to the overall goals of the program. A developmental evaluation framework was useful here. This framework is seen by some in the field as a subsect of formative evaluation in which the aim is to center the continual development of a complex program (Rohanna, 2021; Alkin & Vo, 2018). Developmental evaluation recognizes that programs tackling complex issues cannot afford to remain static, as they must continually adapt with the ever changing challenges they face (Rohanna, 2021). Programs that continuously adapt are best evaluated through this developmental evaluation framework.

The updated mixed-method approach included utilizing the data from the usability testing, altering the survey of all participants, and the addition of semi-structured interviews with the university research partners (Appendix B). The interviews mirrored the survey questions as they were meant to enrich the data collected. My aim shifted from measuring specific outcomes to gaining a better understanding of the themes, goals, and impact of the program on participants' perspectives and attitudes towards community-university partnerships.

The rationale of the mid-program survey was to gather information on perceptions and understandings of participants in relation to the program and community-university partnerships to determine the impact of the EJLP. There were a total of 29 questions, including 2 introductory, 7 pre-program, and 10 pre- vs. during-program questions. Information was to be collected from EJ Leaders and their university research partners through a mid-program survey. This survey was meant to collect diagnostic information on each participant's prior experience with community-university partnerships, as well as their perspective on the objectives and usability of the modules. Survey data would detail their prior understandings, document if there was a change in their thinking, collect information on what they found most helpful about the modules, and ask if there were any recommendations for future modules. As part of the survey, a retrospective pretest (Lamb, 2005) was integrated to understand if priorities had shifted from before to during their engagement in the program. The timing of the survey limited what outcomes could be measured as it was administered relatively soon after the first in-person visit of three. Long-term outcomes would not be able to be uncovered for months or years necessitating future study. However, I was able to gather important information that shed light on the following:

1. The baseline understanding & level of expertise held by EJ Leaders/ institutional researchers in relation to building community-university partnerships
2. Perceptions of program participants regarding components and the overall structure of the EJLP, as well as their view of best practices for community-university partnerships before and after engaging in the program to this point
3. Why participants have chosen to engage in this program

The survey asked participants to think retrospectively and indicate if there have been shifts in their perspectives before and during engagement in the program. The expected results were that perceptions for those who have never engaged in the community-university partnership

development will likely shift more so than those who have prior experience with these processes. In addition, the question of “what’s in it for the participants?” remained nebulous to staff at FRI, especially regarding why university researchers chose to engage in this program. Understanding their reasons for participating would be helpful for FRI’s sustaining of the program. According to staff at FRI and the 2023 EJLP Evaluation, a challenge of previous years was the misalignment of expectations with the reality of what could actually be accomplished within the nine months of the program. These survey results could illuminate if that remained an issue.

The intention of the interviews was to gain an understanding of university researchers’ experience with and perspectives on community-university partnerships, their research values, and what they hope to gain from participating in this program. These interviews took place in July and August of 2024, virtually and in-person. The interview questions directly mirrored the survey questions in order to enrich the data already collected. Each interview was roughly 40 minutes. The goals of these interviews included:

1. Gaining a deeper understanding of how university researchers perceive this process/ program
2. Determine why researchers are participating in the program
3. Ascertain more in-depth details on their experience with community-university partnerships

Institutional research partners were chosen as interviewees for multiple reasons.The first justification for interviewing solely the university researchers was that EJ Leaders had limited capacity and availability to engage with this project, making this a convenience sample. Every effort was made to be considerate of their time and also refrain from perpetuating the harmful practices of over-researching under-resourced populations. Being a member of the FRI EJLP administrative team afforded me a deeper understanding of the EJ Leaders’ work and their motivations for participating in the program. However, the same could not be said for university

researchers. The second reason UC Davis researchers were chosen as interview subjects was because their perspectives were not as clear to me. The final reason they were chosen was for the purpose of gathering feedback and recommendations from faculty with various levels of experience with community-university partnerships. There are several, well-seasoned professionals with expertise in community-based and engaged work that could provide insight on how this program might be further strengthened.

Data collected through the first and second iteration of the formative evaluation were analyzed leveraging the theoretical framework interweaving feminist, critical environmental justice, design, and community-based participatory research studies. Findings from the usability testing observation were examined and iteratively coded. Memos were written after each full day of observations. Survey results were downloaded from Qualtrics and preliminarily examined in the Qualtrics-generated default summary report. The data were cleaned utilizing list-wise deletion for results that had completed less than 95% of the survey (Koundinya, 2018). Out of the eighteen individuals invited to take the survey, fourteen responded, eight of which were complete responses, yielding a usable response rate of 44%. Utilizing Qualtrics Crosstabs iQ, two cross tabulations were generated in relation to the retrospective pretest question in the survey. Findings from the survey that seemed to necessitate further clarification were emphasized through questions in the semi-structured interviews. Recordings from each interview were transcribed using Microsoft Word and anonymized. Each transcript was checked for accuracy and read over several times. Interview transcripts were coded through an iterative, reflexive process (Creswell, 2013, Chapter 8). Overall, there were eight main codes and twenty sub-codes. Themes were then developed from these codes and written in a google document that was continually updated with notes, thoughts, and additional findings.

Implementation

What is the context within which the EJLP is working to build community-university partnerships?

The first iteration of the EJLP was the “Environmental Justice Fellows Program” was intended to build community-university projects with the objectives of building the expertise of the fellows, supporting or bettering the EJ community, and informing the research and policy space on EJ issues related to transportation and energy. The aim of the program was to offer a reciprocal experience that helped participants build-capacity, influence institutional EJ research and create horizontal relationships as opposed to hierarchical. Despite intentional and deliberate design of the program, exploitative academic praxis was replicated within the relationships being built in the first year. For example, former EJLP participants have shared in the past that they experienced feelings of tokenization and superficial acknowledgement of their expertise. With the program’s initial aspirations guiding future programmatic cycles, the overall structure has been constantly evolving to more fully realize desirable outcomes for EJ Leaders. Fellows in the inaugural cohort of the “Environmental Justice Fellows Program” were paired with UC Davis researchers to create environmental justice oriented research projects. This program design was meant to center the expertise of all participants, notably the value of community expertise in this knowledge exchange process. A stipend was allocated for each EJ Fellow, providing just compensation for their knowledge exchange and labor throughout the program. During the first year of the program, these Fellows were seen as additional support for university researchers and their labs, rather than equal thought partners with their own expertise to offer. This knowledge was either unacknowledged or exploited by their university research partners. CBPR encourages co-creation from the start if and where possible (Deeb-Sossa, 2019; Creger, 2020). Designers of the program at the Institute of Transportation Studies (ITS) hoped to

co-create the structure of the program with environmental justice community-based leaders. However, due to outside obligations and limited capacity, this process did not come to fruition. Given the program was created within an academic institution without co-creation from the beginning, it makes sense that the first programmatic cycle was fraught with challenges typically found in similarly constructed CBPR projects. The application of theory is rarely as precise or uniform as it may be described in academic text. Although the intention was to build a program with a foundation of reciprocity, the acknowledgement and uplifting of community expertise was not a realized outcome. Another reason EJ Leaders may have felt tokenized might have been due to a lack of willingness to participate on the part of faculty. One of the original designers of the program, Juan Carlos Garcia Sanchez, indicated this was a major issue towards the inception of the program. In conversation with Juan Carlos, he shared that,

> "[b]y early 2021, it was clear that [the EJLP] would need buy-in from faculty and staff. Something I thought would be difficult to attain from a junior analyst (me) and a PhD student. It was evident that the project would require and benefit from a senior leader (such as a faculty director) that would bolster connections and engagement with key other university partners"

Dr. Sarah McCullough was brought on as the director of the program after it had been designed and applicants were recruited. One of her major roles was to build relationships with the university researchers at ITS and the Energy Efficiency Institute (EEI) in order to gain their support for the program.

Since being appointed director, I argue Dr. McCullough has taken a reflexive, iterative, multi-stage approach that integrated continual feedback from community-based participants throughout each programmatic cycle. In the second cycle, the program was renamed to the "Environmental Justice Leaders Program" (EJLP) to shift the language describing the EJ "Fellows" to that of "Leaders." This was an initial step the administrators took towards ensuring community expertise would be uplifted, acknowledged, and centered in this process. The length

of the program was extended from six months to nine months to allow for more time for community and relationships to be built. EJ Leaders in the second program cycle were not directly paired with university research partners. Instead, the Leaders were given access to university resources and support to develop their own projects. Many EJ Leaders indicated in the 2023 EJLP Evaluation conducted by Mayra Sánchez Barba that this project was too cumbersome, especially because the guidelines and specific expectations of the projects were nebulous (Sánchez Barba, 2023). Although the project was challenging, the EJ Leaders indicated that overall they felt respected and validated throughout their time in the program, which counters the experiences of the first year cohort. The EJ Leaders from the second year cohort indicated in the evaluation that they gained the most by connecting with one another, meaning that the program was successful in building community and space for these EJ Leaders at UC Davis. However, these Leaders also shared that they wanted more opportunities to build connections with faculty.

In comparing the first two cohorts, Dr. McCullough saw the opportunities and challenges to bettering the program for the third cycle from first hand experience and through evaluation data collected by Dr. Sánchez Barba. How might the strength of community and relationship building from the second cohort be captured throughout the process of pairing EJ Leaders with UC Davis researchers to form more reciprocal relationships as was done in the first cohort?

Redesign of EJLP for Third Program Cycle

The third iteration of the EJLP was adjusted in collaboration with a team at the Feminist Research Institute (FRI). Strong consideration was given towards input from an evaluation done by Dr. Mayra Sánchez Barba, the Research Program and Policy Manager at FRI, as well as recommendations from myself based on my own research and experience on community development studies, and Dr. Sarah McCullough's, the Executive Director of FRI, experience

with the program. The redesign process involved weekly brainstorming meetings between myself and Dr. Sánchez Barba. The goal of this third iteration of the program was to facilitate knowledge exchange between community leaders and UC Davis researchers. In addition, the program would aim to facilitate the beginning of relationship building for long-term community-university partnerships and future community-based participatory research projects. The major changes made included alterations to the application process, the addition of an EJLP advisory committee, and the reorganization of the program's structure.

Application Process

Applications were designed by Dr. Sarah McCullough and I. This was accomplished through reworking the previous year's application to target a different audience than years previous. A number of changes were made to narrow the applicant pool in an effort to better the experiences of EJ Leaders in this year's cohort. In years prior, the EJLP accepted early career professionals from across the country who were working in environmental justice. This meant that the program was serving a more professional development function than a research-orientation. Applicants for this third year needed to be working within the state of California as mid-career professionals who had some idea of what academic research work might offer their own work in mobility justice. The theme of mobility justice was selected in the hopes of targeting environmental justice professionals focused specifically on issues of transportation and energy. The hope was this would allow for easier matching between EJ Leaders and the UC Davis researchers at the Institute of Transportation Studies (ITS), the fiscal sponsor of the program.

FRI received over forty applications from community-based environmental justice leaders by the deadline of February 29, 2024. Applicants were sorted and given initial rankings based on the following criteria:

1. A history of living or working in an EJ community

2. Level of awareness of new technologies/policies and quality of match for UCD researchers
3. Clarity on how mobility justice improvements can impact community
4. Experienced and increasing responsibility professionally, with readiness to address research and policy (Resumes)

Another graduate student researcher, Coco Herda, and I distributed the workload, with each of us evaluating roughly twenty applicants. The two of us also considered their home organization's willingness to form long-term relationships with FRI. As a team, FRI staff worked through these preliminary rankings over the course of a three hour session. Each candidate was further analyzed through an intersectional approach that considered their lived experience within an environmental justice community, their geographic location within California, their existing technical knowledge, thoughtfulness and comprehension of equity implications of their work, and their socially constructed identity categories such as ethnicity and gender.

The candidate pool was narrowed to twelve applicants that were presented to the EJLP Advisory Committee for their rankings. Committee members were asked to consider the narrowed applicant pool utilizing the same criteria as FRI, and their suitability for partnering with UC Davis researchers and their labs. Six applicants were then invited to take part in the program. Once they agreed to participate, each EJ Leader was asked to fill out a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that detailed the minimum requirements for engagement.

EJLP Advisory Committee

The EJLP Advisory Committee came to fruition as a result of a recommendation from the EJLP 2023 Evaluation Report (Sánchez Barba, 2023). This advisory committee has four members including three academic professionals from different disciplines with knowledge of the EJLP and one professional at the California Air Resources Board. The rationale for establishing such a committee was to have members shape the program and build in

accountability. In the EJLP 2023 Evaluation Report, it was specified that the roles of this committee should be to 1) set clear goals and objectives for the program, and 2) draft ethical agreements and expectations for UC Davis Faculty and Researchers committed to engaging closely with Leaders. However, in practice the advisory committee has not had the capacity to draft and carry out these roles. Instead, FRI staff including myself have come up with ideas and proposed them to the committee for feedback.

Program Structure

I proposed a structure for the program, focusing on the initial relationship building process between the community EJ Leaders and their soon-to-be UC Davis research partners. Instead of working together to build projects, EJ Leaders and their UC Davis researchers would exchange knowledge over the course of the program. The proposed structure included modules, similar to workshops or meetings, accompanied by details on the target audience, the purpose of the module, objectives, and the date during which it would take place (Table 1). These modules were part of the program schedule, which also included ongoing meetings between the EJ Leaders and the staff at FRI leading the program. As previously mentioned, the draft modules were altered in an effort to meet the needs of FRI. For example, the informational activities that would have helped participants orient themselves to their partners was removed from the structure. This was the case despite the selected best practices calling upon both parties in a community-university partnership to familiarize themselves with one another's work ahead of time (Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al., 2024; London et.al., 2020). Tensions frequently arose between what the cited literature recommended and the reality of what Dr. McCullough saw as feasible practices for the program. Dr. McCullough raised concerns about the willingness of participants to participate in good faith in the informational activities and expressed that there was no mechanism that could be implemented to maintain UC Davis researchers' accountability within the program. The latter reason meant that the proposed university researcher

memorandum was not initially instituted. In addition, the capacity of FRI was brought into consideration, given that the EJLP is but one of many projects administered by FRI. Modules were altered (Table 2) to reflect these concerns. Overall, a semi-structured approach with greater flexibility in relation to the objectives was favored by the team.

