"Expanding our public: Locating community partners for participatory collaboration"

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This is my first year as a faculty member at the University of Washington Bothell. I am an ethnographer with research and teaching interests in urban and community life, and when I arrived on campus last fall I wished there were some kind of an inventory of local community-based organizations that I could consult to get a sense for the collaborative research and teaching possibilities that might exist for me in our region. In consultation with staff members at the Center for Community Based Learning and Research I discovered that UWB has fairly well-established pathways and potential institutional partners (such as non-profits or municipal bodies) for more straightforward service learning type projects, but that we have yet to fully develop our capacities for other kinds of community-based projects and for more grass-roots, participatory collaborations in particular. Given this institutional need, my project is a contribution towards better infrastructure for future community based participatory research at the University of Washington Bothell. I am making an inventory of potential community partners—including grass-roots social movements, community activists, and other less than formally consolidated parties that are not currently well represented among our contacts—and imagining potential future pathways for participatory projects in collaboration with these partners. The project is also a step towards greater diversification of our engagements with community, deepening and extending our commitments as an innovative and pertinent public institution.