



Fostering and Sustaining Community-University Research in Changing Times

Workshop Summary

November 2019

Overview

On November 7 2019, the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute hosted a workshop entitled *Fostering and Sustaining Community-University Research in Changing Times*. We were joined by 37 participants from community organizations and universities throughout south-western Ontario who were eager to learn from and with their regional colleagues. The workshop focused on exploring collaborative research done with and for the community. It was facilitated by international community engagement experts Emma McKenna (Queen's University Belfast) and Henk Mulder (University of Groningen), and tailored towards those who were currently engaged in, or who were interested in engaging in, community-university research and community engagement. It aimed to enable and inspire participants by building relationships and fostering an international knowledge exchange.


After brief introductions and framing comments from the facilitators, participants worked through four 'burning' questions that had been identified in advance. Most participants had noted that they hoped that this workshop would help them in their current work in community engagement; the questions chosen for discussion reflect an intermediate level of familiarity with community engagement, and a desire to reflect on tools, practices, and methods. A number of recurrent themes emerged through the day's conversations. They are listed below, organized by each of the four questions.





Question 1: How can we articulate and be responsive to community needs?


- Value and understand community priorities
 - Understand community context, including the range of potential barriers
 - LISTEN and BE in the community
- Communicate clearly and effectively before, during, and after projects
 - Meet face-to-face when possible
 - Ask questions, be curious, listen
- Recognize that community needs are diverse
 - Could include research, meeting space, parking, library card, etc.
- Recognize that community timelines do not match university timelines
 - Need for long-term engagement
- Work to break down barriers between community and university
- Use project scoping to clearly articulate and record (community and university) needs
 - Ensure project fits available resources and timelines
 - Set realistic goals, expectations, and outcomes
 - Be clear about what the university is/is not able to do
 - Understand the community's end goal
 - What will the output be used for?
- Engage a variety of community stakeholders
 - Including those not typically connected to the University
 - Including those with lived experience
- Implement a pathway and/or mechanism to access the university (e.g. submission form)
 - Be clear about how to locate and use this pathway
- Foster mutual trust and respect
 - Be open to change along the way



Question 2: How can we effectively document the impact(s) of community-engaged research?

- Methods:
 - Start from the beginning
 - Regular debrief meetings
 - Use funder-provided frameworks if applicable
 - Explore impact from a range of perspectives
 - Formal check-ins
 - Informal check-ins
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- Via existing tenure and promotion mechanisms
 - Creative methods (e.g. digital storytelling)
 - Impacts to document:
 - Employability and other student outcomes
 - Short term impacts
 - Long term impacts
 - Challenging because of limited funding and resources
 - Relationship/partnership development
 - Challenges:
 - Documenting impact requires time and resources
 - Partners and/or students may feel pressured to be positive
 - Partners and/or students have different levels of expectations that may not have been clearly articulated prior to evaluation
 - People who participate in evaluation might be keepers or champions (i.e. biased)
 - Questions:
 - Who selects and defines the metrics used?
 - Who determines how the selected metrics related to impact?
 - How do you gather reflections that are honest and timely without creating burnout?
 - How can we document learnings from projects and people
 - How can we ensure there is accountability on all sides

Question 3: How can we work with students in the community-based research process?

- Clearly articulate the value of community-based research opportunities
 - Especially with regard to skills development
 - Manage student expectations of skill development
 - Bridge gap between what students want to learn and the realities of the roles and skills to be developed through community-university collaboration
 - Provide clear details on the level of support provided versus the level engagement, teamwork expected
 - Advertise positions and projects widely via email and social media
 - Undergraduate and graduate students
 - Endeavour to work with students from all faculties and departments
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Question 4: How can we use community-engaged work to create policy changes and/or culture shifts

- Slow down
 - Culture shift takes time, resources, money, and people
- Gain a better understanding of policy
 - To know when and how to push back against it
 - To know which 'table' to sit at
- Understand and advocate for the barriers that community organizations face
- Demonstrate impact using qualitative and quantitative data
 - Understand the needs of different audiences for reporting/evaluation
 - Demonstrate impact in creative ways
 - Showcase stories and other insights
 - Inspire others to get involved
 - Create momentum and sustainability for community-engaged programs and units
 - Highlight existing need for the university to be engaged
- Collaborate and share resources
 - Foster allyship and solidarity in times of institutional and policy change
 - Establish in-person connections
 - With peers and administrators
- Celebrate success with all stakeholders
- Frame work and issues thoughtfully depending on context
- Maintain social justice lens and community focus