EJ Leaders visited the UC Davis campus from May 2nd-3rd, 2024. As was described in former sections, the preparatory module components were set aside due to capacity constraints among other issues, and the objectives were instead tackled during the first in-person modules. This shift meant that EJ Leaders and their UC Davis research partners met in the first module without having read or learned much about one another beforehand. Each EJ Leader and university research partner unit met either at the Feminist Research Institute or at the Institute of Transportation Studies, with the exception of one online meeting. Each partnership's first module was conversational and included an introduction of their background, description on what they could offer the other, and what they would like to ask of their counterpart. These sessions lasted approximately an hour. The second module took place during the EJ Leaders' time at FRI on-campus. Dr. McCullough facilitated this session on why it is important that we ask different questions in scientific research. This module was conducted as an informal conversation between Dr. McCullough and the EJ Leaders on the history of oppression perpetuated in the name of scientific research. The objective was to offer EJ Leaders transparency on the difficulties they may face working within the system of academia. The third and final module occurred the following day and was facilitated by Jonathan London, a professor in the Community Development Graduate Group at UC Davis. His session was intended to facilitate conversation between UC Davis researcher partners and their EJ Leaders on best practices for engaging in community-based participatory research. Unfortunately, due to miscommunication and a lack of attendance, the workshop's target audience of university partners wasn't reached. Instead, the participants were the EJ Leaders. This led to a mismatch between the structure of the training, which was to build community-university partnerships. As

a result of this incident, university researcher memoranda of understanding and the community-university partnership agreement forms were drafted. These documents were shared with the EJLP Advisory Committee and the EJ Leaders to encourage transparency and collaboration. The MOU and the partnership agreements were then shared with the UC Davis researchers and their EJ Leader partners (Appendix C).

After the EJ Leaders' first in-person visit to UC Davis, they continued to meet with their university research partners via Zoom. Their first online meeting served as a space to continue the conversation they had begun in their first in-person module. EJ Leaders and their university research partners discussed more in-depth what they had to offer the other, and their specific asks of their counterparts in the knowledge exchange process. A staff member at FRI was present for each of these meetings. FRI staff helped each partnership with their community-university partnership agreement form. Each partnership form asked partners to identify their contact information and any additional personnel engaged in the partnership. EJ Leaders and their university partners then collaborated to create shared equity-related goal(s), three specific asks of their counterpart which were prioritized and given time estimates for completion, and a meeting schedule including the frequency, length, and times/ dates if possible. They were also asked to share any upcoming events for the other party to consider attending, as well as any anticipated additional visitation that might be needed other than the remaining two in-person visits of the EJ Leaders in September and January. Space was left at the bottom to encourage additional comments or sharing of relevant information. Each pair completed these forms and shared them with FRI staff. All university research partners signed the MOUs which outlined expectations of them while engaging in the program. These MOUs asked UC Davis research partners to commit to demonstrating mutual value for each other's expertise, time, and labor despite the discomfort that may be brought about in the process. These documents detailed the time commitment of twenty five hours for knowledge exchange, completion of the aforementioned community-university partnership agreement form, and

attendance at three workshops on equity and community partnership in research. Research partners are asked to monetarily support the EJLP as funding allows and participate in the remaining in-person visits of the EJ Leaders.

An additional expectation of the EJ Leaders is attendance at regular meetings with the team at FRI. These meetings are either on a bi-weekly or monthly basis with the goal of creating space for checking in, sharing knowledge, and developing skills of interest to leaders. The structure, frequency, and content of these meetings is continually informed by EJ Leaders. Towards the beginning of the program, the cohort and team at FRI would meet bi-weekly with discussion centering around how the partnerships were going. This was also a space where EJ Leaders can share about their own lives and be in community with their peers. Before the summer began, I designed and administered a survey informed by conversation in a prior check-in meeting to capture feedback from the EJ Leaders regarding their preferred meeting frequency and topics they'd most like to learn more about in future meetings. It was then determined that Leaders preferred to meet on a monthly basis throughout the summer. The top three topics of interest to leaders were 1) subcontracting with large institutions, 2) how to make community-driven policy, and 3) continuing the conversation on community-based participatory research. For each of these workshops, FRI will work with local professionals with knowledge on these topics. Guest speakers will join the meeting as either a primary or co-facilitator. EJ Leaders are invited to contribute to or help lead these workshops, in addition to proposing their own.

Findings

This research project utilized a CEJ, feminist, CBPR-oriented, design approach to understand the restructuring and administration of the EJLP as it has facilitated the beginning of community-university relationship formation while centering the long-term needs and wants of community leaders. The program is able to offer value to participants as it generates ecotones

that allow for the building community, meaningful informing of research at UC Davis, and reimagination of the ways in which knowledge is produced for transdisciplinary outcomes. An ecotone is an area where two forms of landscape meet, generating places of liminality. They are geographically "...border zones between adjacent communities of vegetation where…life forms that ordinarily require discrete conditions meet and interact" (Nixon, pg. 30) These can also be created within academic settings that uplift transdisciplinary practices. These in-between spaces allow for knowledge to transcend disciplines, where experts can create new ways of understanding and making sense of the world together (Cannon, 2020). The EJLP as a program creates ecotones for these possibilities and opportunities to exist between groups that would otherwise never interact.

Throughout this project, there has remained a dissonance between the best practices in the literature and the realities of what the EJLP can strategically undertake. The program is confronted by the challenges of operating the program including funding, time constraints, and understanding of community expertise to varying degrees. Beneath the surface of the maintenance of the EJLP, FRI is confronted by the tensions and difficulties of operating a transdisciplinary program that is attempting to bring together academics and professionals with diverse positionalities and theoretical approaches to their work. Within the context of this research project, the central challenge was understanding how the selected best practices in the literature could align with the realities of running an environmental justice program from within a feminist research center. As a result of this program though, opportunities exist to enhance community partners' capacity, open up co-creative possibilities, and ways to challenge systemic barriers to transformative change.

It is still early in the program to gauge the full impact of the structure in relation to building these relationships with mutual understanding, but there is clarity on the overall value of the EJLP to participants. To better understand the impacts of the program, this necessitates further evaluation and study. Key themes discussed include power dynamics, community

expertise, systemic barriers to transformative praxis, and the push and pull between a fluid, context-aligned approach and the need for clear expectations.

How can the EJLP help build relationships between Leaders and institutional researcher partners that will aid their community-based efforts for environmental justice outcomes in California?

This research on the third cohort attempts to shed light on this question, as it relates to how the EJLP may go about building partnerships that truly serve the long-term needs of community-based EJ Leaders. I argue that through a reflexive, iterative, multi-stage approach, the redesigned program has married the strengths of the first two programmatic cycles to the benefit of the newest cohort of EJ Leaders. The EJLP is helping to build community-university partnerships through situated, context-aligned, transdisciplinary program design and administration. This has been best accomplished by centering community expertise and diverse knowledge production processes. This overall approach is necessary given the complexity of the program and the eight partnerships simultaneously being built during the third programmatic cycle.

In the case of the EJLP, staff at FRI are utilizing an intentionally feminist approach to relationship building, serving as bridgers or boundary spanners (Cannon, 2020) between EJ leaders and university researchers. EJ Leaders are coming into this program while working within social movements in California to address environmental harms predominantly impacting low-income communities and communities of color. This work has been theorized about through critical environmental justice (CEJ) studies in academia. Both EJ Leaders and their university research partners have a diverse array of experiences working within community-university partnerships, in which many have exemplified selected best practices for community-based participatory research (CBPR). This was evident in my survey data, visually represented in

Table 3. The theoretical framework interweaving feminist, CEJ, CBPR, and design studies encapsulates the complexity of this program and the perspectives of the diverse actors involved. The implementation of this program at each stage unintentionally or purposefully leverages this theoretical framework.

The redesign of the program for the third cohort has been informed by Dr. Sarah McCullough's professional experience, and the input of EJ Leaders both informally and through the EJLP 2023 Evaluation conducted by Dr. Mayra Sánchez Barba. Both of these professionals' situated knowledge and the input of past EJ Leaders influence the direction of the EJLP. Their reflexivity aligns with their values as feminist researchers and is exemplified throughout the redesign, leadership, and administration of the EJLP. Designing the program's structure has also been an inadvertently ontological design and design for transitions approach. Those involved with the redesign at the Feminist Research Institute (FRI) engaged and continue to engage in ontological design, in which the designers are situated within the program acting as boundary spanners (Cannon, 2020). Ontological designers are reflexive, responsive, and act with an understanding of the impact that design itself has on them. In other words, designers in this discipline understand that design designs (Escobar, 2018). Although the staff at FRI are not actively considering their work as ontological design, the process through which they are designing, leading, and administering the EJLP exemplifies ontological design and design for transitions. Design for transitions, as described by Cameron Tonkinwise, is a process by which designers act from the presence of what is wanting to emerge from a situated perspective rather than what they wish to impose as a design solution (Tonkinwise, 2015). This approach is significant because it acknowledges the interplay between the program administrators, the program participants, and the structure of the program itself. Dr. McCullough has allowed for this third programmatic cycle to take form in response to what the EJ Leaders need from the program, rather than imposing ideas of what the program ought to be. This approach is not

without its challenges, but it provides flexibility for the structure to design its participants while they in turn design it back over multiple, flexible stages.

Candidate Selection Process

The application revamp and candidate selection process were informed by the successes and failures of previous years gathered through the lived experiences of previous participants and leaders of the program. One of the challenges of the second year cohort was that discussions on policy were less beneficial for out of state EJ Leaders. “If policy advocacy remains part of the program, given Davis’s proximity to Sacramento, it would possibly be more advantageous to limit the Leaders to California” (Sánchez Barba, 2023). In addition, building lasting relationships from across the country was difficult for participants. To address these challenges, the third year cohort was constituted of EJ professionals based in California in order to ensure that the upcoming EJ Leaders could get the most out of the experience. An explicitly intersectional feminist approach was taken throughout the application process. The team at FRI collaboratively examined the geographic location, lived experience within an EJ community, gender, and occupational positionality for each candidate. Each candidate was evaluated through a set of collaborative processes, which is demonstrative of a multi-stage process that is aligned with design for transitions theory (Tonkinwise, 2015). Applicants were additionally evaluated based on how well their research interests aligned with potential research partners. Likewise, the selection of the university research partners was specific and intentional so that all partnerships were formed with two partners who had clear mutual interests. This process was informed by selected community partnership best practices. Aligning interests amongst partners and uplifting community knowledge are seen as essential to building successful, sustainable partnerships. The emphasis of the latter is also essential to ensuring CBPR projects in formation are truly to the benefit of the community partners as well as the university researchers.

The matrix of domination is constituted of the systems of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and settler colonialism (Hill Collins, 2014). Given that the EJLP is an institutionalized program, the matrix of domination stands to be replicated as it exists within academia without careful consideration and intentionality (Libiron, 2021). It is possible to a certain degree to prevent this replication of harm and act with such intentionality, but challenges remain given the constraints of maintaining the program. The candidate selection and partnership matching processes continue to be limited by the fiscal sponsors of the program, ITS and EEI. EJ Leaders were chosen to best fit within the confines of what research was being funded at UC Davis. ITS is led by a Chevron endowed chair, meaning that there is money flowing into the institute from fossil fuel companies. There were several applicants who weren't selected because of their focus on biking in their work rather than electric vehicle transportation. ITS and EEI expect that a majority of the EJ Leaders will work with their researchers and faculty. Biking professionals were less likely to have a match at ITS as the conversations around sustainability at the institute focus on electric vehicles and less so active and public transportation. The EJLP requires EJ Leaders to fit into the confines of the system as it exists, and at present ITS is funded through a fossil fuel capitalist model. As Audre Lorde has said, "[f]or the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 1983). Despite the FRI's best efforts, EJ Leaders will likely continue to be chosen based on the wants of the fiscal partners given that without funding, community partners are frequently unable to participate in such partnerships. This will be discussed further in the following sections.

Goals and Objectives of the EJLP

The application of this feminist, design, critical EJ, CBPR informed approach means that the goals and objectives of the program are specific to each partnership in development. Since

each partnership is distinct, the preferred outcomes for each will differ and emerge on different time scales. This acknowledgement of the diversity of contexts across partnerships is strategic and counter to the blanket application of solutions that is frequently touted as equitable. Feminist STS, ontological design, and design for transitions studies challenge this blanket approach to equity with an argument for a situated approach. As the program's director, Dr. Sarah McCullough is acting as an explicitly feminist, and unintentionally situated designer facilitating "a process of action research, coming to understand by making changes" (Tonkinwise, 2015). The goals and objectives of the program are not explicitly stated, not because they are not present, but because they are in a constant state of becoming with an opening of opportunities occurring at each stage of the program. For example, the ongoing meetings with the EJLP team and the EJ Leaders were not established until after polling the EJ Leaders on what they would like to learn and discuss. The general goal of these meetings is to provide space for knowledge sharing, and the objectives came to exist through gathering feedback and discussion with participants.

