



## The Southeast Equine Research and Education Partnership

By Ann Scheunemann, Craig C. Brookins, Duarte Morais, Celen Pasalar, Tyler Kuss, Benjamin Jones, and Bruno Ferreira<sup>1</sup> with Ashley Simons-Rudolph

*“Community and economic development in rural areas can best be achieved through successful collaboration within and between universities and in partnerships with public and private agencies.”*



Figure 1. Used with permission from the author.

The Southeast Equine Research and Education Partnership (SEREP) is an interdisciplinary, interinstitutional, community-university collaborative. The long-term goal is to build on the organically grown local equine ecosystem to bring community, economic, and workforce development to a rural region in the southeastern United States.

The 18-month project began in March 2017 and includes direct engagement with community members, private businesses, nonprofit agencies, and government entities. The partnership is supported through funding from the Appalachian Research Commission (ARC) and involves a team of interdisciplinary researchers (ecological-community psychology, people-first tourism, and landscape architecture), local community college administrators and faculty, and stakeholders across broad sectors of the community.

This work is important as an example of a way in which a land grant university can fulfill its mission of service to communities. It also serves as an example of the close ties between a community college and its home community. Because of the purpose of this project, the service and support offered by both institutions extends beyond this initial outreach objective to empower a community to envision and realize its own development.

## Highlights

**Complex community challenges require creative and integrative interdisciplinary collaborations.**

**Successful community projects require community partnerships.**

**This ongoing feasibility assessment seeks to create a model of community-university engagement in rural settings.**

Researchers' consistent engagement with participating communities has led to actionable feedback regarding such factors as how the Equine Research and Education Center should look and what research is possible in the context of the region.

Engagement has also created new relationships within communities, which could lead to future projects and new ideas for development. The project also provides an example of successful interdepartmental collaboration within a university, interinstitutional collaboration between a university and community college, and university-community collaboration. As we work together and gather more data, we increasingly synthesize a common vision and move as a team from a multidisciplinary to an interdisciplinary collaboration. While members multidisciplinary teams maintain a focus in their individual disciplines while working on a common project, interdisciplinary teams are more integrative and tend to be more collaborative. This multilayered team is complex but has, with a few stumbling blocks, successfully established initial findings on the feasibility of an Equine research and education center.

## **Methods**

Focus groups, interviews, town hall meetings, design charrettes (a planning session where residents, designers, and others create a vision for development), and online surveys are the primary methods of data collection. These data are being synthesized into a series of reports. Feedback is solicited at every stage from community stakeholders. Success will be determined through the building of community capacity.

### **ON HOW A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORMED THE PROJECT**

Utilizing an ecological framework and community participatory methods, this project recognizes the importance and necessity of approaching complex community development challenges through multiple disciplinary lenses. The project is centered on values of social and economic justice and generating equitable opportunities for local residents in a mostly rural area that has an abundance of natural assets but fewer economic resources.

---

<sup>1</sup> Original Citation: Brookins, C. C., Morais, D., Pasalar, C., Scheunemann, A., Kuss, T., Jones, T. & Ferreira, B. (2017). Southeast equine research and education partnership—an NC State-Isothermal Community College partnership. Retrieved from <https://serep.wordpress.ncsu.edu/>

## What Does This Mean For?

*Practice:* Navigating multiple perspectives within communities and partnerships is complicated, and community psychology research often flows from researchers instead of initiatives designed to engage the entire university or multidisciplinary institution. Our goal is to create a model, using community and interdisciplinary psychological perspectives and methods that can be used for broad scale community-university engagement and engagement scholarship.

*Social Action:* This project involves community work and all of its inherent complexities. We have looked at the physical, economic, social, historical, and political circumstances within the involved communities and have identified a less economically and politically resourced subset of the local equine community. The second stage of data collection will deliberately work with under-resourced and underrepresented groups to insure their representative voice in the final outcome. It is expected that this inclusion will bring forward more types of social actions.

*People working in settings similar to the one that you studied:* This project is based in a rural and semirural setting. The interdisciplinary and institutional engagement model we are creating is expected to provide a framework for researchers and community members conducting similar work.

*Terms of use:* This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/) It is attributed to Ann Scheunemann et. al. and the original version can be found here <https://www.communitypsychology.com/the-southeast-equine-research-and-education-partnership/>