

## University of Tennessee, Knoxville Institutional Initiatives

Bob Rider

In March 2011, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville submitted its first-ever application for the C. Peter Magrath University/Community Engagement Award and W.K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award. The team that came together over several months to prepare this proposal drew from a number of disciplines and departments in a transformative collaboration not unlike the community partnership they sought to document with their submission. The goal: to establish a new precedent of practice for advancing community engagement at Tennessee's flagship university.

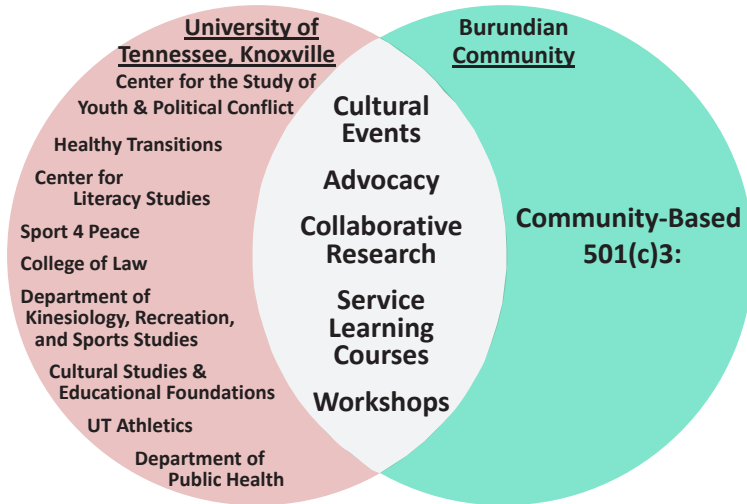
With a newer engagement program than many of its peers, and with far fewer resources than many as well, the team did not expect much more from entering this highly competitive contest than to place engaged scholarship on a more prominent and intentional plane at their institution. The team was thus both delighted and surprised to learn a few months later that the University of Tennessee, Knoxville had won the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award; it was one of only four institutions in the country to do so.

The university's winning proposal, *Ready for the World*, tells the story of how the University of Tennessee, Knoxville has advanced community engagement and engaged scholarship through just one of many university-community partnerships. The *Ready for the World* program is part of a long-range plan to transform the campus culture and prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The university supports a robust study abroad program, but also recognizes opportunities presented by the global cultures represented in its own backyard. For those academic institutions that do not have or cannot afford study abroad programming, or for students who cannot participate in study abroad programs for financial or other reasons, *Ready for the World* offers a new approach to internationalization and outreach/engagement that is both economical and effective.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville's engagement with a local community of Burundian refugees exemplifies *Ready for the World* collaboration. Faculty members and students joined the city's school district, public health department, public housing, and social service agencies, which lacked the resources to

accommodate the unique challenges presented by a large number of incoming Burundian families. Together, this partnership created an infrastructure for community-based programming and research. All work proceeded using a set of priorities established by the Burundians, including a community-based organization, youth programs for Burundian children, educational opportunities for adults learning English, computer lessons for the adults, and job skill development.

The Burundians now operate their own registered nonprofit organization, SODELA (Solidarity, Development, and Light Association), which takes a leadership role in collaborating with partners from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in a variety of activities (see Figure 1). University faculty and students have produced peer-reviewed scholarship (e.g., research, new service-learning courses) based on work with the Burundians. Some of this work has attracted national and international attention, and faculty members have been invited to present their scholarship and implement their ideas in other parts of the world.



**Figure 1. Collaboration Matrix**

**For more information, contact**

Bob Rider

Dean

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

[brider@utk.edu](mailto:brider@utk.edu)

(865) 974-4126