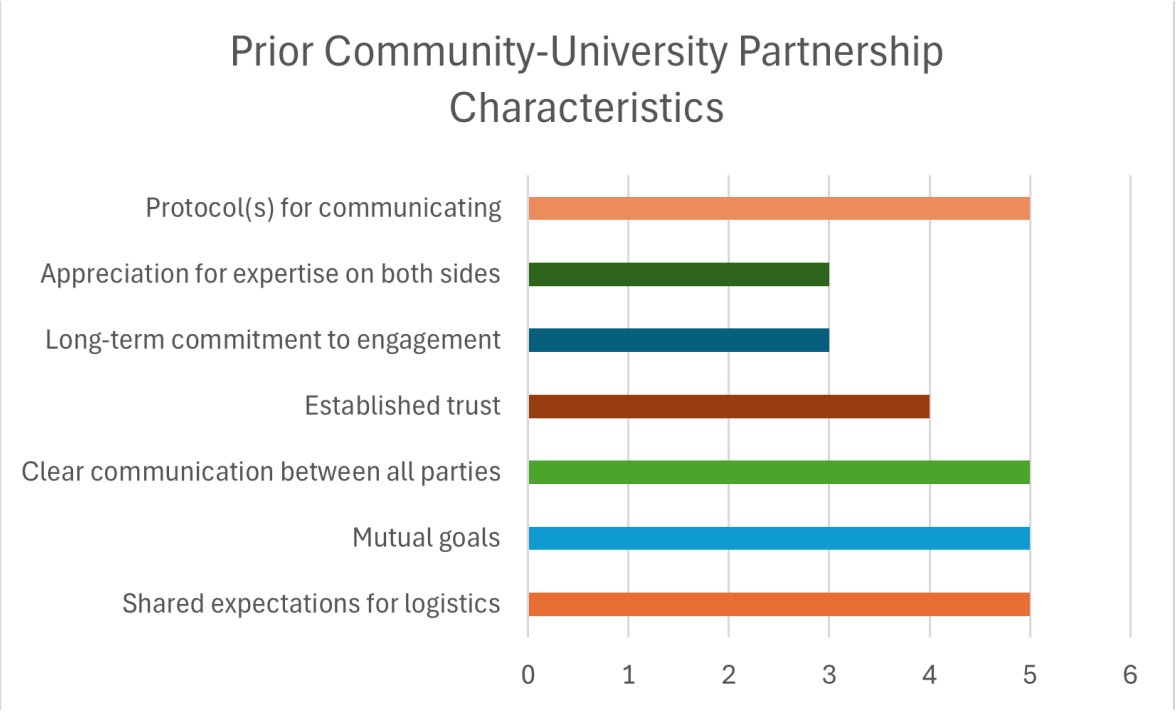
The shift to emphasizing mutual knowledge sharing and production is more adaptive of an overarching goal than years prior, which had EJ Leaders working to create projects with UC Davis researchers. This approach allows for EJ Leaders to more directly determine the outcomes they want to achieve through the program overall, while compensating them for their labor in this process that is rarely funded. This is also supported by the selected literature. "Scholarship on the subject [of transdisciplinary research] has found that the pressure to produce usable results—as defined in relationship to a disciplines' norms and values—needs to be reduced in order to increase collaboration" (Cannon, 2020). A majority of participants indicated in the survey and interviews that they hope to exchange knowledge, develop community, and build long-lasting partnerships with others through the program. How the program can go about assisting in accomplishing these goals is aligned with each participant's respective positionality, meaning a situated approach is necessary to best suit the needs of

each EJ Leader. Overall though, the program generates ecotones where such knowledge exchange is possible amongst the cohort and within their partnerships. However, this design approach has posed challenges from many participants, both EJ Leaders and UC Davis researchers, across program cycles who remain confused about the expectations, guidelines, and intended outcomes. This will be further discussed in a subsequent section.

Prior Community-University Partnership Experience

University researchers and the EJ Leaders are coming together to engage in the EJLP with differing levels of experience working in community-university partnerships. In the survey of 8 participants from the EJLP who fully completed the survey, 62% of those surveyed indicated they have previously engaged in a community-university partnership. Participants were then asked if the previous partnership exhibited a choice of seven characteristics, along with space to provide "other," that were ideal characteristics for mutually beneficial relationship formation compiled from CBPR literature.

Table 3 - Characteristics of Prior Community-University Partnerships from Survey Data



All five of the participants indicated that the partnership exhibited clear communication between all parties, indicated that the partnership had shared expectations for logistics, and that the partnership had mutual goals. All survey participants that engaged in a prior community-university partnership indicated that it had been at least moderately successful for themselves and/or their organization. These survey results indicate that more than half of program participants have prior experience with varying degrees of successful community-university partnerships.

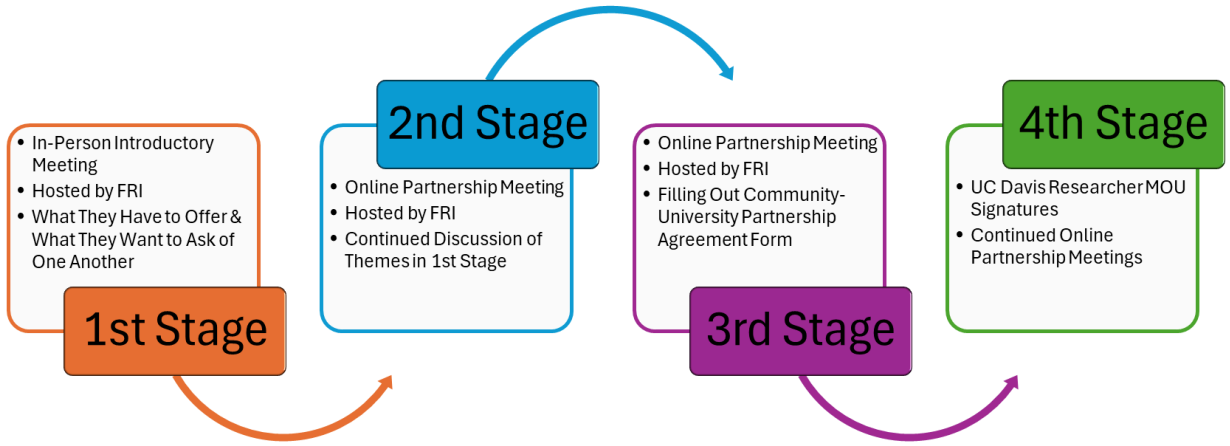
Although they exhibited some important characteristics, at least two of these partnerships may have benefited university partners more than their community-based counterparts. Neither of the two EJ Leaders who had been involved in a prior partnership indicated that there was established trust nor an appreciation for expertise on both sides. One of the EJ Leaders elaborated “[i]t's a mixed bag. Some experiences felt truly mutual and some felt one-sided. This probably has to do with who is leading the project.” Some of the key attributes that ensure a given community partner is benefiting from partnership with a university are these characteristics (establishing trust and long-term commitment to engagement) that were present most, but not all of the time according to university research partners surveyed. This indicates that in order for the EJLP to help build relationships between UC Davis researchers and EJ Leaders that will aid their community-based efforts for environmental justice outcomes in California, the program must be designed in a way that further emphasizes the creation and/or development of these characteristics for each partnership. This must be done through designing and implementing the program centering the lived experiences, expertise, and needs of EJ Leaders. I argue the program has begun this process, yet it is still too early to tell the success of these efforts.

Building Community-University Partnerships

The EJLP is building eight community-university partnerships between the six EJ Leaders and seven university research partners. Two EJ Leaders are working collaboratively with one UC Davis research center. In addition, two EJ Leaders are simultaneously building two partnerships with different university research partners. A multi-stage process is facilitating this partnership formation, with stages including 1) initial in-person introductory meetings, 2) first online meeting facilitated by a staff member at FRI, 3) second online meeting to complete the community-university partnership agreement, and 4) signing of MOUs by all participants. At each stage, partnerships require different types and degrees of assistance given that each is distinct. The approach by FRI in designing and administering the EJLP allows for these steps to adapt to the situated needs of each partnership unit in formation.

Ecotones are possible because of different aspects of the program's structure. I argue that EJLP is creating these transdisciplinary spaces where EJ Leaders and UC Davis researchers can co-create possibilities and futures in which multiple ways of knowing and seeing the world can exist together (Cannon, 2020). FRI staff continue to operate as boundary-spanners to design and open spaces where partners can work through questions, projects, and challenges together. Within these ecotones, community-based leaders and university researchers can collaborate in more reciprocal, less hierarchical ways for the benefit of both parties. The opportunities that arise from these spaces are those of co-creation, capacity enhancement for EJ Leaders, long-term partnerships, and the generation of new knowledge and frameworks to the benefit of both parties. The EJLP has an opportunity to enhance the impact of these ecotones by welcoming in more UC Davis partners from diverse disciplines related to environmental justice.

Diagram 1 - Realized Beginning Stages of Partnership Formation



Across the 1st stage (initial in-person introductory meetings), also known as module 1, participant observation notes demonstrated variability in the suitability of the matches, how participants interacted with each other, and to what extent each was seen as an expert in the eyes of their counterpart. Of the five meetings examined, three of them needed little to no help from FRI staff in facilitating the meeting. Those three quickly established their commonalities, expressing this with phrases like “it seems that we have a lot in common.” Two EJ Leaders who were paired up with one research center expressed a number of their concerns working in their field. “I’m not listened to, especially as a woman,” one EJ Leader explained. In this particular meeting, there was open, frank conversation with light banter and laughter. By the end of the meeting, the participants in the partnership were discussing an upcoming funding opportunity for which they could collaborate and apply together. From the beginning, this partnership exemplified a spirit of co-creation scholars such as Kim Tallbear emphasize as essential to

countering the status quo research approach (Tallbear, 2014). The remaining two meetings that occurred with ease included participants who shared similar knowledge and expertise. One EJ Leader communicated at length their personal experiences that led them to their environmental justice work. The other EJ Leader casually went back and forth with their UC Davis research partner as if they were already colleagues with similar connections in the field.

The remaining two meetings exemplified different dynamics. Both of these meetings were more directly guided by Dr. Sarah McCullough. One of these meetings was more balanced than the other, with both participants exhibiting active listening practices such as nodding their heads when the other was talking. In this meeting, the EJ Leader shared their background and expertise, which was promptly acknowledged by the university researcher as something that could be utilized in their work. This may be representative of a common challenge in community-university partnerships and academic research in general, where community expertise and knowledge is co-opted by university researchers. Feminist scholars caution that even CBPR can allow for the co-opting and misrepresentation of the ‘subaltern voice’ (Tuck & Yang, 2014). It is too early to determine though if this will be a challenge in this partnership; rather, it exemplifies how the EJ Leaders may be viewed in differing ways by university researchers. Similarly, the remaining meeting highlighted troubling power dynamics that can present in these partnerships. Rather than a reciprocal conversation, the session was inadvertently led by the university researcher in a seemingly interview format. The EJ Leader did not get through their introduction before this university researcher interrupted to dive deeper into technical conversation. The prompts discussed in the other four meetings were hardly, if at all, touched upon during this meeting. These results demonstrate the variability inherent in building community-university partnerships through an institutional program. No one-size-fits-all approach can be successful across these partnerships as each one has its own unique challenges. However, there are ways that the program has provided structure that has helped this process and added value to participant experience.

Community University Partnership and Memoranda of Understanding Forms

The memoranda of understanding (MOU) and community-university partnership agreement form (Appendix C) were implemented as components of the program structure to help develop expectations and goals for these partnerships. University researchers who agreed to take part in the program signed MOU's that led with the statement, "[t]he premise of this program is that community members are knowledgeable experts and potential research collaborators. These collaborations can lead to more accurate results and greater equity" (Feminist Research Institute, 2024). The MOU was also explicit in calling upon these partners to "demonstrate mutual value for each other's expertise, time, and labor" (Feminist Research Institute, 2024). When drafting this MOU, FRI leadership ensured that community expertise was centered and emphasized in writing and through the formulation process. EJ Leaders and the EJLP Advisory Committee were welcomed as collaborators on this document. "Partnerships are most successful when they are grounded in recognizing each partners' equal expertise, power and ownership, and increasing input and decision-making from diverse perspectives" (Creger, 2020, pg.5). These forms also state "[t]hese encounters may bring about discomfort. We encourage both parties to 'embrace the discomfort' in order to grow" (Feminist Research Institute, 2024). MOUs were drafted and circulated in response to a lack of university researcher attendance at a workshop on CBPR best practices during the EJ Leaders' first visit. This document was explicit in its intent to center community expertise among other values of the program, and the expectations of university researchers.

Partnership meetings, both online and in person, are spaces where uncomfortable, real dialogue was encouraged between EJ Leaders and their research partners. Challenges, or threats (Nixon, 2011) that arise from working within ecotones are made clear to partners, but so are the possibilities and potentials. The community-university partnership agreements (Appendix C) helped to outline the latter, which were filled out collaboratively between the EJ

Leaders and their university partners. These agreements asked participants to establish shared equity goals, requests of one another, meeting schedules, and share important logistical information. University researcher #4 shared the following in relation to these documents:

> "So I I would say, I appreciate having those kinds of materials just in that, you know. I think just having an opportunity to really be intentional and explicit about why folks are coming together and what their goals are. I think that's always a good way to come, you know, to start things off, and to have some really clear expectations and parameters on both sides is really helpful."

Each community-university partnership took a different approach to filling out this document according to their own situated, context-aligned needs. University researcher #1 and their EJ Leader changed the format of the document to include additional sections that they both felt were important to have in writing. A researcher in a different partnership felt the form was unnecessary for their partnership, but added that it would likely be helpful for others with less aligned interests.

> "I think I actually felt like maybe we didn't need to do that, because we had already established a way to work together. However, if because we have this common interest, however, if we hadn't, I think it would be important, if there's like a faculty member or a fellow that are a little bit more apprehensive or they're not quite sure, they haven't really identified common ground. I think going through that worksheet would probably help the two parties identify a way to work together…And even when we filled it out, we ended up identifying some additional things that we were going to do." - University researcher #2

This quote collected during interviews with UC Davis research partners may indicate that an even less structured approach for the program may be more appropriate for partnerships with well aligned interests. However, the same research partner also indicated in this quote that additional ideas came from working through the form together. The form adds both the potential for accountability and value for the partnership, yet the degree to which it does is dependent on the participants own lived experiences, goals, and interests. University researcher #4 indicated that they found the form helpful in establishing shared goals and a structure for accountability

that could be referenced in the future when the collaboration felt imbalanced. It's still unclear though for some if these structures are successful in building accountability of the participants to the EJLP.

