

The Flint QuadPod: Building a Community-Academic Ecosystem Through Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Word count 248/250

Authors: Heatherlun Uphold, Jennifer Edwards-Johnson, Anar Guru, Jennifer Fisch Ferguson, Lucine Jarrah, Stacy Seeley, Ken Sylvester, Cindy Donner

Heatherlun Uphold, PhD, MPH, Michigan State University College of Human Medicine
Jennifer Edwards-Johnson, DO, MPH, Michigan State University College of Human Medicine
Anar Guru, PT, DPT, Mott Community College
Jennifer Fisch Ferguson, PhD, Mott Community College
Lucine Jarrah, MSW, University of Michigan-Flint
Stacy Seeley, PhD, Mott Community College
Ken Sylvester, PhD, University of Michigan-Flint
Cindy Donner, MBA, Kettering University

Issue: Community-academic partnerships often operate within individual institutions, creating challenges for sustained collaboration across educational sectors. There is growing interest in models that strengthen connections among institutions while aligning teaching, research, and community engagement activities around shared local priorities.

Description: The Flint QuadPod is a collaborative partnership among Kettering University, Michigan State University-College of Human Medicine, Mott Community College, and University of Michigan-Flint focused on strengthening teaching and learning, research, and community engagement in Flint and Genesee County. The QuadPod seeks to create a more connected and responsive community-academic ecosystem by aligning institutional strengths around shared local priorities. The aim is to support each institution in fostering connections between faculty, student learning, and community needs. Lessons learned will be shared from the early development of the partnership, including the importance of relationship-building, shared ownership, and balancing the unique missions of two-year institutions, four-year universities, and medical/public health programs.

Lessons Learned: Successful cross-institutional collaboration requires intentional efforts that prioritize trust, accessibility, and mutual benefit. The partnership has also reinforced the value of shared language, relationship-centered collaboration, and approaches that recognize the unique strengths and contributions of each institution within the broader educational ecosystem. Furthermore, the QuadPod partnership has found opportunities to deepen faculty and student collaboration and to establish stronger avenues for future community engagement and cross-sector partnerships.

Recommendations: The Flint QuadPod highlights the potential for locally rooted collaboration to strengthen connections across institutions while building a more connected educational and community-academic ecosystem in Flint and Genesee County.