> "I would I say [the MOU and partnership agreement] are good. I mean, again, like jury's out, right? So, like, we filled it out, but we don't know, … I don't know what's gonna happen yet because we haven't started it. But I I thought those were good moves. I think the MOU and the, and the partnership agreement were, were helpful. And, you know, it was it was good process working on it together. And I think the outcome, you know, provided something of value" - University researcher #3

The insights from these university researchers indicate that it may be too early to definitively say whether or not the forms and MOUs implemented are having the intended effects. What this data demonstrates though is that the process of moving through this adaptive program structure, specifically the community-university partnership forms, has added value to their experiences and their partnerships. Process is as important as the outcomes to FRI. As these participants move through this structure that is meant to facilitate the building of right relationships, they are practicing how to embody this. This is significant as "[n]ew embodied routines slowly become collective, eventually transforming social consciousness and institutional structures" (Escobar, 2018). A baseline commitment to the principles outlined in both the MOUs and the community-university partnership agreements lays the groundwork for building mutual confidence and trust, which are essential for collaborative research (Cannon, 2020).

Developing Community

In addition to building partnerships between the EJ Leaders and their university research partners, FRI also facilitates the development of community amongst the cohort and FRI staff. This is accomplished through regular meetings with the EJ Leaders online and during their

in-person visits to UC Davis. During the first months of the program, FRI established bi-weekly meetings with the cohort to begin this process. These meetings remain flexible and adaptive to the needs and wants of the EJ Leaders. Discussion with EJ Leaders during one of the bi-weekly meetings helped inform the schedule for the summer as well as guide the topics of the summer meetings. A poll was administered to the participants to gauge their top three meeting topics. The team at FRI then reached out to local leaders of community-based organizations and requested that they facilitate these conversations. This is representative of ontological design, in which the participants are seen as active participants in the design and development of the program. Rather than Dr. McCullough selecting what she might infer is best for the EJ Leaders, she defers to their desires of what they would like to see for the program.

Time was allocated for discussion and community building throughout the first in-person visit of the EJ Leaders to UC Davis. Dr. McCullough led module 2 which was initially to be a presentation, but given technical issues became a transparent, engaging conversation on how university research historically and presently exploits and oppresses low income communities and people of color. There were several points where the room filled with laughter as EJ Leaders joked around with one another and staff at FRI. The environment appeared welcoming and EJ Leaders seemed to be at ease with both the staff at FRI and one another. While module 1 was occurring for different leaders, there was a community collage project available in the main room for EJ Leaders waiting to meet their university research partners. The theme of the collage was mobility justice and while they created it, EJ Leaders shared conversations about their work and personal lives. This activity was integrated as a way for EJ Leaders to engage in a process of ‘forward dreaming’ together (Sze, 2020). “Art is an indispensable feature of creative sustenance and renewal” (Sze, 2020) especially in community with others. Forward dreaming counters the narratives of pain too frequently centered when working with systematically oppressed communities (Tuck, 2014). Later that day, the EJ Leaders attended dinner and a screening for the film “Biking While Black” in Sacramento. The film screening and

panel similarly emphasized forward dreaming, creating space for dialogue on how Sacramento could become a safer place for Black bikers.

This emphasis on developing community amongst the cohort is aligned with the EJ Leaders' desires and motivations for joining the program. Survey results indicated that EJ Leaders joined the program with the hopes of connecting with other EJ Leaders, exchanging knowledge amongst one another, and advancing one another's work. This is also representative of an ontological design approach. Participants are actively designing the program, as the EJLP in turn develops community and structure that facilitates their goals.

What is the effectiveness of the proposed structure in facilitating this relationship building?

Data collected for this study indicates that community-university partnerships are successfully being built to varying degrees. It remains unclear from the data if the program's structure has shifted what participants prioritize when working within community-university partnerships. I argue that this is not a negative reflection on the program as participants joined the program with different entry-level capacity to engage in these partnerships. Differently from previous cohorts, there is evidence that the EJ Leaders may be benefiting more from the structure than their predecessors. A remaining challenge is a lack of clarity on expectations and the goals of the program from the perspective of university research partners. Overall, it is still too early to tell if the changes made to the program have helped build long-term relationships with mutual understanding as further research is needed to draw such conclusions.

Participants indicated in the survey that they were either neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied with tested aspects of the program. A neutral stance was greatest for the program's facilitation of relationship building and relevance of program tasks to their needs. Interview questions attempted to dive deeper into why that might be the case and if university researchers

agreed with this neutrality. Three of the university researchers shared that they were satisfied with the facilitation of relationship building by the program. The program structure itself appears to be most useful in generating ecotones, which connect EJ Leaders with university researchers interested in building relationships with structured support from FRI.

> "...[T]he fact that there is the infrastructure there where you had a whole selection process and you have some orientation and you have team building support for them like that's great. Like that's that's definitely value add for sure and, and even though I've done this stuff a lot, you know, it's, I I don't have to be the single point of contact. You know, I don't have to come up with a new template for an MOU. You know, I don't all those things that, that that FRI can pick up, so I would say that that's certainly valuable," - University Researcher #3

All interviewees expressed that the program's existence is helpful. Another university researcher shared that the structure of the program is amazing because it takes an intersectional, social-justice based approach seriously. However, this same university researcher also stated that they felt neutral towards the facilitation of relationship building because of the inability to build trust in such a short period of time. The structure of the program is lacking in the amount of time it affords participants to build these relationships.

In addition, three of the four interviewees communicated that they were struggling to understand the goals and expectations of the program. For two of the university researchers, they indicated that it was less of an issue because they had greater synergy with their EJ Leader partners. These challenges regarding time and clarity of expectations will be further addressed in a subsequent section. Despite these challenges, six of the eight survey participants indicated that they were satisfied with the structure of the program. Across all four interviews, half expressed satisfaction with their partnerships and the other half shared that they felt it was still too early to make a determination. All interviewees and several survey respondents indicated that it is still early to draw definitive conclusions.

There were minor, insignificant shifts in priorities for survey respondents when asked how they prioritized different practices for creating community-university partnerships before and during the program. Shifts were seen primarily for prioritizing practices including understanding of partner's experience and outlining of capacity within a partnership. These shifts occurred despite prior experience with community-university partnerships. This was a surprising finding given that it was expected that greater shifts would occur for those who did not have prior experience. However, a majority of participants (62.5%, n=8) had previously engaged in a community-university partnership, which may explain why there are insignificant differences. If participants entered the program with a good understanding of how to build these partnerships, they are less likely to be impacted by a general introduction to engaging in community-university partnerships. The survey data show that there was no shift for UC Davis researchers, and that the minor shifts in priorities were primarily amongst the four EJ Leaders who responded. Interview data assists in shedding light on this question further.

University researcher #2 indicated that they came in with an open mind with no concrete expectations of the program. "I don't think [priorities] changed because I don't think I had any prior expectations, necessarily." Other university researchers indicated during interviews that they came in with their own understandings of how to best work with community partners. In addition, prioritization may not have shifted for these university researchers because utilization of different best practices is situational and contextual for each partnership. "I don't, I think what you would prioritize would depend on how the relationship develops with the individual, like at least from my perspective," said university researcher #2. Participants' attitudes and perceptions may not be shifting not because the program is ineffective, but because they have prior experience and the way each partnership is constructed necessitates a different approach to applying best practices. The program's structure takes this into account through its iterative, reflexive design. For example, FRI provided a community-university partnership form, but participants were able to alter it. Working through that form allowed each partnership to

determine their goals and ways of communicating, and provided a means for future reference and reflection.

Unlike prior years, data indicates that the EJLP may be accomplishing the goal of building community-university partnerships that center the needs of EJ Leaders. University researchers in past programmatic cycles benefited from co-opting the expertise of the EJ Leader as though they were a student or extra support staff in their lab. These accounts from former EJ Leaders have been shared with the leadership of the EJLP. This paternalistic approach to research is an ongoing problem within community-university partnerships, as community-based leaders struggle to have their expertise seen as legitimate (Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024). Through observations during module 1, it appeared that one of the five partnerships examined is potentially struggling with a replication of this hierarchical power dynamic. The other four partnerships that were observed exhibited preliminary qualities of more reciprocal relationships such as ease of communication and alignment of goals and interests. This is mirrored in the interviews with university researchers who shared that they felt the program was adding value for their EJ Leader, and to varying degrees themselves. University researcher #4 alluded to a very different challenge present in this year's cohort.

> "Yeah, I mean, I - it might actually be the converse right now that I, I feel like, I definitely see there being a lot of value for the partner, particularly just because, like, they seem to have a lot of need. And that's become very apparent in the conversations. That, you know, they have a lot of capacity needs" - University researcher #4

This university partner felt that the benefit to their EJ Leader was significant, while the value added for them was less clear. The EJ Leader in this instance is gaining needed support for their community-based efforts that they would not have otherwise received without the program. In this instance, the program has been successful in centering and supporting the needs of the EJ Leaders while building these relationships. This may signify a change in the power dynamics that have troubled previous cohorts. However, this is still representative of a non-reciprocal

relationship that may harm the program in the long-run. Since its inception, the EJLP has struggled to garner support and participation from UC Davis faculty. Without this buy-in, the program is unsustainable unless FRI were to alter the structure and find alternative funding sources. This is an unfortunate reality of running a program within an institution that has and continues to perpetuate systems of oppression. Academic knowledge production and institutions are rooted in settler colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2014), structural racism, and white supremacy (Creger, 2020). If the EJLP hopes to further garner funding from these university research partners to continue running the program, the benefit of working with an EJ Leader to exchange knowledge must be apparent. That is the nature of this transactional model, which was hinted at and will be discussed in more detail in a following section.

A threat to the effectiveness of the EJLP is a lack of clarity on expectations and goals of the program for university research partners, and potentially EJ Leaders. Interview and survey data suggest that this flexible, iterative, multi-stage approach has left participants confused and wanting for more information. In the EJLP 2023 Evaluation, leaders, faculty, and policymakers all emphasized the need for additional clarity regarding expectations and outcomes of the program. These findings may represent a pattern that stands to harm the effectiveness of the program given that setting clear, shared expectations for communication, scale, and scope are necessary for undertaking collaborative processes (Cannon, 2020; Creger, 2020; London et.al., 2020). Three out of the four university researchers interviewed for this study had difficulties defining the expectations of themselves and their EJ Leader partner. One university researcher indicated “I don't, I'm not too sure if, [pause] if [EJ Leader] has or knows all the expectations of the program as well, right?” The approach to the program’s administration and design allows for flexible adaptation, but it simultaneously leaves participants wanting more information. This university researcher elaborated,

> “I think some aspects where I think the program could improve. Is, uh, being clear about expectations of all parties, right? Whether that be as individuals, … the EJ leaders, and the

> mentors. I think everything needs to be really well defined and I don't, I, I get some of that and some of that is defined. But I don't, [pause] I don't feel like, that's fully defined" - University researcher #1

Despite the EJLP's inability to adopt all of the selected best practices, this challenge must be addressed as it is not an isolated phenomenon. In the 2023 EJLP Evaluation, Dr. Sánchez Barba collected data from former EJ Leaders that suggested "the Leaders found that the guidelines and expectations to develop [the 2023] project were unclear" (Sánchez Barba, 2023). As a result, some EJ Leaders from the 2023 cohort did not complete the project. General knowledge exchange has replaced the project component for this year's program. It's been left to each partnership to decide how they'd like to go about this knowledge exchange. That may not be a difficulty for every partnership. Another university researcher described the program as abstract, "and, maybe like the intention is the program is abstract and like we figure out how to work with the partners and vice versa like best." However, this was not framed as a negative or detracting factor for the program's effectiveness by this UC Davis partner. In fact, this university researcher suggested that this may be a positive approach for some partnerships.

> "So, maybe keeping it abstract can be beneficial because you know us and the, the two fellows like we're working well together. But you know, maybe for others they would benefit from a clearer understanding of, like what is expected of the university researcher, what the fellows, expectations of them are" - University researcher #2

This quote suggests that the EJLP structure, design, and administration, in favoring a more flexible, nebulous approach, are not necessarily leading to negative outcomes for participants. However, university researcher #4 expressed confusion and concerns in regards to the lack of programmatic expectations of their team. These results indicate that a situated, context-aligned approach is helpful for the diversity of partnerships, but additional transparency and clarity would improve the experience of some participants. The outlining of clear expectations would

potentially increase the impact and effectiveness of the program in establishing reciprocal relationships.

Analysis of which entities have agency to make such alterations may be helpful to understand how to enhance the effectiveness of the EJLP. As the leadership for the program, FRI in partnership with the EJLP Advisory Committee has agency to change the application and selection processes, as well as the overall programming. FRI could implement steps to ensure that clear expectations are communicated from the beginning, and that participants have access to streamlined information throughout the duration of the EJLP. The team at FRI is challenged in doing so due to the constraint of funding. The EJLP is steadily receiving fewer funds from their fiscal sponsors, ITS and EEI. Limited capacity is a challenge for leadership at FRI running the EJLP as previously stated. In order to best implement these changes, FRI needs more support, either monetarily or through administrative assistance from ITS and EEI. These institutes have significantly more resources at their disposal than FRI, and as a result they may hold more power within the UC Davis ecosystem. Such power could be better leveraged to support the EJLP if ITS and the EEI truly value the work of the program.

Across interviews and data collected from the survey, it is apparent that the program is adding value for participants to varying degrees. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this formative, developmental evaluation as the program is still in its early stages. These preliminary findings demonstrate that the partnerships in formation are generally aided by the structure of the program and the value added to EJ Leaders differs from previous programmatic cycles. Challenges in relation to time, communication of clear expectations, and reciprocity will be further explored.

What are the challenges and opportunities to build these partnerships?

This approach to redesigning, leading, and administering the EJLP has generated both challenges and opportunities. Challenges manifested in this program relating to time, funding, and the varying degrees of understanding community expertise are persistent problems for community-university partnerships across the country. Opportunities have also arisen in the face of these challenges, as the EJLP is creating ecotones or spaces of transdisciplinary possibilities, bolstering co-creative potentials for partnerships, and enhancing capacity of participants and their organizations. While challenging the systemic barriers it is working to change, FRI has created the right conditions to further alter the ways UC Davis researchers view and interact with community partners.

Within the context of this project, the central theme that was both a challenge and an opportunity was the tension between what the literature called for versus what was possible for this program. This research project faced difficulties when attempting to implement selected best practices from a complex theoretical framework. Tensions exist between scholars in CBPR, Critical EJ, feminist STS, and design studies, as well as between theory and praxis. Through these tensions though, new possibilities arise and may point to how the EJLP can generate a new model for going about administering transdisciplinary programs with a feminist approach.

Challenges

The challenges the EJLP faces are not unique to this program as community-university partnerships will uphold the systemic inequities of the institutions within which they operate unless intentional action is taken to counter them. Difficulties that were evident in data collection related to time, funding, and varying degrees of understanding community expertise. This is in addition to the central challenge of the tension between theory and praxis, which will be discussed in a later section.

Time

Community-based participatory work takes a significant amount of time. Communities who have been frequent research subjects have potentially faced extractive practices in the name of settler colonial science (Tallbear, 2014), and/or extraction of their knowledge and stories predominantly centering their pain and shortcomings (Tuck & Yang, 2014). As a result, there may be a great deal of mistrust and hesitation among such communities when considering whether or not to partner with universities (Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024). This is especially true for communities of color, indigenous communities, latinx and migrant communities who have been the subjects of research with little to no benefit returning to their communities from these studies. In order to build relationships between communities and universities, institutional researchers need to first allocate a significant amount of time to establish trust (Cutler et.al, 2024). A long-term commitment by university researchers to a given community is most ideal. However, this is challenging to attain given the time constraints of the program.

The EJLP works to facilitate this initial stage in the relationship building process over the course of nine months with a minimum of twenty five hours working collaboratively to exchange knowledge. This may not be enough time for robust partnership formation. One researcher indicated that time and trust are linked, with trust being built over time as a key component of successful partnerships. This university researcher had prior experience working in partnership with community leaders. They expressed how it took about fifteen years to establish the community-based organization they helped to collaboratively build. Another interviewee had direct experience with a program meant to build community-university partnerships to conduct participatory action research (PAR) projects. They indicated that this program's timeframe of one and a half years was helpful to allow for more robust relationship building. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) practitioners in the literature similarly state that this process will be time consuming when done right (Cutler et.al, 2024; London et.al.,

2020). This is a challenge for the program given its short lifespan in comparison to exemplar case studies.

There is concern that university researchers already lack time to dedicate to programs such as this. “Yeah, people, everyone is so, like everyone is so time constrained at a university,” said university researcher #2. Despite university researchers’ interest in participating in the EJLP, systemic issues factor heavily for many research faculty given the additional challenge of funding. Some university research partners depend on grants to continue their work, effectively equating their time with funding:

> “Like 100% of my time is funded by grants and contracts. And so I should be spending 100% of my time working on stuff that like, pays, pays me, right? And I'm doing things like this does not pay me and so it takes time away from that so it's just like a, like it's hard to allocate time towards something for which, there's no like, you know, funding for, right, like I'm soft funded that I need to be working on programs” - University researcher #2

This is not the case for all university research partners. Teaching faculty and professors later in their careers may have more flexibility when it comes to allocating time to community-based participatory work. A different UC Davis researcher indicated that “my time commitment [to this program] is not massive.” In comparison, community leaders and organizations face similar challenges to research faculty. CBPR projects continually run the risk of reducing the capacity of community organizations given that they are also time constrained with fewer resources at their disposal compared to those operating within a massive system like the University of California. Time remains a challenge for both EJ Leaders and their university partners.

Funding

Funding is an ever-persistent challenge within the context of any CBPR work. The initial phase of building a given partnership between communities and universities is not typically included in grants. Systemic barriers at the state further complicate the ability for university

researchers to justly compensate community partners. CBPR initiatives may rely on in-kind donations of labor and time from their participants. This challenge alters potentially transformative, collaborative programs such as the EJLP in ways that perpetuate the matrix of domination, specifically capitalistic processes. A transactional model appears inevitable under these circumstances.

Both EJ Leaders and their university research partners struggle with different funding challenges. Historically, university researchers have engaged in researching communities, especially communities of color and lower-income communities, without properly nor justly compensating them for their efforts (Creger, 2020). Best practices for CBPR call on university researchers to allocate resources to compensate community members for their knowledge and collaboration. This is seen as essential for building mutually beneficial, equitable partnerships (Creger, 2020; Cutler, 2024). In the state of California, there are systemic barriers to doing so.

> “And when you apply for this funding, um there's limits on how much funding can be subcontracted out to non UC or or Cal state organizations, which and that applies to community based organizations. So if I want to work with a community based organization. There's like, say, there's $100,000 of funding, like, I think it's like 25% or something like that. Or I think it's like whichever is less like 25% or $50,000. And so like, sometimes you cannot give sufficient funding to a community organization for them to work with you. Or you can only give them like 25 K and that's not enough for them to do the work. So there's these, like structural impediments to actually doing like this community engaged research using some particular funding sources like, like if we want to work with a community based organization and we want them to help us do some listening sessions, and some like focus groups and you know stuff like that and it would be like $100,000 like. They will be like, oh, no, you can't do that. We won't give you that funding to do that” - Researcher #2

The state government of California limits the amount of funding particular research grants can allocate to compensating their community partner. Systemic research funding challenges stand to reinforce the matrix of domination as university researchers are privileged in this power

dynamic as the ones who can apply for and distribute this funding. Fiscal sponsors of academic research determine what projects and university researchers will be funded. As a result, research in the interest of capitalist gains seems inevitable. This results in transactional approaches to community-university partnerships. The university research faculty member quoted above seems to be linking time with money. If the time university researchers spend is not bringing in research funding, they are less able or unable to do their work. However, the university researcher remains atop a hierarchy, albeit constrained within the parameters of this funding apparatus, but with the power to decide whether or not to engage with community leaders.

"There is often a dramatic difference in wealth and power between a university or a tech company and a community-based non-profit organization" (Cutler, 2024, pg.10). University researchers, especially within the University of California system, have an immense wealth of resources available to them in comparison to their EJ Leader counterparts. Community-based environmental justice leaders and their organizations face severe challenges while operating under the current extractive capitalist economy. Obtaining adequate funding typically requires advanced capacity and knowledge of the grant making process. Larger grants take a significant amount of time and organizational capacity throughout the application process. When these organizations must continually spend their time pulling together funding, their capacity to organize and fight for environmental justice is hindered. In addition to being resource constrained, the slow violence they are subjected to on a daily basis that is a direct result of turbo-capitalism places them at the bottom of societal hierarchy as disposable people (Nixon, 2011). They must not only fight for resources, but also fight for their community members' and their own lives.

A UC Davis researcher interviewed for this study with prior experience on both sides of community-university partnerships expressed that securing adequate funding for community members remains a major limiting factor to building these research relationships. Selected

literature echoes this sentiment. This university researcher indicated that for a particular program, “the funding, while there was some support like it was very limited. What you know, the much larger level of support was provided in kind through training and coaching and capacity building and bringing people together” said university researcher #4. The systemic devaluing of what community members can offer university researchers is apparent in these anecdotes and mirrors the literature. This is despite the fact that researchers working with community partners from the very start of a research project “can produce better, more useful research from the first step” (Cutler, 2024, pg.17).

When time is equated with money, and those with power and money are able to decide whether or not to engage with community members, a transactional model appears inevitable. Within this model, community leaders and their organizations are at the whim of university researchers and larger institutions that ask them to prove the value of what they offer to enhance research outcomes with limited to no compensation. The EJLP is not immune to this as it struggles to maintain buy-in from university researchers, who indirectly determine the funding that will be allocated towards the program. EJ Leaders are called upon to demonstrate the value that they bring to their university research partner in order to maintain this funding. Money determines the direction of academic research, and therefore also limits who can be selected for such programs at the EJLP. If ITS and EEI were funded to do research on active and public transportation, or energy sovereignty in a fossil free economy instead of electric vehicles and energy efficiency, the third cohort of the EJLP would be constituted of different professionals. UC Davis’ ITS and EEI not only hold power over how they go about interacting with community leaders, but also who gets a seat at the table with them in the first place.This transactional model is nonetheless still allowing for the redistribution of resources to community leaders. It’s unclear though if the benefits and value added by the program outweigh the costs of such a model.

Community Expertise

Community expertise is devalued by both academic and government institutions, yet the valuation of their work may also lead to co-optation, resulting in further harm for their communities. This pernicious catch-22 poses a challenge for community-based leaders who want to make change for their communities, but who do not wish to uphold the matrix of domination that devalues their knowledge in the first place. EJLP university partners are, to varying degrees, aware of EJ Leaders' expertise and the value of the knowledge they bring. Despite their own reported level of understanding of community expertise, university researchers may be unsure of how to approach uplifting it. These challenges persist as western academia has trained many university researchers to uphold modernist ideas of what constitutes objective truth (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991).

Community-university partnerships are described as helpful to community partners because "[t]he prestige and history of the institution itself can bolster more effective advocacy, even allowing community organizations to be in the room with the right stakeholders" (Cutler, 2024, pg.13). At face value, this seems like a good justification for a community partner to participate. The legitimization of their expertise is important to generate tangible outcomes for the lives of their community members. However, feminist scholars such as Eve Tuck caution that by participating in this system, such knowledge may be co-opted and utilized to perpetuate more harm than good. The system of academia is afforded the power to determine what is valuable knowledge that can inform government decision making. In the United States, the government is imbued with the matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2014) which reinforces a capitalist, heteropatriarchal, settler colonial, and white supremacist society. Scholars like Tuck may argue that to institutionalize community knowledge is to continue the upholding of the matrix of domination. Tuck argues that community leaders' refusal of research is a response to settler colonialism, conquering, obsession with knowing (Tuck & Yang, 2014). To counter this,

community leaders in the context of the EJLP must maintain agency and power in relation to how their voice is represented and, if at all, integrated within academic research. EJ Leaders have to be able to critically examine research being conducted and question for whom it benefits.

The EJLP is operating within a settler colonial institution, posing a challenge for FRI's staff who uphold the values of these indigenous feminist scholars among others. As the leaders and administrators of the program, they are working to ensure that EJ Leaders can maintain agency and power in each of their partnerships. This requires an immense amount of labor that is unseen and undervalued. University research partners for the third cohort have varying degrees of awareness of the expertise of the EJ Leaders, meaning they each require different kinds of support from the staff at FRI. For example, university researcher #1 mentioned that they know there's a lot they can learn from the vast experience of their community partner. In comparison, university researcher #2 struggled to find the words to describe their partner's expertise. "It's hard to like. I feel like I'm going to say they're unskilled. They're not like unskilled, like they have a different set of skills, right?" What was surprising though is that both of these interviewees expressed they lacked clarity on how to best go about engaging in knowledge exchange "Um, and so I want to learn from them. But how do, how do I approach that?" said university researcher #1. This same researcher also had questions about how the program can go about carrying this out.

> "...how would the process of learning from them be facilitated, right? Um, from the leaders? How, other than them having a presentation at the end, like, what other part of the program really puts their, highlights and puts their, um, knowledge, uh, to use or, uh, sense how it, how's it centralized in a way, um, that community organizations and faculty are respecting, honoring, and exchanging with, um, and so I don't know what that, you know, what that looks like, but I think those are some of the questions that I had for real, right?" - University researcher #1

Even those with heightened awareness of community expertise may still need assistance from programs like the EJLP in navigating how to best engage in right relations with community partners. This is a challenge for FRI as a boundary-spanner (Cannon, 2020) between the EJ Leaders and university researchers in differing disciplines, especially when each university researcher has differing perspectives on what constitutes expertise and objective truth. University researcher #2 shared that although there was a learning curve at first to working within prior community-university partnerships, their experience within the EJLP seems more straightforward. Although they shared similar questions about how to best go about approaching the recognition and uplifting of community expertise to that of university researcher #1, they shared in their prior experience that there were more clearly delineated roles for community participation.

> “They were useful in providing input onto the project and so on, like, it's just probably the more technical things that are more difficult like. Even like designing like a a research protocol. You know, that's kind of like a technical thing or facilitating a listening session. It's also like quite technical because, you know, you have to be careful what you say. Like, you don't want to like bias participants and so on and like. Trying to help them understand that was, you know, a bit of a like a learning curve, I'd say” - University researcher #2

This quote from university researcher #2 is demonstrative of how scientific university researchers are trained to view what constitutes objective truth, and what does not. Community partners were seen as helpful in particular ways, and a hindrance when it came to collecting information “without bias.” This university researcher went on to explain “and like we ended up facilitating or co-facilitating it with them. They were there, like, helping us reach the community. But we were the ones, like, asking the questions.” From the perspective of feminist scholars like Haraway and Harding, there is no such thing as one objective truth, but rather that knowledge is situated and cannot be removed from the context within which it is formed. Objectivity is determined by those who hold power within the matrix of domination, meaning objective truth is

really objective power (Haraway, 1988). Critical environmental justice scholar Rob Nixon similarly questions the issue of who counts as “witness” and I would argue expert in the environmental degradation occurring in a community. Whose knowledge is privileged? Who bears “social authority to witness?” (Nixon, 2011, pg. 16). University researchers are granted the authority and power to determine that their community partner is imbuing results with bias.

Whereas university researcher #1 is primarily concerned with how to best respect and honor their community partners knowledge, university researcher #2 may see their community partner playing a more supportive role. This may explain why this researcher #2 believes the process to be more straightforward than researcher #1. The latter may have more questions about how to approach this knowledge exchange process because they are envisioning more significant redistribution of power to community partners. This may be an example of university paternalism that was present in the first programmatic cycle. Despite semantic changes, from Fellows to Leaders, university researchers continue to refer to members of the third cohort as students and fellows both in interviews and throughout the duration of the program. Similarly, university researchers interviewed indicated they were “giving back” to the communities with which they work. Kim Tallbear calls upon researchers to abandon such phrases in favor of “sampalataya” which “...involves speaking as faith—as furthering the claims of a people while refusing to be excised from that people by some imperialistic, naïve notion of perfect representation” (Tallbear, 2014, pg.4). Standing with and speaking as faith requires that collectively, “we must soften that boundary erected long ago between those who know versus those from whom the raw materials of knowledge production are extracted” (Tallbear, 2014, pg.2). The phrase “giving back” may imply a paternalistic notion of charity rather than embracing non-hierarchical, co-creative processes that are necessary to truly redistribute power to those who have been oppressed in the name of objective truth, objective power.

Although seemingly minor, terminology matters when working within an institution that has historically and continuously oppressed low-income communities and people of color.

University researchers must therefore be more intentional about how they refer to both their EJ Leader partner and the process through which they are building this partnership. The state of California, like the University of California system, grants university researchers objective power, while it devalues the expertise of community leaders. University researcher #2 shared how California requires exemptions on certain grants if the university partner wants to more equitably fund their community partner.

> “And like you can like apply for like an exemption, and justify like why the expertise is not available with any within like say like no UC system has expertise of this community organization, but it's hard to do that as well because you know, maybe they don't agree with that assessment. Maybe like, they do think there's like professors who can do like community engagement and, and reach the community that the organization is working or something like that” - University researcher #2

The uplifting and honoring of community expertise and various ways of knowing remains a significant challenge for the EJLP and any other institutionally based programs working to connect community leaders and university researchers. Working within both academic and government systems that devalue community expertise necessitates active resistance and intentionality to oppose the replication of hierarchical knowledge production processes. Despite these challenges, the EJLP is working to reshape university research culture at UC Davis with a multitude of opportunities available as a result of the program’s structure and design.

Opportunities

The EJLP is working to overcome these challenges, and in the process, leadership has created a multitude of possibilities for the program’s current cohort and future iterations. Transdisciplinary possibilities have arisen as a result of the creation of ecotones, where EJ Leaders and university researchers can build partnerships. Although co-creation is minimal within the structure of the program, the partnerships in formation may allow for future co-created

projects from the beginning. Both EJ Leaders and UC Davis researchers may be benefitting from capacity enhancement because of the program. Overall, the EJLP is challenging systemic barriers to generate possibilities for current and future participants.

Co-Creation

The inverse to university paternalism and the devaluing of community expertise are co-creative processes that uplift different ways of knowing. Co-creation is a selected best practice where possible when it comes to community-university partnerships. In Making Racial Equity Real in Research, Hana Creger of the Greenlining Institute argues that communities should be co-creators of projects and viewed as equals in the research process, and partnerships are most successful when this is done well (Creger, 2020). Despite this, community leaders and their organizations have differing capacities that impact their ability to engage in such processes that are higher on Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969). Academic CBPR scholars stress that community involvement needs to optimize, rather than maximize community involvement based on interests, capacities, and sociopolitical contexts (London et.al., 2020). Creger similarly writes that realistic expectations need to be set regarding the capacity of community partners given that they are typically already over capacity and under-resourced.

The EJLP, and more specifically the leadership at FRI, have been strategic about how they go about integrating co-creative processes into the design of the program itself. The purpose of the EJLP is to enhance EJ Leaders' abilities to do their evermore pressing work. Feedback from EJ Leaders is continually collected and utilized to alter the program to support this, and at times it is a challenge to obtain such feedback given how EJ Leaders' and their organizations' capacities are limited. For example, the EJLP staff meetings with EJ Leaders are tailored to the specific needs and wants of EJ Leaders. Several polls have been shared with EJ Leaders to gauge their feedback on themes and optimal meeting times and frequencies.

However, attendance at meetings over the summer was poor for one of the workshops set up as a result of EJ Leaders' busy schedules. Co-creation is more difficult when capacity is limited, but it remains a worthy endeavor in the eyes of EJLP leadership.

As the EJLP continues to expand its alumni network, more opportunities may arise to integrate more co-creative processes for the benefit of EJ Leaders. As these EJ Leaders leave the program and continue to do their work, the hope is that they do so with the support of continued partnership with UC Davis faculty and researchers. If their capacity is enhanced, the alumni of the EJLP may be more able to engage in co-creation within their partnerships and with future iterations of the EJLP. One of the partnerships in formation this year has already applied for funding for a project together signaling that co-creation may be possible from the start for these partners. FRI, acting as a community engagement core (London et.al., 2020), is creating opportunities for projects that are co-created from the beginning with funding to support the EJ Leaders throughout the process. Although the program itself is less able to integrate co-creative processes, it allows for co-created projects to exist.

Capacity Enhancement

The EJLP is intended to enhance the capacity of EJ Leaders in their community-based environmental justice efforts. In addition, UC Davis researchers' capacity to do CBPR work may also be expanded because of the program. If the EJLP can expand both partners' capacity to engage in CBPR projects, they stand to benefit both parties and lead to more sustained, long-term, equitable partnerships. It would serve the EJLP well to maintain connections with all participants to measure such impacts. The opportunity to further enhance capacity may arise from an EJLP alumni network.

Capacity is a major determining factor for the level of participation a community partner can undertake. This study took this into consideration when selecting interviewees as EJ Leaders are stretched thin. UC Davis researchers, to varying degrees, also face challenges with

limited time and resources. Definitive conclusions cannot be drawn in this study in relation to EJ Leaders, as their first hand verbal accounts were not captured in an effort to avoid reducing their capacities. Observations from involvement and familiarity with the program are useful though in drawing minor conclusions. The EJLP provides $10,000 to each EJ Leader taking part in the program during the third cycle. Funding for such relationship building is essential to allow for community leaders and their organizations to be able to engage (Creger, 2020; Cutler et.al, 2024). A monetary contribution is a form of capacity enhancement through tangible resource allocation to EJ Leaders. Data collected from UC Davis researchers interviewed for this study can point to what possibilities may exist for capacity enhancement on both sides. All interviewees expressed a desire to help expand their EJ Leader's capacity. Many of these interviewees indicated that the program provided them with the opportunity and infrastructure to support their EJ Leader partners and build relationships. In particular, one interviewee mentioned the magnitude of the technical assistance they were providing to their EJ Leader and their organization given the latter's capacity needs. University researcher #3 cited potential capacity enhancement as a motivation for participating in the program. "So one is just individually, I just always am interested in opportunities to increase my own capacity around doing this work in, you know in just different dimensions." This university researcher also cited

> "...the fact that there is the infrastructure there where you had a whole selection process and you have some orientation and you have team building support for them like that's great. Like that's definitely a value add for sure and, and even though I've done this stuff a lot, you know, it's, I don't have to be the single point of contact. You know, I don't have to come up with a new template for an MOU. You know, I don't all those things that, that that FRI can pick up, so I would say that that's certainly valuable" - University researcher #3

FRI, in acting as a boundary-spanner and community engagement core, is enhancing capacity for UC Davis researchers to build these partnerships in more equitable, reciprocal ways. The UC Davis research partners are provided with tools via the structure of the program that allow

them to focus on their work with their EJ Leader partner. This is a challenge for FRI, as another interviewee expressed that this program necessitates different amounts of assistance for each university researcher.

> “I'm still like at a place that's like trying to learn how to work with organizations better. I'm like halfway maybe, but some people are like 0% of the way there, whereas other people are like all the way there. And so, you know, it's going to be hard to like, you have to account for the fact that, like some people have never spoken to someone from your community” - University researcher #2

This context-aligned approach to the EJLP is challenging for FRI when university researchers do not have experience with community-university partnerships. However, the survey results for this study indicated that most survey participants (62.5%) have been engaged in a community-university partnership previously. All participants who had this previous experience indicated that their previous partnerships were at least moderately successful to very successful. University researchers are coming in with their own understanding of how they define what community is and how to work in right relation with community partners. They unanimously indicated in interviews for this study that they are motivated by their hope to learn from their partners. The EJLP is therefore expanding their capacity to do work they see as beneficial. “Like if researchers and academics care about like, the quality of their work and accurately accounting for you know or behavior or whatever, and building stuff that people want, like they should be doing this type of thing because it does, it does help” said university researcher #2.

It’s promising to hear that UC Davis researchers' capacity to do this work has been enhanced, and that they see the value in this process. However, it is still too early to tell if long-term partnerships will result from this year’s cohort, nor can this study fully speak to the capacity enhancement available to EJ Leaders. The creation of a robust alumni network may help the EJLP to measure and multiply the impact of the program. EJ Leaders indicated via the

survey that their motivations for participating in the program were predominantly to develop new connections and engage in knowledge exchange with other participants. The EJLP is working to provide such opportunities to this year's cohort through the structure of the program, and an alumni network could bolster these efforts. Facilitating in-person and online meetings or events with individuals from across cohort years, and including UC Davis researchers who have a track record of working in right relation with their EJ Leader partners, could allow for further knowledge sharing. Best practices and the narrative structure for the program could be drafted through such a network, bolstering co-creativity in the process as well.

Challenging Systemic Barriers

The EJLP faces systemic barriers related to funding and the legitimization of community expertise that pose difficulties for the program, but also present opportunities for change-making within the institution. Current regulations within California further complicate this challenge, yet the EJLP provides direct, substantial stipend to each EJ Leader. Community expertise is systemically undervalued across universities in California and the U.S. The EJLP generates spaces though where community expertise and the needs of leaders can be centered. Despite the challenges the EJLP is up against, leadership at FRI is creating a multitude of futures and opportunities to challenge the business-as-usual approach to community-university partnerships from within.

Equitable compensation for expertise and labor is a constant struggle for community partners working in partnership with university researchers. "There are like structural impediments to actually getting funding to give to community organizations. So like a lot of funding, we get comes from the state" shared university researcher #2. This interview elaborated on this point in a prior section, where they outlined the barriers to adequately compensating community partners working with state funding due to restrictive caps on how much of that money could be given. Without this funding, this university researcher expressed

that these relationships are even more difficult to cultivate and sustain. This process of building community-university partnerships is time intensive and can stand to harm community organizations if they are not compensated. The EJLP is challenging these systemic barriers by funding community partners with $10,000 during the relationship building part of community-university partnerships, which typically goes unfunded. As mentioned previously, this compensation is significant as it allows for EJ Leaders to engage in the program while enhancing their capacity in their environmental justice efforts.

Through the EJLP, EJ Leaders are compensated as experts in their field. Throughout its third programmatic cycle, the program was explicit in calling on participants to engage in knowledge exchange which is meant to encourage non-hierarchical partnership building instead of replicating the dynamics of university paternalism. Data from this study suggests that both EJ Leaders and their university partners are coming together motivated by this call for bi-directional learning and knowledge sharing. One university researcher communicated they would like to see further uplifting of community expertise.

> “And so I think that there's adding, um, a component to the program that allows, and I guess in some sense it does still it already exists, but um, how, how is it that we centralize our knowledge, honor it and highlight it? Um, where we're treating [EJ Leaders] as educators to us as well?” - University researcher #1

The program has willing participants wanting to learn more about one another’s work. The opportunity that seems to arise here is one of design. “Design is the process of deciding on and then realizing preferred futures” (Tonkinwise, 2015). If the program hopes to encourage respect and admiration for community expertise, the EJLP can do so by providing structure and funding for EJ Leaders to lead workshops, trainings, or projects themselves. The program’s design could facilitate more experiences in which EJ Leaders can share their knowledge and skills as experts. How this may be done well is up for debate, given that some feminist and indigenous scholars may argue that academic institutions such as UC Davis are undeserving of such

knowledge given that they reinforce societal oppressive systems. However, design and critical environmental justice scholars maintain that change must be implemented at multiple stages, across temporal and spatial scales. By centering and uplifting EJ Leaders' expertise, the program has the potential to further alter the ways in which UC Davis researchers view and work with community partners.

In what ways are selected best practices for community-university partnerships relevant and usable within this program?

Theory vs. Praxis

The methods section of this thesis project described the program and evaluation design, both of which were reimagined throughout the course of this research. In conducting the literature review for this project, a number of ideal and potentially useful best practices emerged. These were coalesced by myself and proposed to the EJLP leadership team at FRI including Dr. McCullough and Dr. Sanchez Barba. What became evident during this meeting was that although it is great that these best practices exist in theory, the program could not implement them because of the challenges of working with a diverse group of individuals while being constrained by logistical hurdles, limited capacity, and an imbalance of power dynamics. With these challenges in mind, community development and specifically CBPR scholars might want to think about how to approach this work in different ways and consider integrating suggestions on how to adapt to the challenges of praxis. A feminist lens allows for a critical evaluation of these selected best practices, where the translation from theory to practice is not just a challenge, but an opportunity to learn how programs like this can go about doing this work in more transformative, equitable, and effective ways.

Logistics of the program coupled with the limited capacity of FRI were previously mentioned as justifications for the altering of the methodological approach for this thesis project. FRI's leadership and administration of the EJLP is impacted by this limited capacity. It became apparent throughout my time with the program (Summer of 2023 through September of 2024) that the disinvestment in feminist studies and institutes such as FRI is itself an injustice. With few full-time staff and a continually shrinking EJLP budget as ITS moves on to the next flashy sustainability project, it has become more difficult this year than the year prior to administer the EJLP in the ways the literature calls for as truly equitable. For example, FRI was unable to implement aspects of the proposed program schedule (Table 1) not only due to potential lack of buy-in from university researchers, but also because in order to carry out this equity programming, it requires a time commitment to do it well. Similar to EJ Leaders, FRI must make calculated decisions so as to maintain their capacity to run the EJLP and survive in a funding environment of austerity towards feminist studies. What solutions exist then within community development studies for problems such as those faced by FRI running a transdisciplinary program within a well-resourced University of California system?

I argue the opportunities and lessons that arose from witnessing this transition from theory to praxis center power. Through analysis of interviewee feedback, an earlier conclusion was drawn that university researchers were equating money with time. University researchers, especially those who do not teach, I argue are resource constrained and confined to a scarcity mentality within academia. However, these same researchers have a wealth of resources available to them through their affiliation with the UC system. As previously mentioned in sections above, they are afforded a level of power and privilege through this connection to UC Davis. Staff at FRI, in particular Dr. Sarah McCullough, may face issues of limited capacity, yet they use the power of their affiliation with UC Davis and ITS to directly reallocate resources to EJ Leaders. In order to realize the ideal best practices from community development and CBPR scholars for programs like the EJLP, university researchers working within institutes with

significant funding must acknowledge the power they hold themselves and work to reallocate and redistribute said power.

FRI has attempted to facilitate this power exchange within the transactional framework the EJLP is operating within. They have done so through centering community expertise, justly compensating EJ Leaders for their time, adding accountability mechanisms such as the MOU and community-university partnership agreements (Appendix C), among other strategies. These are palliative steps that allow for minor change but do not facilitate transformative change. Community development studies cannot be naive to the ways in which academic systems, intentionally or unintentionally, replicate the matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2014). Rather, what would be useful for programs like the EJLP is an adaptive model that could explain how to approach the building of community-university partnerships that center community needs with recommendations on how to realistically begin to redistribute power for more transformative outcomes. Further research is needed within community development and CBPR studies to uncover such a model.

One of the main challenges of applying selected theoretical best practices to this program is the tension between CBPR models, evaluation methodologies, and a feminist STS approach. The EJLP has been led by feminist researchers who uplift the situated nature of each partnership in formation. This approach acknowledges that participants are coming to the program with diverse perspectives, positionalities, and understandings. The EJLP works to bring together academics and community leaders across disciplines who may not fully understand the others' work and differing degrees of experience with community-university partnerships. A feminist approach to the EJLP allowed for flexibility and understanding that there was no uniform approach that could be taken across all partnerships in formation. University researcher #2 alluded to this.

> "And like one, I know there's all these like, like theories of like, what's it like, community based participatory research? And there's all these frameworks of how to work with community

organizations. I think some of the people that made these frameworks have not actually done community engagement because it's like it doesn't, it's like a not like a one size fits all thing.

CBPR practitioners have advocated for a context-aligned approach to engagement (London et.al, 2020), but remaining questions from this research are: how often are models for CBPR co-created with community partners? How flexible are these models to the needs of community leaders and organizations? What systemic change is needed to reallocate power into the hands of community members to co-create and lead such projects?

Recommendations

The EJLP may serve as a case study for other programs that work to connect community leaders and university researchers across disciplines. Although this study was highly specific to UC Davis, the best practices outlined below are likely applicable to other programs. Lessons learned from this study may help inform similar efforts to build reciprocal community-university partnerships that truly serve the wants and needs of community partners. These recommendations are informed by the literature, the data and analysis in this study, and my own lived experience working with the EJLP over the course of a year and a half.

1. **Fiscal sponsorship is essential to ensure programs of this nature can exist. Underinvestment hinders capacity to implement the program in the most equitable ways possible. ITS and EEI must recommit to fully funding the EJLP for future programmatic cycles**

2. **Programs should define key terms used during the program**

    2.1. EJ Leaders were first referred to as EJ Fellows, which may have contributed to the way these community experts were viewed by university researchers. Power is embedded in language (Cho et.al, pg.796), and FRI, ITS, and EEI researchers must be intentional

about how they refer to community partners if they want to offer EJ Leaders the respect they deserve.

2.2. Researchers can be based in a variety of settings, whether they are within the community, working for the government, or operating within academia. Programs should specifically state what type of researcher is working with the program. In this case, university or institutional researchers seemed to be the appropriate terminology, yet this has not been institutionalized by the program. The EJLP could benefit from this given that they hope EJ Leaders will, in the future, operate as EJ Researchers.

2.3. Community is a nebulous term that warrants definition at the beginning of each program cycle to avoid overutilization as a buzzword. FRI should spend time with EJ Leaders and UC Davis researchers defining this term.

2.4. Institutional researchers should work to erase barriers for community leaders' understanding around research jargon and technical terms (Creger, 2020). FRI should ensure that this information is shared by UC Davis researchers at the beginning of the EJLP.

3. Establish and communicate clear yet flexible goals, expectations, and metrics for success

3.1. Goals for the program should be clearly agreed upon by the program's leaders at FRI in collaboration with the advisory committee as a baseline for what the program hopes to do. The goals and objectives should be shared with program participants, displayed on the website, and continually communicated throughout the program's informational materials.

3.2. Setting shared expectations is a clear and consistent best practice in the literature (Creger, 2020; Cannon, 2020; London et.al, 2020). The community-university partnership and MOU documents were seen to varying degrees as necessary and valuable in establishing these shared expectations. These forms are structured, but they must remain flexible and adaptive to partners' needs.

3.3. Community leaders may define success differently than their university research partner (Creger, 2020). It is important to set clear expectations for what success looks like for each partnership in development from the beginning. FRI should continue to use the community-university partnership agreement form to ensure this is made clear between both parties.

4. Streamline and ensure ease of access to important information

4.1. Orienting Materials

4.1.1. Program participants should have access to information about one another's backgrounds. It is especially important that university researchers engage with and commit to learning about their community partner before the start of the program. FRI should ensure that participants orient themselves to their community partner's local context before the first in-person visit (Creger, 2020; London et.al, 2020).

4.1.2. Offer EJ Leaders the opportunity in future applications to indicate if there's a university researcher they are interested in working with, and have these potential partners listed on the website.

4.2. Faculty and Community Partner Welcome Packets

4.2.1. Detail general goals of the program, expectations, important forms, and frequently asked questions, among other information as needed.

4.2.2. Include contact information for the program's leadership and points of contact for various issue areas such as administration, media, etc.

5. Programs of this nature should maintain flexibility to allow for the program to best meet the unique needs of each partnership in formation

5.1. Agreements and forms meant to set expectations should provide structure, not a straight jacket, for how partners are to engage with one another. These agreements should be living documents that allow for continual reevaluation and reflection as needed

5.2. Programmatic scheduling set by the lead organization should account for the capacity of the community leaders during different times of the year

6. Multiple ways of knowing and being in the world must be uplifted throughout the structure of the program

6.1. Academia too often places community expertise and wisdom at the bottom of a false hierarchy. Programs like the EJLP should center participants, in this case EJ Leaders', expertise and knowledge with opportunities that allow Leaders to facilitate and educate UC Davis researchers

6.1.1. For this program, UC Davis researcher workshops should be co-created and, when possible, facilitated by EJ Leaders

6.2. The value of community expertise should be stressed in the program's mission statement, documents, agreements, and communicated verbally to all participants

6.3. Participants are entering the program with different positionalities, perspectives, and experiences with community-university partnerships. Program leadership should allocate time to learning more about the participants' backgrounds

7. Systemic change is needed to remove barriers for university researchers and community-based leaders to engage in such partnerships

7.1. The state of California, the University of California system, and in particular the school of UC Davis must provide easier, more dignified funding mechanisms for working in partnership with communities. For instance, grants should be multi-year and renewable and should cover living wages

7.2. University researchers should be supported in their work with community partners and encouraged to engage as early in the process of a research project as possible. This should be supported by UC Davis administration, ITS, and EEI

7.3. Community members should be compensated as legitimate experts that provide invaluable knowledge that cannot be outsourced to university professionals. State

officials should amend policy to ensure that grants have higher maximum amounts that justly compensate community partners' for their labor and knowledge

8. Integrate co-creative processes that give community partners the opportunity to design the program back

8.1. FRI and ITS should create the opportunity to craft a narrative structure that allows for participants to determine what values and theoretical perspectives are central to the program (Narrative Structure, n.d.). This should integrate input from and be critiqued by EJLP alumni when possible,

8.2. Community leaders should have agency in determining to what degree they would like to share their expertise with the other program participants. If and where possible, community leaders should be able to propose and lead workshops/ discussions on topics of interest to them. They should be compensated for their work.

9. ITS amd FRI must commit to consistent, culturally cognizant communication with regularly scheduled check-ins that allow participants to share with transparency and honesty

10. Generate opportunities for EJ Leaders to create an optional program deliverable outside of conventional academic presentations or publications

10.1. FRI may poll EJ Leaders about their preferred means of communicating about their experience with the program

10.1.1. Do so at the inception of the programmatic year, with an additional check-in halfway through

10.2. Uplift avenues of creative expression as valuable ways of conveying their experiences in the EJLP

10.3. Create opportunities for current and former EJ Leaders to engage in creative expression in relation to the program.

10.3.1. Examples may include publications on the website, a group art show, a video project posted on the FRI YouTube, among other ideas

11. Establish an EJLP Alumni Network

11.1. Facilitate meetings with the purpose of allowing EJ Leaders across cohorts to meet and socialize with one another in an effort to build community

11.2. Afford the alumni network opportunities to co-create with the program through establishment of best practices and/or the narrative structure for the program

12. Programs of this nature should last at least a year, if not longer to more closely move at the speed of trust

12.1. This is only possible with robust, stable funding from the fiscal sponsors of the program, ITS and EEI

12.2. CBPR scholars interviewed indicated that other programs with similar goals were successful after one and a half years, when co-creation was evident from the start.

12.3. “Build in more flexible timelines and allot more time than anticipated for trust building, payment to partners, and community outreach and engagement - throughout the application, planning and implementation phase” (Creger, 2020, pg.11).

13. The relationship building process should center the principles of reflexivity and reciprocity

13.1. Program participants and administrators should engage in continual reflection and critically examine how the processes they are working within or leading are perpetuating the matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2014).

13.2. The structure of programs of this nature should uphold and support the embodiment of reciprocity and the interconnectedness of participants. Community expertise must therefore be uplifted given the problem of university paternalism.

Conclusion

The EJLP has begun to form community-university partnerships between UC Davis researchers and EJ Leaders that are more likely than years prior to serve the long-term needs and wants of the EJ Leaders. Although this research was unable to demonstrate that the structure of the EJLP shifted what participants prioritize when engaging in community-university partnerships, this may be due to the high level of prior experience with these partnerships amongst EJLP participants. Data collected has revealed that overall participants overwhelmingly see the value in various aspects of the program's structure and the general existence of the EJLP. It is still too early to tell to what degree the program has been successful in building the eight community-university partnerships of the third programmatic cycle. Early data indicates that a number of the partnerships exhibit more reciprocal connections than years prior. Further evaluation and study would be needed to fully uncover such outcomes. Despite significant challenges related to funding, time, and varying degrees of appreciation for community expertise, this program is opening possibilities for EJ Leaders to co-create projects with university researchers and enhance their capacity for their own environmental justice work in communities across California. Recommendations from this thesis project may help other university-based programs like the EJLP tackle similar challenges and confront systemic barriers to equitable outcomes.

Findings from this work also contribute to the various bodies of theory referenced for this project, especially with regard to how theory relates to praxis. Feminist STS studies continually unearths issues of working within an institution that upholds modernist perspectives of

knowledge production and power. Leadership at FRI exemplifies what it looks like to uphold the importance of situated knowledge and the redistribution of power to community leaders in a program that is inherently transactional. They are demonstrating the continual contradictions of conducting such work within an institution that values one universal truth and upholds objective power within academic hierarchies. This project illustrates the application of a feminist approach to program leadership and administration in partnership with science research institutes. Design studies may similarly benefit from the findings in this report as ontological and transition designers may navigate very similar tensions while remaining situated within a given program and institution. In addition, this project contributes to the growing body of literature on critical environmental justice (CEJ) studies. CEJ scholars may further evaluate the dynamics of power and privilege within community-university partnerships, which may or may not serve their movements against slow violence. Finally, this research contributes a critical perspective to the real-world application of CBPR as a methodology and theoretical approach. This research illuminates the challenges of applying selected best practices from CBPR literature within an institution that constrains transformative work.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Foundational Principles

1. Research co-created and supported by university researchers across disciplines and communities impacted is more accurate and beneficial to enacting change.
2. There is an inherent power imbalance between the university and a given community, in which universities are privileged with immense wealth and authority on what constitutes knowledge. This imbalance distorts trust between these parties and hinders the development of meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships. This program acknowledges, critiques, and actively opposes the replication of these power dynamics through intentional programming and co-learning experiences between the two parties.
3. Universities have a history and present track-record of extractive practices in under-resourced communities to the latter's detriment. This program attempts to create a liminal space where community leaders and university researchers meet as equals.

4. Community members are experts on their own lived experiences. Their knowledge is significant and should be valued the same as academic experts within their given fields.
5. Knowledge creation and objectivity are situated. The idea that there is one objective "scientific" truth perpetuates the privileging of "standard" ways of knowing that are overwhelmingly white/ cis/ hetero/ socioeconomically well-off. Uplifting other ways of knowing, along with critical analysis of this process, are necessary to obtaining objectivity, if at all possible.
6. We recognize that communities across California are experiencing the impacts of slow violence and environmental injustices that are creating the phenomenon of "situated displacements" (Nixon, 2011). This term represents the circumstances where individuals are not physically relocated, but their surroundings are rendering unlivable/ contaminated and their resources are used and/ or abused. Our program's focus on mobility justice aims to directly counter this repeated occurrence where communities are confined to unlivable spaces with limited mobility to access basic human rights and services (Sze & London, 2008).

Programmatic Values

- Mutuality: Respect, benefits accrued on both sides, acknowledgement of important wisdom offered
- Interdependence: We need one another to do this work
- Community Care: We thrive in community, where we take care of ourselves and one another. We treat each other as humans first and workers second
- Transparency: We share why we are doing what we are doing, and how we hope it will benefit you
- Reflexivity: We will reflect and continually adapt the program to the needs of participants and our staff

- Anticolonial: We actively fight the perpetuation of colonialism and white supremacy

Appendix B

Usability Testing Observation Prompts

Figure 1. Prompt for Module 1

Observation Prompts	**Actions You Observed/ Comments You Hear**	**Personal Notes**
How did researchers introduce themselves and their background?		
How did EJ Leaders introduce themselves and their background?		
How are EJ Leaders communicating what they can offer?		
How are researchers communicating what they can offer?		
How do participants engage with one another (body language, tone, language, physical distance from one another, etc.)?		
Are participants actively engaging in the module? (example cues: participants asking questions, participants discussing the questions posed among themselves, providing feedback when requested or even when not requested)		
Is there anything else that stands out to you throughout the module?		
Are the objectives of the module covered in the time given?		
Suggestions from the module		

Figure 2. Prompt for Module 2

Observation Prompts	Actions You Observed/ Comments You Hear	Personal Notes
Does the module content seem relevant to the audiences present?		
How are participants engaging with one another? (ex: body language, tone, language, physical distance from one another, etc.)		
Are the participants comprehending the material present?		
How is the facilitator engaging with the audience?		
Are participants actively engaging in the module? (example cues: participants asking questions, participants discussing the questions posed among themselves, providing feedback when requested or even when not requested, etc.)		
Are there any other actions that stand out to you throughout the module?		
Are the objectives of the module covered in the time given?		

Figure 3. Prompt for Module 3

Observation Prompts	Actions You Observed/ Comments You Hear	Personal Notes
Does the module content seem relevant to the audiences present?		
How are participants engaging with one another? (ex: body language, tone, language,		

physical distance from one another, etc.)		
Do the module materials appear usable?		
How is the facilitator engaging with the partcipants?		
Are participants actively engaging in the module? (example cues: participants asking questions, participants discussing the questions posed among themselves, providing feedback when requested or even when not requested, etc.)		
Are there any other actions that stand out to you throughout the module?		
Are the objectives of the module covered in the time given?		

Interview Protocol and Questions

Figure 4. Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my thesis research project. This interview is part of the evaluation piece of my thesis. I am researching how the Environmental Justice Leaders Program can best facilitate the building of community-university partnerships to better reflect and serve long-term community needs. I am especially interested in understanding your motivation for participating and your perspective on this program so far. You are one of several individuals I will be interviewing for this evaluation.

This interview will help enrich my survey data. I plan to record this interview via my phone.Participating is entirely voluntary. I will ask you about six questions. If you aren't comfortable answering a question, that's fine; you can ask that we move on to the next question. If at any point during our interview, you decide you don't want to continue, please let me know and we will stop. I am not aware of any negative consequences from participating in this interview. Once my thesis project is complete, I will delete the recording.

I will not reveal your identity in my thesis project. If I quote you, I will change your name. In my analysis, I will focus more so on themes that arise across interviews and the survey. If you have any questions after our interview, you can contact me at 410-245-1904 or email me at

mwilli@ucdavis.edu.

Figure 5. Interview Questions

Questions	Purpose	Prompts
Before engaging in the EJLP, did you engage in building partnerships with community organizations/ members/ leaders?	Develop their baseline understanding	
		If yes, can you tell me a little more about them?
		If no, is there a reason why you have not?
What motivated you to become a research partner in this program?	Gather data on why researchers are participating in the program (what's in it for them?)	
What do you hope to obtain or accomplish through this partnership?	Gather data on why researchers are participating in the program (what's in it for them?)	
What aspects of the program are helpful? Do you think the program is helping you achieve these goals?	Gain a deeper understanding on how researchers perceive this process/ program	Have the things you prioritized shifted in relation to community-university partnerships? We have a number of neither satisfied/ unsatisfied on some aspects of the program, including relevance of tasks and facilitation of relationship building. Do you agree/ disagree with this? Why or why not? Preliminary survey results show that some of the goals of the program aren't being met to the extent that we might hope for. What's your perspective of the goals of the program? For example, one of the goals is the establishment of mutual understanding and expectations
Do you find that the EJLP is valuable to you and your community partner?	Gain a deeper understanding on how researchers perceive this process/ program	
		If yes, why or how?

		If not, why not? what changes could be made to make it valuable to you?
Do you have any feedback on the program? Is there anything you would change Do you have any recommendations?	Gain a deeper understanding on how researchers perceive this process/ program	Anything else that can help me with evaluating this program better

Mid-Program Survey

Figure 6. Survey Questions and Rationale

Prompt/ Question	**Question Type**	**Options**	**Purpose**
Thank you for completing this survey. All questions are voluntary, and answers provided are anonymous. This survey should take no more than [X] minutes to complete.			
Please identify your affiliation with the program	Multiple choice	A. EJ Leader B. UC Davis Researcher C. Other (Please Specify)	
PRE-PROGRAM			
Before this program, have you been a part of a community-university partnership?	Multiple choice	Yes/ No/ Unsure	How much experience do these participants have with community-university partnerships?
[FOLLOW-UP IF ANSWER IS YES] Which of the characteristics did the partnership include?	Check-Boxes	- Shared expectations - Mutual goals - Clear communication between all parties - Established trust - Long-term commitment to engagement - Other:	How much experience do these participants have with community-university partnerships?

[FOLLOW-UP IF ANSWER IS YES] Which of the following were outcomes of the partnership?	Check-Boxes	- Sustained partnership - Academic publication(s) - Community dissemination of results - Policy action/ implementation - Other:	How much experience do these participants have with community-university partnerships?
[FOLLOW-UP IF ANSWER IS YES] Please indicate to what degree you think the partnership was a success for you and/ or your organization	Scale	1- Not at all 2 - Somewhat 3 - Moderately 4 - Mostly Successful 5 - Very Successful	How much experience do these participants have with community-university partnerships?
What do you hope to obtain or accomplish through this partnership?	Short Response		Understanding the expectations of different partners involved in the program
What is your motivation for participating in the Environmental Justice Leaders Program?			
PRE VS. POST (7/1)			
Please rate the following aspects as they relate to your level before engaging and now during your engagement with the Environmental Justice Leaders Program			
To what degree did/ do you prioritize the following:			

1. Establishment of expectations for collaboration within a community-university partnership	Scale	Before 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High After 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High	How have participants' perceptions changed, if at all, regarding community-university partnerships while engaging with the program?
2. Creation of shared language and communication methods between yourself and your partner	Scale	Before 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High After 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High	How have participants' perceptions changed, if at all, regarding community-university partnerships while engaging with the program?
3. Development of a deeper understanding of your partner's expertise	Scale	Before 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High After 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High	How have participants' perceptions changed, if at all, regarding community-university partnerships while engaging with the program?

4. Outlining of you and your partners capacity within the partnership	Scale	Before 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High After 1 - Not a priority 2 - Low 3 - Minor 4 - Moderate 5 - High	How have participants' perceptions changed, if at all, regarding community-university partnerships while engaging with the program?
Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the program.			
1. Relevance of meetings, events, and tasks in relation to your needs	Scale	1 - Very Unsatisfied 2 - Unsatisfied 3 - Neither Unsatisfied nor Satisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very Satisfied	Does the program provide information that is useful/ of utility to this participant?
2. Layout of the program	Scale	1 - Very Unsatisfied 2 - Unsatisfied 3 - Neither Unsatisfied nor Satisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very Satisfied	
3. Content of the meetings and events	Scale	1 - Very Unsatisfied 2 - Unsatisfied 3 - Neither Unsatisfied nor Satisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very Satisfied	Does the program provide information that is useful/ of utility to this participant?
4. Facilitation of relationship building	Scale	1 - Very Unsatisfied 2 - Unsatisfied 3 - Neither Unsatisfied nor	Is the program facilitating relationship building between participants?

		Satisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very Satisfied	
5. Overall quality of the program	Scale	1 - Very Unsatisfied 2 - Unsatisfied 3 - Neither Unsatisfied nor Satisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very Satisfied	Does the program provide information that is useful/ of utility to this participant?
For the aspects that you were not satisfied with in the above question, what changes would you suggest?	Short response	Open-ended	
To what extent do you feel you accomplished the following during the partnership meetings:			
1. Exchanged useful information	Scale	1 - Not all all 2 - Somewhat 3 - Mostly 4 - Completely	Does the program provide information that is useful/ of utility to this participant?
2. Began building trust between you and your partner	Scale	1 - Not all all 2 - Somewhat 3 - Mostly 4 - Completely	Is the program facilitating relationship building between participants?
3. Establishment of mutual understanding and expectations	Scale	1 - Not all all 2 - Somewhat 3 - Mostly 4 - Completely	Is the program facilitating relationship building between participants?
4. Developed common language and communication strategies	Scale	1 - Not all all 2 - Somewhat 3 - Mostly 4 - Completely	Is the program facilitating relationship building between participants?
If you indicated low scores on any of the aforementioned aspects, what changes to the program may help?	Short response		What changes, if any, should be made to improve the program?
What, if anything, would you alter from this program?	Short response		What changes, if any, should be made to improve the program?

Do you have any additional feedback regarding the program?	Short response		What changes, if any, should be made to improve the program?

Appendix C

Community-Partnership Agreement Form

Environmental Justice Leaders Program

Environmental Justice Leader & UC Davis Researcher Agreement

1. **Environmental Justice Leader:** _____

   Email: _____

2. **UC Davis Research Lab:** _____

   Main contact: _____ Role/Position: _____

   Email: _____

   List additional lab members who will work with EJ Leader:

Name	Role in Lab	Email

3. **Shared equity-related goal(s).** Together, co-create the goal(s) you wish to achieve. These can be specific to the length of the program or more aspirational.

4. **Requests.** Please list your top three most important requests by priority that you would like to receive from the other party.

EJ Leader

	Request	Estimated hours
1.		
2.		
3.		

Research team

	Request	Estimated hours
1.		

2.		
3.		

5. **Meeting schedule**.

   a. Number of meetings/Frequency: _____

   b. Length: _____

   c. Time and dates (if possible): _____

      _____

6. Please share any events that may be of interest for the other party to attend.

7. Do you anticipate that an additional visit will be needed aside from the two remaining visits on Sept 26–27, 2024 and January 23–24, 2025? If so, when? Can the lab finance the additional visit?

8. Additional comments or relevant information:

UCDAVIS Feminist Research Institute

Environmental Justice Leaders Program 2024
Memorandum of Understanding

Congratulations on your acceptance to the 2024 Environmental Justice Leaders program at UC Davis! Below are the terms and agreements for participating in the program. Please read each carefully.

1. You, as an Environmental Justice (EJ) Leader, will be provided a $10,000 stipend that will cover travel expenses, as well as compensation for time and expertise.
2. Your participation in the program involves:
    a. Leaders are required to be present for three UC Davis campus visits, scheduled for May 2–3, 2024, September 26–27 2024, and January 23–24, 2025. Your stipend should cover your travel costs, while the program will cover your hotel stay.
    b. Leaders are required to attend bi-weekly meetings on Fridays from 2–3pm. If this day/ time is unavailable to you, please let us know.
    c. Leaders will participate in a 25-hour knowledge exchange with a pre-appointed UC Davis research partner. This time will be divided equally between you and your institutional research partner.
    d. Each Leader will give a virtual presentation about their work to UC Davis students and researchers.
3. Each Leader and their appointed research partner will co-create shared expectations and agreements in their first three meetings. This will be compiled in a document to be signed by both parties and serve as a reference for your partnership.
4. Leaders are expected to communicate with the EJ Leaders' programmatic team and their research partner regarding absences, delays, or complications.
5. Leaders, institutional research partners, and programmatic staff will take in occasional surveys intended to gather information for purposes of program evaluation and improvement. Your participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated but not required.
6. Leaders will be given the opportunity to attend online and in-person talks and events at UC Davis.

7. As an EJ Leader, you are expected to uphold the Principles of Community required by UC Davis.

We welcome you to contact the Feminist Research Institute (fri@ucdavis.edu) with any questions or concerns regarding this MOU and over the course of the program. Please return this MOU with your signature to mwilli@ucdavis.edu.

By signing the below, you acknowledge and agree to abide by the above terms and expectations throughout the duration of the program (04/25/2024–01/27/2025).

Name (Printed) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

UC Davis Researcher Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Environmental Justice Leaders Program

Memorandum of Understanding for Research Partners

Thank you for participating in the UC Davis 2024 Environmental Justice Leaders Program. Below are the terms and agreements for participating in the program as a research partner. Please read each carefully.

1. The premise of this program is that community members are knowledgeable experts and potential research collaborators. These collaborations can lead to more accurate results and greater equity.
    a. Research partners and community partners are expected to demonstrate mutual value for each other's expertise, time, and labor.

b. These encounters may bring about discomfort. We encourage both parties to 'embrace the discomfort' in order to grow. [1, 2, 3]

2. Your participation in the program requires:
    a. A 25-hour knowledge exchange with a pre-appointed community partner from the Environmental Justice Leaders Program. This time will be divided equally between you and your community partner.
    b. Completion of an agreement (template provided) created between the research partner and EJ Leader that lays out goals, priorities and a plan for the knowledge exchange.
    c. Attending 3 workshops on equity and community partnership in research (1 hour long each). These will take place virtually.
3. Each Leader will give a virtual/recorded presentation about their work. Research partners will make an effort to attend/view these and share them with their labs and colleagues.
4. Along with your appointed Leader, research partners will co-create shared expectations and agreements in their first three meetings. This will be compiled in a document to be signed by both parties and serve as a reference for your partnership. (Please see attached document).
5. Research partnerships can be challenging and highly rewarding. The research team can communicate with the EJ Leaders' programmatic team regarding delays, complications, or challenges that may arise.
6. Leaders, institutional research partners, and programmatic staff will be asked to take occasional surveys for program evaluation and improvement. Your participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated but not required.
7. Research partners are asked to provide financial support for the EJ Leaders Program as funding allows and/or build support into future funding opportunities.
8. Representatives of the research partner lab are expected to participate in the in-person campus visits during the following dates:

    September 26–27, 2024

    January 23–24, 2025

We welcome you to contact the Feminist Research Institute (fri@ucdavis.edu) with any questions or concerns regarding this MOU and over the course of the program. Please return this MOU with your signature to habergmark@ucdavis.edu.

By signing the below, you acknowledge and agree to abide by the above terms and expectations throughout the duration of the program (04/25/2024–01/27/2025).

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[1] hooks, b. (2014). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge.

[2] Woolley, K., & Fishbach, A. (2022). Motivating Personal Growth by Seeking Discomfort. *Psychological Science*, *33*(4), 510-523.

[3] Wilson, H.K. (2020). Discomfort: Transformative encounters and social change. *Emotion, Space and Society,* 37, (10068), 1-8.

Name* (Printed) _____

Department or Research Unit: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

* The research lab representative signing this agreement will share these expectations with other members of the research team and ensure that they abide by them as well.